

**SENATE***Wednesday, October 08, 2008*

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

[Third Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Vice-President:** A list of those who spoke on Monday, October 06, 2008: Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. Wade Mark, Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan, Sen. The Hon. Emily Dick-Forde, Sen. Cindy Devika Sharma, Sen. Dana Seetahal SC, Sen. The Hon. Arnold Piggott and Sen. Helen Drayton.

On Tuesday, October 07, 2008: Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning, Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran, Sen. The Hon. Bridgid Annisette-George, Sen. Mohammed Faisal Rahman, Sen. Corinne Baptiste-Mc Knight, Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace, Sen. Dr. Carson Charles, Sen. Annette Nicholson-Alfred and Sen. Laurel Lezama.

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment (Sen. The Hon. Tina Gronlund-Nunez):** Mr. Vice-President, I wish to thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this debate on Budget 2008/2009, which was presented in the other place by the Minister of Finance and here in the Upper House by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

I would like to congratulate them for a well-rounded budget, which has touched each and every one of us in a way to carry us forward to a better tomorrow. As indicated earlier by the Minister, I am pleased to put forward other aspects that comprise the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment.

In the case of housing, the Government is committed to nurturing a caring society in which the needs of citizens, particularly the most vulnerable, are met. A caring society recognizes that families are the cornerstone of our communities, and today more than ever, these families need the support of the communities they

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live within; they need the support of the businesses, the Government and we recognize that this is a necessity. In light of this the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment continues to implement a housing policy that has the potential to impact a large number of broader economic and social policy objectives by meeting the housing aspirations of our citizens. The policy acknowledges the live reality of our citizens that housing is a basic human need, and as such, it is fundamental to the achievement of the objectives of Vision 2020. Therefore, we are committed to providing affordable housing and in so doing, create good, wholesome communities.

The Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment has therefore been addressing the two dimensions of housing in Trinidad and Tobago, that is the insufficient supply of adequate housing and the issue of affordability. Even though there have been approximately 32,000 housing starts since the commencement of this programme, demand has grown steadily and at the present time the applicant database reflects a demand of over 111,400 applicants for housing. The Housing Development Corporation (HDC) has reported 3,174 housings starts and plans to achieve 8,010 units in fiscal 2009.

The Government also recognizes upon reviewing this very said database of the 111,400 applications, that 50 per cent of these applicants earn less than \$4,000 per month. Given the current construction environment where the cost of construction is escalating, it is expedient that realistic measures be introduced to combat the affordability issue.

Yesterday Sen. Dr. Charles used the term "land for the landless". Even though this may have been a programme with admirable goals, it failed badly. This programme lacked a proper understanding of the clientele it was meant to service, the middle class. This programme started, as we all know, under another administration, and I guess they were under the impression that the middle class had deep pockets, so that they would be able to begin to build a house on a whim.

Today, we could see for ourselves the results of this "land for the landless" programme. Drive around to the many housing developments that started during this programme that has scattered throughout the country, and in fact, I just happen—because I walk with this all the time in my briefcase, to remind me of how important it is for one to know one's clientele in order to better service them—to have a listing here of all the infill programmes where we had to step in to fix what was started by another administration.

This land for the landless programme covered places like Bon Air, Arouca; Boy's Lane, D'Abadie; Buen Intento, Princes Town; Dyette Estate; Union Hall, San Fernando; Edinburgh 500; and so many more. When you drive around you will see the many abandoned and empty lots. Somewhere their owners attempted to begin to build, but due to their middle class status they had to be abandoned. You will see these allocated lots overgrown with bush, taller than you or I, Mr. Vice-President, a true lack of planning.

We, however, have been able to step in and make a bad situation good. We, through the HDC, had developed the Infill Programme where the owners of these said allocated lands could approach us at the HDC to build a modest house. We do offer three designs of these modest homes: tall houses, flat houses, and even split level houses for these individuals who were so unfortunate so many years ago to finally achieve a home of their own.

In a few cases where the lot owners had demonstrated no intention to build anymore or never had any intention to build, it seems in many cases, in the first place, the HDC goes through much expense and legal time to acquire back these properties, and then make them available to those of the public who need homes.

We, however, have not thrown this grand concept of land for the landless into a box and buried it in any graveyard. We have put in place the future distribution of Caroni lands, some average 20,000 lots, which will be allocated, some as land alone for the beneficiary to build their own dream home or in other cases, where HDC will assist these beneficiaries to build their own dream homes.

Mr. Vice-President, I give you the commitment of this Ministry that this time around we will ensure that failure in this programme will not be in the future; we shall plan and ensure that we assist our clientele so that they can have their dream homes one day. [*Desk thumping*] So, going on, Mr. Vice-President, the Government continues to pursue the ongoing implementation of financing and subsidy initiatives and other financing plans, where the Government has implemented the following initiatives to assist members of the public. We do this through the reduction of the mortgage interest rates.

When this new housing programme began back in 2002, mortgage interest rates offered for these state funded housings was 12 per cent. Today, in order to assist the middle class and low income earners of our society, the same said ones that the Members of the Opposition seem to cry about but fail to plan for, the Government now offers a 2 per cent interest rate for persons buying a state house of less than \$450,000 with an income of less than \$8,000 a month. [*Desk thumping*]

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We have gone even further, because back in 2002 when this new housing programme began, citizens of this country had to dig deep in their pockets to find the 10 per cent required for down payments to purchase their new homes. If we look at the people we are trying to assist, the vulnerable in our society, that 10 per cent is extremely hard to find, when they are so fortunate to be selected out of the random selection process that is in place.

The Government, recognizing that on a fixed income, those middle and low income earners of our society, the vulnerable will not be able to find these moneys, so making their dreams out of reach, therefore, today in 2008, the down payments stand at zero per cent for persons with monthly incomes of \$8,000 and less. Zero per cent, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

**10.15 a.m.**

I sit here in this Senate week after week and listen to the many contributions by Members of the Opposition, and also like the regular man on the street I look at the Lower House on television or listen to it on the radio. I am forever amazed—I am using a nice term—at the spin that is constantly made by these very individuals. For unlike what is said by the Member of Parliament for Siparia at the Friday sittings, this Government has always been committed to making houses affordable and would continue to do so for the regular man on the street.

I could only conclude that maybe she and her party if ever given the opportunity, would want to allocate state houses to the people of this country at \$30,000 and more. I do not know, Mr. Vice-President, where she got this figure of \$30,000 being required in order to get a state house. I could only put this down as maybe possibly a Freudian slip by the Member for Siparia, demonstrating her true intentions if given the opportunity because it is not the intention of this Government to ever go that way at all.

Today, if we look at the American experience that we all see every night on our televisions, we would recognize that this has sent ripples through international markets. This is the result of a society which has left the vulnerable open to the mercies of the predatory speculators, the businessmen in the financial system, who we recognize today have walked away with huge profits. Subprime mortgages granted at fearfully high interest rates to the vulnerable of the society within the United States.

We, today, could see how this system has failed, but let me assure you, Members of this Senate and the people of this country that the middle and low

income earners, the regular man who walks our streets come first when it comes to the policies being set in place by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

In this Ministry our concerns go even beyond the scope of the housing programme, and in so doing we would like to compliment the Ministry of Finance and by extension the Government for its initiative of increasing the ceiling for the exemption of stamp duty for residential properties. This ceiling has increased from \$350,000 in 2002 to \$850,000 in this year's budget. In other words, today if a young couple, a single mother, those in our society earning more than \$25,000 a month or so and want to purchase a piece of property up to \$850,000 they pay not one cent in stamp duty. A caring Government looking after all.

The old housing allocation policy, after reviewing its performance over the past few years, we have found it to be deficient in its distribution formerly. Even though this Government had embarked on a housing programme second to none in the Caribbean and the region on the whole, all on behalf of those who need shelter, this allocation policy was roughly based on only three factors:

1. one had to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago;
2. you had to be over the age of 20 years;
3. you could not own any property or land in Trinidad and Tobago.

Only those three, roughly.

In our efforts to improve service delivery, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment embarked on putting in place a new refined allocation policy to ensure greater equity in the allocation process, removal of loopholes identified within this process and that there is transparency in the selection process.

In short, the new revised allocation policy in the selection of applications will be based from this time forward on the following criteria: Once again one has to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, but there will be an emphasis on residency status. Because we believe that applicants should be living here, not there. They would be 21 years of age and over; not a part-owner or owner of property or land in Trinidad and Tobago, which will also apply to one's spouse whether married, common law or otherwise.

There will be a focus on first-time homeowners, because our focus is on those who have never owned a home, not those who transferred their houses to other family members so that they could walk through the doors of HDC and tell them I own no property. There would be a ceiling on income to not exceed \$25,000 gross

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monthly household income. Our focus in the ministry is not to house millionaires but to house the vulnerable of our society. The date of the application—because we recognize that there are many who have been suffering for many years waiting their chance to have a home of their own.

We have begun to weight applications based on the date of applying in systematic formulae of weights. We are also focusing on the number of dependants that would comprise the household, because we believe that strong families make strong communities and therefore make a strong Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Beneficiaries of these Government houses cannot transfer or sell these houses for a period of 10 years after receipt of keys because we believe that these families so allocated need these homes for their families and not as a real estate or profit making business. Also these residential houses have to be—and I stress, have to be—occupied within one month of receipt of their keys.

This revised allocation policy goes further to cover more criteria and also covers the format of the draw which would be publicly done in the future and now includes a prepared declaration which if found to be false, would cause forfeiture of that allocated property and imprisonment. It is most sad, that we in the ministry have to go to such extremes to protect the sanctity of this housing programme to ensure that those who need, not those who want can access adequate and affordable shelter for their families.

In tandem with the revised policy the home applications fulfilment system—HAFS as we call it—database is also being cleaned up to ensure that only eligible citizens are captured and to facilitate seamless processing from application to allocation.

This caring Government goes even further to address affordability with the rent-to-own programme where we make mortgages affordable for individuals who are financially unable to service a mortgage. Persons are allowed to enter an agreement to rent for a period of five years where two-thirds of these payments go towards the down payment on that home. At the end of this five years this rent-to-own agreement will then be converted to a mortgage. If it is found that after this period of five years has passed that the individual is unable to service a mortgage, this very said rent-to-own programme will be extended for an additional three years to give the individual family the opportunity to better themselves to service a mortgage in the future.

This is a perfect example of a caring Government, a Government that truly cares about the middle and low income earners so that they could also one day

hold a deed in their hand and boast that they own a piece of this land in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It is to be noted that the ministry has also lent a support to the amendment of the legal framework to incorporate the ideas of portable and transferrable mortgages to allow survivors of applicants to take over these mortgages. This has opened the door to the elderly in our society who are also in need of homes. Once again, a truly caring Government.

This ministry has also vigorously implemented different subsidy mechanisms which have been designed to make houses more affordable. In an effort to reduce the cost being borne by the beneficiaries, Government agreed to subsidize the cost of the housing units being constructed by HDC where beneficiaries of HDC houses are only required to pay for the raw cost of the land while the Government absorbs the infrastructural cost for the development of the land.

Further, the ministry commenced implementation of the new housing subsidy—this is to inform Sen. Dr. Charles—I do not know where he got his information from that we have done away with all the subsidies.

**Sen. Dr. Charles:** I never said that.

**Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez:** Well, I got the impression that you did.

**Sen. Dr. Charles:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez:** Just to make sure that you hear this so you would not make that mistake in the future. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Dr. Charles:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. Narace:** What he said is do not give them any houses at all.

**10.30 a.m.**

**Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez:** The new housing subsidies have been put in place which provide the following:

- a \$35,000 subsidy to purchase a new house costing less than \$195,000 based on beneficiaries earning an income between \$40,001 and \$65,000; or
- a \$50,000 subsidy to purchase a new house, costing less than \$195,000 based on beneficiaries earning an income between \$25,000 and \$40,000.

Mr. Vice-President, Senator Nicholson-Alfred would be pleased to hear that we recognized that in Tobago, the cost of a new home is more than it is in

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Trinidad, so therefore, this Ministry has put in place these very said subsidies, but the houses that one will be able to purchase in Tobago, go up to \$214,500. [*Desk thumping*] In the Government's continuing effort to ensure that all citizens maintain an acceptable living standard over the period 2002—2008, policies were introduced to aim at improving housing conditions for low income groups, through the refurbishing of our existing private and public housing stock. In this respect, the Ministry has continued to implement the Home Improvement Grant and the home improvement subsidy, which are intended to assist in the rehabilitation and maintenance of the existing housing stock.

Homeowners with a maximum household income of \$60,000 per annum and who also meet all the relevant criteria are eligible for a Home Improvement Grant of \$15,000 to effect home improvements and repairs. During the period October 2007 to August 2008, 1,164 Home Improvement Grants were distributed to the vulnerable beneficiaries of this country. It is expected that another 300 grants will be disbursed by September 30—just passed—and it is also projected that 2,000 grants will be disbursed in fiscal year 2009. The home improvement subsidy is yet another programme, Mr. Vice-President, and Sen. Dr. Charles, and it is a matching subsidy that is provided to beneficiaries with a household income of less than \$84,000 per annum. The maximum value of this subsidy is \$20,000, subject to the provision of a match in a combination of funds, materials and sweat equity. During the period October 2007 to August 2008, 556 families received home improvement subsidy disbursements, and an additional 150 families are expected to benefit from this subsidy by fiscal year's end. It is projected that 1,800 subsidies will be disbursed during fiscal 2008 to 2009.

Mr. Vice-President, all that I have said thus far, is a most comprehensive approach to assisting the vulnerable, the middle and low income earners in our society, all being done by this caring Government. Not all Ministries—and I have to put a plug in here—ill-treat their clients, as the Opposition would cause people to think. For this very section in the Ministry which handles subsidies was the recipient of the Prime Minister's award for Service Excellence 2007, as a result of the outstanding customer service with respect to these two programmes. Citizens are attended to by courteous, well-trained young men and women.

In fact, I would like to share with this Upper House a personal experience of mine, for I dropped in at one of these many caravans which take these two programmes throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and members of the public came up to me and complimented these very same young people who assist the public. This is a perfect example and I would like to support even the youths in this



Senate, in the form of Senators Lezama, Primus and Cummings, who are only a little younger than I—[*Laughter*] that I would like to say that the future of Trinidad and Tobago is safe and sound and we should encourage our youths and give them that added incentive to become better at what they choose to do tomorrow. I would like to personally support all of our youths.

Mr. Vice-President, in the Ministry's effort to improve the living conditions of citizens, the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) has continued its ongoing refurbishment programme on its rental units, which includes repainting, electrical rewiring, plumbing, replacement and/or repair of roofs, repairs to windows, internal refurbishing, replacement of railings and repairs to ceilings. During 2007/2008, the HDC was successful in completing 85 per cent of the refurbishment of its rental units in a comprehensive housing programme, that understands the needs of the people where rental units are a main feature. We recognize that this is something that has to be done, to ensure that we maintain proper standards for the people of this country. Windows were replaced in 185,000 units at a cost of \$12.3 million, while approximately 550 roofs were replaced at a cost of \$14.3 million. Painting was done on several sites including Savannah Villas, Aranguez and Beetham Gardens at a cost of \$5.39 million. Electrical works were carried out in approximately 717 units at an overall cost of \$8.1 million. In addition, approximately 700 units were completely refurbished at a cost of \$20.2 million.

Mr. Vice-President, I have with me here a listing of all the major projects that were done by HDC to refurbish the many rental units. I can go through it, but I am sure we do not have the time, Harding Place, Cocorite; Mango Rose; Paradise Heights; Almond Drive; Powder Magazine, Phase II; it goes on and on; Couva and Maloney. The HDC, I must say is doing its work on behalf of the citizens of this country.

At this time, I would like to move on to a controversial item which I cannot understand why it becomes so controversial, but the Land Settlement Agency, otherwise known as the LSA. The Land Settlement Agency has been implementing the squatter upgrade component of the Inter-American Development Second National Settlements Programmes since 2002. Under this component, the LSA is improving living conditions and taking the steps to provide security of tenure to families living in informal housing settlements on state lands. These improvements have included the provision of basic services and upgraded infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, water and drainage and sewer facilities for these said individuals.

In the 2007/2008 infrastructural upgrade, work continued on 3,576 lots at various locations, including Pine Settlement, Sangre Grande; Race Course Lands,

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Arima; Bon Air North, Arouca; Milton Village, Couva; and River Estate, Diego Martin. Works also continued on three pilot projects at the Port of Spain squatters study mainly, Sugrain Trace, Laventille; Dundonald Hill, Belle Vue; and Scorpion Alley, Carenage. The works included construction of footpaths, road, river and drainage improvements at an estimated cost of \$10 million. These works are expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to share with this honourable Senate, the success of some of these projects. The majority of these projects were accomplished based on the input and participation of groups, organizations and the people of these very said areas, all working with and alongside the Land Settlement Agency to uplift the place they call home. This programme is truly an enriching programme which in fact feeds right into the title of this budget 2008 that is, "Shaping Our Future Together". The 2008/2009 budget projected an expenditure of the LSA's capital programme under the IDB Squatter Regularization Programme amounting to approximately \$16 million, all geared towards the vulnerable of our society. Another aspect of this Government's housing policy is the containment of squatting, and the need to protect the citizen's rights to property.

Legal squatting is and would never be encouraged by Members of this Government. In fact, the defenders of this type of inhumane substandard living should be frowned upon. I understand that a few weeks ago, a Member of Parliament associated with the Opposition in the other place, gave great support to the concept of citizens of this country, to construct houses in this inhumane manner. I also understand that she encouraged them to squat and live in galvanize houses. Is this what the UNC wants for our people? I wonder if this very said Member of Parliament ever walked into a galvanize house under this midday heat; or ever sat with her children in a galvanize house at 3 a.m. and feel that cold coming through that galvanize? Mr. Vice-President, this is not what this Government intends to put in place for our people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] Shame, shame, shame!

I go further, for I am sure I would get the support of Members of the Opposition here in the Senate, for we all know that the act that guides the LSA and the activities, was developed and passed under their tenureship. In so doing, the LSA division is charged with the responsibilities of containing squatter sites and has been executing the policy to ensure that there is compliance with the law. At the same time, protect the lives of families who unknowingly put themselves in danger by setting up poorly constructed structures. In fact, in many cases the LSA

operates as the eyes and the hands of every citizen of this country, by protecting our state lands, the very said lands that belong to every citizen of this country, not a chosen few.

**10.45 a.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to acknowledge the hard-working staff of the LSA Division; they go beyond the call of duty to assist. We must always acknowledge those who go that extra mile.

At this time, I would like to speak a little on the Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA). The Government recognizes that infrastructure is not only physical, but also social, and continues to provide citizens with sporting and other leisure activities that contribute to their health and well-being. To this end, the CDA has been continually improving the facilities under its control.

In fiscal 2008, the CDA commenced the upgrading of its beaches and golf facilities, such as installing amenities at Chagville and Macqueripe and improving its golf course, as well as restoring some of its historic buildings such as the St. Charles Church. These upgrading activities will continue in the new fiscal year. From fiscal 2008 and continuing into the next year, the CDA has begun implementing activities which will promote Trinidad and Tobago as a tourist destination. Some of these activities include the development of nature trails and natural parks, restoration of the Chaguaramas Hotel and Convention Centre and the launch of a new and aggressive international marketing campaign entitled, "Come Live the Vision". The Chaguaramas Development Authority has a long way to go to achieve the great aspirations of this Government, and we give them every support that we can.

This Government recognizes that there is need for a holistic approach to infrastructural development and this would be addressed in the context of the Government's broad policy for national, physical and regional development and land use. As such, in fiscal 2008, the Town and Country Planning Division will continue rebuilding long-term land use planning capacity within the Division. In addition, the following changes have greatly assisted in shortening time lines from months to weeks when it comes to applicants: computerization of agency data used by the Division in the preparation of its plans; improving the database used to collate and analyze land use data and continued training in data collection techniques are also expected to shorten this time frame even further.

The Division also purchased satellite imagery which will be used to inform the development of local, area and national physical development plans for

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Trinidad and Tobago. The Town and Country Planning Division plans to complete local area plans for Caura Valley, Chaguanas and Couva, by the end of fiscal 2009, and regional development plans for the 14 regional corporations, inclusive of local area plans for Scarborough and San Fernando. Cabinet has also approved the commencement of the preparation of the second National Development Plan for Trinidad and Tobago in fiscal 2008. [*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. L. Rogers*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and Members of this Senate.

Considering the time is becoming short, I shall now move on to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) of this Ministry, a most important aspect. Information is always required in order to make the proper decisions.

Central to the issue of public sector reform is the strengthening of the system of national statistics. Furthermore, one of the objectives of Vision 2020 is the creation of a comprehensive, coordinated national statistics system that delivers high quality, user-oriented, relevant and timely economic, social and environmental statistics. The goal is, therefore, to develop a management approach that fosters sound statistical and professional data compilation, as well as dissemination practices.

To ensure that the premier information and research agency in Trinidad and Tobago, the CSO, remains at the cutting edge of statistical development to support decision-making, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment began institutional strengthening of this very said agency. In 2009, there will be a focus on continuing the restructuring of the agency. Furthermore, the Central Statistical Office has implemented several projects that would ensure the availability of necessary data, including launch and conduct of the household budget survey 2007/2008.

The CSO has also begun pre-census activities for the upcoming 2010 census, a pilot project to develop a programme of environmental statistics and the completion of gross domestic product estimates. Additionally, in 2009, the household budgetary survey fortnightly sample—surveys of households

throughout Trinidad and Tobago—will continue until April, and pre-enumeration planning activities will continue. Work will also commence during the new fiscal year on the rebasing of the retail price index, the domestic production index and the constant price indices. The second set of environmental statistics will also be compiled and published within the coming year.

In 2008, the CSO also initiated a project to create a national socio-economic database to strengthen the country's capacity to monitor development indicators, as well as strengthen and build institutional capacity in the public service to manage national socio-economic data for effective planning, monitoring and evaluation of development progress and international reporting.

The vision of effective government is that Trinidad and Tobago is served by an efficient, accountable and participative government that is committed to providing quality public institutions, promoting public safety and security for all and which cooperates with local, regional and international bodies.

Finally, in promoting effective government, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment has been implementing advanced information technology management systems and processes; as such, over the fiscal period under review, the Ministry implemented phases I and II of the Mortgage, Rentals and Settlement Administrative System in its implementing agencies and key stakeholders. This software will allow the agency to enter real-time transactions—real-time transactions—of clients' mortgage payments. Other systems implemented include the Fiserv collections and Docplus; the Fiserv collections will assist in arrears management and the Docplus will assist in improving the Housing Development Corporation's (HDC) client correspondence.

They have also implemented the Home Improvements Applications System; this was extended to facilitate the tracking of the status of beneficiaries' applications and their selection; Asset Management Tracking System at the head office; redesign of the website to reflect the responsibilities of the newly configured Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment; integration of the network between all of the many divisions, and the start of implementation of the Land Information Management System. This will streamline the work flow for gathering and storing information relative to the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment activities, and enable spatial, analytical representation and sharing of land information.

In fiscal 2009, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment will complete the Land Information Management System and the Asset Management

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Information System, as well as re-engineering the HAFS website. A radio frequency identification system is also to be put in place to assist in the tracking of the movement of files, which we all know is so important within many ministries.

In closing, unlike the Opposition that refers to the government housing programme as "house padding", and would do away with it at the first chance that they get, let me share with all here today some of the statistics off our very own HAFS database. This is to share with the national public and everyone, how important the housing programme is, not to us and not to you, but to the citizens who need a shelter.

Mr. Vice-President, this is a piece of data, dated July 30, 2008, that I grabbed off my desk this morning. It is the statistics broken down by regional corporations, because we recognize—I hope everyone recognizes—that the breakdown of how houses are selected is through the regional corporation boundaries; not by constituencies as the Opposition would want persons to think. It is not a political thing; this, in my eyes, is a humanitarian thing. [*Desk thumping*]

In July of this year applicants for the Tunapuna/Piarco area crossed 245,000 applications on our database. In San Fernando, the persons who applied from that area crossed 13,000. I go on to Chaguanas—I am not sure that they want houses or if they do not want houses—but the people need the houses, because according to the figure the persons who want to live in Chaguanas cross 11,000. Families need roofs over their heads. Mr. Vice-President, Arima, which I recognize you might have an affiliation to—[*Laughter*]

**Sen. Mark:** He is down in Tabaquite; he is no longer in Arima.

**Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez:**—also crosses 11,000. For Diego Martin we have over 10,000 applications on our database. This Government is attempting to provide shelter to those who need, not those who want. We are here to bring relief, to better the standards of our citizens' living conditions, make the most of our state resources, and utilize both human and cutting edge statistical technology to plan a better organized future for all our citizens. Foremost, the people of this nation can rest assured that they come first in all of our plans; so as our nation develops, each and everyone also develops.

**11.00 a.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, this caring Government truly does care that all the people of this twin-island republic will achieve the ideal one day of Vision 2020.

Thank you.

**BREACHES OF THE STANDING ORDERS**

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, yesterday afternoon we had two breaches of our Standing Orders: Standing Order 35(5) and Standing Order 43(3)(b). I am sure the hon. Sen. Wade Mark would have something to say.

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Mr. Vice-President, I seek your indulgence and that of the honourable Senate. During the contribution of my colleague, Sen. Laurel Lezama, and during the crosstalk we usually engage in, I attributed to my dear friend a statement—*[By order of the Chair, remarks struck off the record]* This was said, of course, in the context of a Legal Notice issued by the Integrity Commission and published in the newspapers in which the Senator's name was published as being one of a number of public officials who had failed to declare their income and liabilities for the years 2003 and 2004.

Let me assure my hon. friend that no offence or negative imputation to her character was intended and, in the circumstances, I wish to respectfully withdraw my remarks *[By order of the Chair, remarks struck off the record]* and hope that my senatorial colleague would understand that in the cut and thrust of politics, particularly in the Senate, these things do happen and should be taken in stride. *[Protests]*

In addition, I would like to put on record that there are many negative statements in the *Hansard* which were directed at my person. I was called a liar by Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning; it was published in the *Newsday* just two weeks ago and it was recorded in the *Hansard*.

**Mr. Vice-President:** We are dealing with what transpired yesterday. You have withdrawn the statement; I think you should also apologize.

**Sen. W. Mark:** I withdraw the statement, Sir.

**Mr. Vice-President:** As I said, two breaches occurred yesterday: one was Standing Order 35(5) which says:

“No Senator shall impute improper motives to any Member of either Chamber.”

The second one is Standing Order 43(3)(b):

“where such Senator has used objectionable, abusive, insulting or offensive words or language or unparliamentary expressions, and, on being called to order, has refused to withdraw such words or language or expressions, and has not offered an apology for the use thereof to the satisfaction of the Senate.”

**Sen. W. Mark:** Can you tell me what was offensive?

**Mr. Vice-President:** Could you please withdraw the statement and apologize to the Senator?

**Sen. W. Mark:** I humbly withdraw my statement.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, let me read Standing Order 43(1):

“The President or the Chairman, after having called the attention of the Senate, or of the Committee, to the conduct of a Senator who persists in irrelevance, or tedious repetition either of his/her own arguments or—”

Sorry, that is the wrong Standing Order. Standing Order 43(3):

“The President or Chairman shall order any Senator to withdraw immediately from the Senate during the remainder of the day’s sitting and may direct such steps to be taken, as are required, to enforce such order:

- (a) where the conduct of such Senator is grossly disorderly; or
- (b) where such Senator has used objectionable, abusive, insulting or offensive words or language or unparliamentary expressions, and, on being called to order, has refused to withdraw such words or language or expressions, and has not offered an apology for the use thereof to the satisfaction of the Senate.”

**Sen. W. Mark:** I humbly withdraw the statement. I had an arrangement with the Vice-President.

**Mr. Vice-President:** The arrangement was that you withdraw and apologize.

**Sen. W. Mark:** I told you that there are several instances where I have been abused in this Parliament and you have sat —

**Mr. Vice-President:** Standing Order 43(5):

“If a Senator disregards the authority of the Chair, or abuses the rules of the Senate by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business of the Senate or otherwise, the President—”

Okay, Standing Order 43(4):

“If an order under paragraph (3) of this Standing Order be not complied with at once or if, on any occasion, the President or the Chairman considers that his powers under that paragraph are inadequate, (the President or Chairman) may name such Senator in pursuance of paragraph (5) or paragraph (6) of this Standing Order.



- (5) If a Senator disregards the authority of the Chair, or abuses the rules of the Senate by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business of the Senate or otherwise, the President shall direct the attention of the Senate thereto, mentioning by name the Senator concerned. The President shall then call upon a Minister, and if no Minister be present any other Senator to move ‘That Senator.....be suspended from the service of the Senate’, and the President shall forthwith put the question, no seconder being required and no amendment, adjournment or debate being allowed.”

Sen. Mark has refused to apologize for the statement he has made, so I call upon a Minister to—

**The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne):** Mr. Vice-President, in accordance with Standing Order 43(5)—

**Mr. Vice-President:** This Senate will be suspended for ten minutes.

**11.10 a.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**11.47 a.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, after lengthy discussion with the Leader of Government Business, he has informed me that he has had discussions with Sen. Mark and Sen. Prof. Deosaran and I think that Sen. Mark will make a statement.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Mr. Vice-President, as I stated earlier, I would want to put on record that when I made my statement yesterday attributed to my colleague [*By order of the Chair, remarks struck off the record*], it was never meant to impute improper motives and, therefore, if my hon. colleague felt offended by those remarks, I humbly withdraw my statement. This is the position I would like to advance at this time.

**Sen. Lezama:** Mr. Vice-President, in the interest of the country's business and in the interest of treating with the business we have to do here, on the Government side, I graciously accept the Senator's withdrawal as his apology. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, we hope that this is the end of this episode and I ask that the remark that Sen. Mark made yesterday be stricken from the record. This is an important debate and none of us would like it disrupted. We hope that good sense will prevail for the continuation of this debate.

**11.50 a.m.****APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

**Sen. Gail Merhair:** Mr. Vice-President, I rise in this my first contribution in the Senate on the Appropriation Bill for fiscal 2008/2009. I have taken cognizance of all the contributions that came before me and wish to congratulate everybody who spoke before me and also congratulate all this morning so that we can get on with the people's business. Congratulations and let us continue with the proceedings of what just transpired.

However, I wish to break the tradition and take a different approach never before tried in the Senate or the other place. In so doing, I wish to recognize the work of the hon. Minister of Finance, Mrs. Karen Nunez-Tesheira and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, along with all the technocrats from the relevant Ministries, in the presentation of this fiscal package.

That being said, I wish to place on record that it is not at all easy to prepare a document of this magnitude that encompasses servicing of a rapidly developing nation. However, in breaking with tradition, for the duration of my contribution, I will assume the position of Minister of Finance. Please note that it in no way tries to mirror or take away the reality. In fact, this is an opportunity to provide my recommendations and is solely intended to be presented as an alternative as to what was offered by the Minister of Finance in the other place on September 22, 2008, and to be accepted or criticized within the same spirit.

Firstly, my theme, given the uncertainty of the global financial markets and economies, would have been: Providing responsible leadership. As I have emphasized in the past, the vision of all citizens is for a better Trinidad and Tobago; a country where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoying greater cohesion and prosperity; a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with all nations across the globe and a society that is recognized for the care and attention it places on children, women, youths, the elderly and the less fortunate. We must, therefore, strive for economic success, in order to establish a better society for all.

To achieve this, my budget will be constructed on the foundation already laid, with respect to maintaining the macroeconomic stability; building capacity to enable our economy to compete effectively in the global environment and manage short-term external shocks, enhance savings and investment and unlock the potential and entrepreneurial talent of our people. All this is aimed at building a

modern and prosperous country. Most importantly, my budget will reflect a comprehensive plan to address the people's priorities for the future. The fiscal package would seek to enhance the financial and physical security of the citizens, while providing avenues for intellectual development, health and adequate infrastructure.

Mr. Vice-President, the economy in the United States is in trouble. The *Washington Post*, on August 03, 2008, had a headline stating: US economy grows at solid pace in second quarter. The *Post's* ambiguity over the condition of the economy reflects the chasm between official government gloss on events and the actual experience of people who work for a living. According to the Bush administration, we are in a slow down, not a recession. The GDP is still growing, though at less than 2 per cent annually. Of course, much of this growth reflects financial transactions, not the creation of wealth, through the production of new goods and services.

According to Subir Lall from the IMF Research Department, writing in the *World Economic Outlook*, entitled: IMF Predicts Slower World Growth Amid Serious Market Crisis, dated April 09, 2008:

“World growth will slow to 3.7 per cent in 2008, in wake of financial crisis.

- United States, other advanced economies lead slowdown
- Emerging economies are likely to weather storm better but”— they will not be—“insulated

Pointing to the balance of risks around the IMF's projections as lying ‘somewhat to the downside’, IMF Chief Economist Simon Johnson said at a press conference on April 09 that the principal downside risk comes from the possibility that financial strains could deepen.”

In the Review of the Economy, Trinidad and Tobago's gross domestic product almost tripled from \$55 billion in 2001 to \$152 billion in 2008 and is projected to rise to \$165 billion in 2009. Real GDP is estimated to grow by at least 3.5 per cent in 2008. According to the Economics Intelligence Unit in its country's assessment, Trinidad and Tobago had a rating of A for sovereign risk, BBB for currency risk, BBB for banking risk, BB for political risk and BBB for economic structure risk. According to Trinidad and Tobago Oil and Gas Report 2008, conducted by Business Monitor International:

“While the overall outlook for Trinidad and Tobago remains generally very robust, the economy is operating at full tilt and the resulting capacity constraints may increasingly come into play over the next few months. Energy

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exports account for 95 per cent of the value of total exports; underlying the country's heavy dependence on the energy sector.

Moreover, Trinidad and Tobago's excessive reliance on the energy sector, as an engine of growth, makes it highly vulnerable to an external shock.

The island group score 69.8 in market orientation, some way above the Caribbean average of 52.7"—this was in 2006—"However, the country performs below par in the infrastructure and institutions subcomponents of the rating, suggesting that there is still much more room for improvement."

On paper, the Trinidad and Tobago economy is robust, even sound. According to the Central Bank, our gross foreign assets moved from US \$2.594 billion in 2002, to US \$9.013 billion in 2007. Our net official reserves moved from US \$1.907 billion in 2002, to US \$ 7.038 billion in 2007. Our balance of payments surplus moved from US \$48.9 million in 2002, to US \$1.645 billion in 2006.

Given the facts presented, it is important that the administration exercise prudence in dispensing with its allocations for fiscal 2008/2009. It must reflect an acceptance to service the needs of the population in a direction that is part of the national consciousness. Our approach to development must be based on achievable goals, set on the basis of compassion and inclusion.

In order to achieve this objective, I present in this fiscal package a series of initiatives of proposals designed to move the country forward. Several key components of development will be tackled by this budget. However, I must say that we will get nowhere as a nation until we have a cultural shift or even a revolution of thought. Citizens must see the need to be part of improving our national condition. In essence, we must put country first if we are to shape our future together.

The safety and security of your citizens must be the paramount objective to any government. In order to ensure safety, we must not only appear, but actually implement policies that serve as a deterrent to crime. The police force must be increased and be mandated to be on patrol day and night. I acknowledge that police officers can be overworked and, perhaps, sometimes demotivated. It is in this regard that law enforcement officers must never be in doubt as to their safety and the economic security when carrying out their duty. It is in this light that I propose a partnership between the Government and the private sector in the implementation of a subsidized insurance policy that would guarantee these officers, when they put their lives on the line, they will be compensated. In other words, we will stand with them.

I turn to the area of inflation, particularly food inflation. Attaining Government's targeted inflation rate of 6 per cent by the end of 2008, will present serious challenges. Taming of existing pressure will require stronger monetary policy action and considerable expenditure tightening. In terms of food prices, my budget will adopt a multifaceted approach to tackling this problem. My budget will establish a joint venture project with the private sector; eight distribution centres, which will be for the sale of food in bulk across Trinidad and Tobago. This means, by reselling these food items in bulk to consumers, it will provide for cheaper prices. This policy can reinvent the cooperative movement of the 1970s and the 1980s.

My budget will engage in an education campaign to address the high level of consumption among citizens. The global food crisis will abate in under 10 years. In the meantime, citizens must be aware of the need to recondition their taste to accepting more generic products as substitutes to high priced import items.

My budget proposes the re-launch of an aggressive buy-local campaign that reinforces this new vision towards boosting local production and distribution. This budget will move towards improving domestic agricultural production, by regularizing farmers on state lands, by granting standard agricultural leases and allowing them to access financial and other government incentives.

Government should also place greater emphasis on the agro-processing industry. Trinidad and Tobago is the home of the Faculty of Agriculture, UWI, St. Augustine. This is a prestigious institution by any standard. It is understandable and expected, therefore, that this faculty be utilized for additional research and development, funded by the Government, for the purpose of enhancing agricultural production. It is recommended that the chair would be established and funded by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to promote a link between research and development in agriculture production, processing and application to the open market.

My budget proposes that in fiscal 2008/2009, Government should re-initiate the process of developing a workable land use policy, which will mandate that the best agricultural lands be reserved for agricultural purposes. The construction of housing projects on grade 1 agricultural lands should cease immediately and be strictly prohibited. The pursuance of large Government-controlled farms would eventually destroy the agriculture sector in Trinidad and Tobago. It is essential that the authorities rethink the application of these farms in Trinidad and Tobago before it is too late.

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I propose the introduction of hydroponics and agricultural science at the primary level of education. As I said before, the food crisis we face today is one of a global nature. Our citizens, particularly those in the lower income bracket, have been feeling the brunt of excessive increases over the last two years. If we are to weather the storm, Government must be willing to take the necessary steps to promote the revitalization of the agricultural sector, which now stands at contributing less than half per cent of GDP. If the long-term economic integrity of this country is to be assured, the free market must be allowed to correct the deficiency between demand and supply and citizens must be more conservative in their consumption.

As a matter of easing the burden to the public, my budget proposes a raising of the ceiling of the non-taxable income of \$60,000 to \$75,000.

**12.05 p.m.**

Over the last six years, Government outlined several initiatives in the area of social services. Policy statements in budget presentations and in other arenas were issued with respect to the national family policy, the National Counselling Programme, the second national plan of action for children and the Children's Authority. However, little progress has been made with respect to many of these initiatives. The Children's Authority Bill and the Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries Bill have been recently passed in the national Parliament. It is the hope of many that Government will move with haste to institutionalize legislation to protect the rights of our children.

Mr. Vice-President, my budget proposes that Government strengthen its efforts to promote positive family and community values. The negative effects of television and electronic broadcast originating from foreign destinations have been debilitating upon the social fabric of our society within recent times. It is therefore considered practical that profits gained from the broadcast of this material be utilized in promoting healthy living. Consequently, it is proposed that a 5 per cent family rehabilitation tax be levied on the revenues of cable providers to fund the revitalization of family life through the Family Planning Association and other related agencies.

The Hardship Relief Programme was introduced to exempt recipients of old age pension from paying water rates. Given the prohibitive increases in the cost of living, Government should expand this programme to include exemption from paying electricity bills to senior citizens. Government's compassion must be self-evident in that it takes cognizance of the challenges being faced on a daily basis by those who have already contributed significantly to the economy and society.

Mr. Vice-President, with a population of 1,083,000—this is according to the CIA World Fact Book —July, 2008 estimates—Trinidad and Tobago accounts for 0.1 per cent of global emissions, an average of 24.9 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per person. These emission levels are above those of Latin America and the Caribbean. If all countries in the world were to emit CO<sub>2</sub> levels similar to Trinidad and Tobago, we would exceed our sustainable carbon budget by approximately 1,019 per cent.

The major issues facing Trinidad and Tobago remain air pollution from carbon emissions, water pollution from agricultural chemicals, industrial wastes, oil pollution of beaches and rivers, deforestation and soil erosion. In terms of ecological footprint, Trinidad and Tobago is ranked 65th of 141 nations which means that improvement is required on average in our land and water area that is needed to support a defined human population and material standard indefinitely, using prevailing technology.

In terms of endangered species protection, we are ranked 74th of 141 nations. In the area of protecting threatened species, we are ranked 135th of 158 nations. On the issue of wetlands protection or preservation of areas of international importance, Trinidad and Tobago is ranked 106th out of 112 countries.

The protection of the Northern Range from “slash and burn” agriculture should be a key priority of the Government in the coming fiscal year. In 2005, 118 hectares of forest lands on the Northern Range were affected by fires. In 2006, the number was 254 hectares. It is therefore recommended that the Forestry Division increase its personnel to improve the number of surveillance patrols conducted along the Northern Range. Establishment of three additional towers to support these increased patrols is also recommended. The Forest Fire Plan Committee should be revived to provide a coordinating approach to these fires by combining the Forestry Division, the Meteorological Services Division, the Environmental Management Authority, the fire services, the Ministry of National Security and non-governmental organizations.

A comprehensive anti-air pollution policy must be devised and adopted in order to reduce the level of toxicity in the air, particularly in areas in and around Port of Spain and San Fernando. It is recommended that an air monitoring system designed by Teledyne Technologies in California and already installed at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate be also installed in Port of Spain and San Fernando. This will allow the authorities to measure the degradation of air quality in our urban centres and recommend policy changes where necessary.

Mr. Vice-President, some persons have expressed concern that the rapid development of housing projects may lead to an escalation in crime as is the case

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of East Port of Spain and in parts of San Fernando. Government must place emphasis on urban renewal, providing avenues for personal development through counselling and for community integration. New tenants should be made to undergo a community orientation programme before being given access to assigned units.

My budget also proposes that Government increase the Home Improvement Subsidy from \$20,000 to \$50,000. This recommendation takes into account the rising cost of materials and labour in an effort to improve the quality of housing stock for all citizens.

There should be a revitalization of the agreement signed between the Government of India and Trinidad and Tobago that resulted in the creation of the Shelter Support Unit under the Land Settlement Agency. Both governments entered into a memorandum of understanding which provided a framework toward the development of technical cooperation between the two countries in housing and human settlements.

The cooperation between the two countries was to be implemented through exchange of scientific and technical experts for study, training, consultancy, exchange of technology information. The exchange of this technology can possibly lead to a reduction in the cost of construction, allowing for greater affordability on the part of the average citizen.

It is imperative that Government move with haste to bring to Parliament a Bill to enact and re-validate the Rent Restrictions Act, Chap. 59:50. Several amendments must be made to take into account the changes in demand and supply for housing. It is recommended that Government increase the coverage of the existing Act to \$3,000 per month for unfurnished apartments and \$5,000 per month for furnished apartments. It is also recommended that Government enforce regulations that make it mandatory for landlords and tenants to register with the Rent Assessment Board. Government should also introduce a landlord accreditation scheme along with a code of conduct.

Mr. Vice-President, I turn now to the issue of health care. All governments in our nation's history have failed at providing a reliable and adequate public health care service. After all these attempts, I believe that we should just simply abolish the Ministry of Health. If we are allocating \$4.34 billion and getting this kind of service, then I say privatize the whole system, but the Government must foot the bill for the citizens. Universal health care will now be managed by the private



sector and funded by the Government. If we negotiate iron clad contracts that monitor service, then we will be better able to maneuver and correct discrepancies much faster than what currently exists. [*Desk thumping*]

In the absence of not accepting the above proposal, I propose that a joint initiative be established between the Ministry of Health and the private sector to manage and monitor a newly established fund that will seek to provide financial assistance to parents of children who are gravely ill and who require medical treatment abroad. It is unbelievably demeaning for parents to take care of their children during illness and be forced to leave them in the care of others to raise funds for their survival. Citizens complain on a regular basis about the lack of assistance from government departments and it is only when a public appeal is made or the Government is embarrassed that something is done. There must be a better way to handle these and other similar situations.

With the escalation in crime and the increasing demand on health care facilities, I propose that the Blood Bank be opened on weekends to ensure access to badly needed blood over this period. It has been noted that access to blood supply has been restricted and may have contributed to the worsening of the health condition of patients, both in the private and public sector and particularly in an emergency situation.

Mr. Vice-President, I propose the creation of citizens' advisory bureaus which will play a critical role in moving Trinidad and Tobago closer to developed nation status and provide for the improvement in the standard of living for citizens. The citizens' advisory service will play a central role in tackling injustice, reducing poverty and social exclusion and enabling people to realize their full potential.

This advisory service will provide the impetus for thousands to understand and realize their rights while through pressing for social change will empower civil society to agitate for progress. The work of citizens advisory bureaus can also act as a powerful catalyst to help social and economic regeneration across communities.

It is envisioned that citizens advisory bureaus (CABs) can be established in Port of Spain, San Juan, Tunapuna, Arima, Couva, Chaguanas, San Fernando, Point Fortin, Princes Town, Rio Claro, Sangre Grande and Scarborough. It can be established in conjunction with Government, business, labour and other members of civil society.

The CABs will ensure that individuals do not suffer through ignorance of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available or through an inability to

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express their needs effectively. The CABS service should be guided by 12 principles: a free service; confidentiality; impartiality; independence; accessibility; effectiveness; community accountability; the citizen's right to decide; a voluntary service; empowerment; information retrieval and a generalist service.

It is also proposed that Government develop policy that would allow university students to earn credits through participation in CABS. It can also encourage communities to offer CABS services online in order to reduce time and delivery of service.

The issue of the escalation of motor vehicle accidents and the consequential rise in accompanying deaths are of great concern to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Current levels are unacceptable. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Works and Transport establish an inter-disciplinary committee to determine where accident black spots are—these are areas where accidents frequently happen—and where they are located throughout Trinidad and Tobago. There are areas that are prone to accidents and measures must be taken to facilitate a reduction in accidents in these spots.

I go now to the issue that binge drinking and late night partying has taken on a new found prominence in our country. In order to curtail the effects of this phenomenon, it is recommended that the breathalyser be enforced in an aggressive manner. It is also proposed that the driving age be raised to 19 years with a systematic and gradual approval of a variety of stages as it leads to the granting of a final permit. Drivers under the age of 21 years should be banned from driving between the hours of 6.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. Too many young persons have lost their lives.

### **12.20 p.m.**

It has been recorded that 30,000 new or used vehicles enter Trinidad and Tobago every year. Given also that our vehicle abundance is in excess of 28 vehicles per square kilometres ranking 28th of 141 nations, and that is more than 52 vehicles per 100 persons, there is little wonder why we have found horrendous traffic congestion to exist in certain notable parts of the country. As part of a platform for action, it is recommended that Government hasten its resolve to implement the comprehensive national transportation study in the short term. Government should also move to significantly reduce the number of vehicles that are imported into the country, particularly foreign used.

Mr. Vice-President, my budget proposes that CEPEP and URP be abolished in fiscal 2009. In 1982, the Prime Minister in his budget speech noted and I quote:

“Perhaps the most fundamental economic problem and unquestionably a critical area for the country is productivity, which if not addressed with the greatest urgency, can render useless and futile all our development efforts. The stark facts are that rampant absenteeism is the order of the day, supervision is invariably lackadaisical or non-existent; wage demands have ceased to bear any relationship to reality; management has become complacent.”

This was in 1982 by the then Prime Minister. A new system of welfare should be introduced, restricting beneficiaries to a period of not longer than three years on welfare with a signed agreement to enrol in any educational programme. The system of public works should be managed by a special purpose enterprise company and through NGOs as it relates to environment maintenance and protection. These make-work programmes create and maintain a culture of violence and dependency.

Mr. Vice-President, my time is limited and I do not have the luxury of three hours. However, it was my intention to outline a variety of alternatives to the Government. It is all well and good to criticize, but what good is criticism if we do not present an alternative. I do not expect it to please everyone, but the act of budgeting for your country forces you to think through all the important numbers and to develop a picture of what our country is going to look like in the future.

A budget is a powerful tool that will help you make better decisions. It enables you to develop and maintain a thorough understanding of the internal and external financial workings of our economy. All the money in the world will do us no good unless we have a change of attitude that will inculcate discipline, tolerance and production. The Demas Task Force Report of 1983 stated and I quote:

“Because of the relative ease with which money could be obtained, very bad work attitudes have been created, especially among young people.”

We must put aside our bias and recognize each other for who we truly are—a human being and a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. According to Suzanna Clarke in an article in the *Newsday* dated August 19, 2008:

“The worse thing about racial prejudice is how much it narrows us and how it stunts what we are and what we can become. When we see someone in only stereotyped terms, we deny ourselves the chance to know that person as they really are. If we expect someone to be good in something, bad at others, to eat certain foods or be a certain way because of their race, that narrows both us and them. The sad thing is, the very nature of racial prejudice is that most times,

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we're not even aware of what we're doing and what we're perpetuating and so we pass it on, for another generation to continue the cycle.”

Mr. Vice-President, the time has come for that revolutionary shift in thinking. No amount of money will get us to developed country status, unless together, we say, yes we can and put country first.

I thank you.

**Sen. Linus Rogers:** I thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to make a contribution to this budget debate 2008/2009. Let me begin by adding my words of congratulations to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, who expertly piloted this Bill in the Senate on Monday, October 06, 2008, and the hon. Minister of Finance, Mrs. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, who piloted this Bill in the other place.

A budget is not an easy task because there are always competing interests and demands that must be taken into account in the context of the developmental objectives of the country. This Government takes the development objectives for the period 2008/2009 as a continuation of the journey started in 2002, when the People's National Movement Government was returned to office and began the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago to developed nation status on or before the year 2020.

I take the opportunity also to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Mrs. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, on being the first female Minister of Finance in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I make that statement not because it is political to do so, but rather to share with the youths and the people of this nation the foresight and commitment that the People's National Movement has in being inclusive, and in this context, I am speaking of gender and over the years.

You will note, Mr. Vice-President, that if you were to look back in our short history as a nation, you will find that as far back as 1956, women played significant and ever-increasing significant roles in PNM administration. Even today, as I look at the composition of this Senate and indeed the other place, I would say it reflects the commitments each party shows towards the issue of gender. In the other place, UNC A, 2 females, if my numbers are correct, out of 15, and PNM, 9 out of 26; in this Senate, the UNC A, 2 females out of 6, 5 Independent females out of 9, and the PNM, 7 out of 15.

As I listened to the contributions coming from the Opposition Bench, if I did not know better I could have been led into believing the rhetoric of gloom and

doom, as they contributed to the debate in this year's budget; a budget with the theme, "Shaping Our Future Together", but consistent with the pillars of Vision 2020, namely investing in sound infrastructure and environment, nurturing a caring society, enabling competitive business, developing innovative people and promoting effective Government.

The approach of the People's National Movement Government to governance is founded on the principle that all economic and social programmes must redound to the individual and collective well-being. It must however be noted that while the Government is committed to implementing the policies and programmes to facilitate the development of our nation, each citizen must continue to seek out and take advantage of the opportunities afforded to him or her.

Over the past three days, a number of my colleagues have addressed many of the issues raised, in some instances provided clarity, and in others provided correction, and thus I would not bore you and this Senate with repetition, but will address one or two issues raised and highlight some initiatives.

I would like to add my voice to the issue of the change in the price of the premium gasoline. Much has been said on this matter and in listening to all that has been said thus far, and this includes submissions by Sen. Mark, Sen. Seetahal SC, Sen. Dr. Charles, as well as the national community, what I would like to do is put this into a perspective, and in doing that I would like to refer to an article, which appeared in the *Newsday*, dated Sunday, September 28, 2008, and it was headlined: "Super vs premium gas". This article deals extensively with the pros and cons of using super gasoline; that is gasoline with an octane rating of 92 and premium gasoline or gasoline with an octane rating of 95. If I may quote, the writer says:

"The type of gasoline to use is one of the most misunderstood areas of vehicle ownership.

When leaded gas was the normal gas in Trinidad, refineries would boost the octane ratings of cheaper grades of gas by adding lead to increase the octane level.

The first rule of thumb is that unleaded premium 95 octane gasoline is not necessarily better for your vehicle.

Unleaded super in Trinidad is rated at 92 octane and unleaded premium is rated at 95 octane.

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Most Trinidadians buy unleaded premium 95 octane gasoline for their car because they grew up with the myth and hearsay in the days of leaded gas that using a higher octane level gas will improve its performance, burn cleaner, go faster, get better mileage or run cleaner."

The writer goes on to note:

"The recommended gasoline for 95 per cent of cars worldwide is unleaded super 91-92 octane.

In fact, in most cases, using a higher 95 octane gasoline than your owner's manual recommends offers absolutely no benefit.

Unleaded premium 95 octane gasoline does not outperform unleaded super 92 octane in preventing engine deposits from forming, in removing them, or in cleaning your car's engine.

I thought gasoline with a higher octane reduced engine knock. It did in older engines using lead gas and carburetors to regulate air/gas mix."

**Sen. Seetahal SC:** Thank you very much for giving way. Before the Senator continues in that vein, just to know the expertise to deliver this, because so many people have been making these statements. So, not to embarrass the Member, but I would like to know the basis, because there are many contradictory statements on this issue. Your expertise in this area.

**Sen. L. Rogers:** This is a writer from Diego Martin who has experience in the local industry as well as in Europe and in North America; his name is quoted here in the newspapers. The writer goes on to say:

"Modern engines are designed to use fuel injectors with computers to accurately control the air/fuel mix under all types of temperature and environment concerns."

This is the key point in here, Mr. Vice-President. He says:

"However, some cars with high compression engines, like sports cars and certain luxury cars need unleaded premium 95 octane gasoline.

Forced induction turbo-charged and super-charged engines have higher cylinder pressures so they require higher-octane gas."

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, at this time it is now 12.35 p.m., we will take the lunch break and will resume at 1.35 p.m.

**12.35 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.35 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Sen. L. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. As I continue in a nutshell the article I shared from before lunch on the use of premium gas basically says that the use of premium gas does not result in better performance or cleaner engines—but there is an exception—except in the case of a few vehicle types, namely sports vehicles and certain luxury vehicles, particularly those with forced induction turbo-charged or super-charged engines for which manufacturers require an octane rating above 95.

Mr. Vice-President, I submit and I advise car owners basically what it amounts to is check your owner's manual to see specifically what the manufacturer recommended for your particular brand of vehicle. If I may reflect on yesterday where my colleague the Attorney General gave a simple test to find out if really and truly you need to upgrade or stay with premium gasoline and pay a higher price. What I would like to do is to reflect a few minutes on something that I saw in the documents and in going through the documents I observed a matter which in my view the Government addressed and continued to address in an effective manner but has received little or no attention.

Shortly after coming into office, it is my observation and this PNM Government noted the impact of HIV/AIDS and what it was having on the citizens of our beautiful nation. This country has seen a significant reduction in deaths related to the HIV/AIDS virus because this Government introduced free anti-retroviral drugs for citizens infected with the HIV/AIDS virus.

The Government recognized the danger and foresaw the threat to the people of our beautiful nation if the progression of this virus was not contained. I am sure we can all remember the days when HIV/AIDS and its impact on our citizens was a headline issue. However, in addressing the threat the Government did not stop at containment but rather in its sustained efforts to prevent and control the spread of the HIV epidemic, has developed a five-year National Strategic Plan as a guide to the national response to the epidemic. The National Strategic Plan has two overarching goals:

1. to reduce the incidence of HIV infections in Trinidad and Tobago;
2. to mitigate the negative impact of HIV/AIDS on persons infected and affected in Trinidad and Tobago.

The priorities of the National Strategic Plan have been executed under five priority areas:

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1. prevention;
2. treatment, care and support;
3. advocacy and human rights;
4. surveillance and research; and
5. programme management, coordination and evaluation.

Between 2002 and 2007 there has been more than a 65 per cent decline in the number of AIDS cases and more than 50 per cent decline in the mortality rates with respect to AIDS-related deaths. As an active member of a non-governmental non-profit organization whose sole focus is to address the needs of the poor and needy among us, I was indeed very happy when this caring Government implemented this programme.

I cannot share with you or express in words, really, the joy I have seen on people's faces, persons who have been infected who could not afford the drug and had resigned themselves to an early and maybe painful death. As early as the first part of this year, I had the pleasure of witnessing someone living with the virus albeit without proper treatment being able to become strong once again and get back to living an almost normal life, doing the things healthy persons would. I say to you, to this Senate and the nation that our caring is best shown by how we care for those among us who cannot care for themselves or who cannot afford to care for themselves. On behalf of those who are affected and infected, I say thanks to the Government for taking care of the present while taking steps to protect future generations of our beloved nation from the threat of HIV/AIDS.

We are a fast developing country and it is therefore important to ensure that as we progress, we have the type of infrastructure necessary to support a developed nation. We have heard and witnessed the push by T&TEC to provide electricity across the length and breadth of our country. We have witnessed the very successful street lighting programme and electrification of the communities across the country and thus I would not say much more on this except to say that more than 100,000 street lights have either been installed or upgraded.

In a similar vein, a number of communities that did not previously have electricity now have electricity. However, as we move along the road to developed nation status we on this side have recognized that as electricity is being extended to more and more communities, more and more of our citizens now have access to electrical power which translates into escalated use of this critical



resource. In effect, as more and more homes are connected, typically we find more and more refrigerators, washing machines, dryers, perimeter lights and even air conditioning units to cool our homes.

In a like manner, businesses and manufacturers are being set up across the country all requiring a reliable source of power. To address this need for power one would observe in the public sector investment documents, provision being made for the installation of a 720 megawatts power plant at La Brea by the year 2010. It is noted that some 240 megawatts of power from this new plant has been reserved for use by the Alutrint Smelter Plant and the remaining 480 megawatts of power would be supplied to the national power grid for use by the nation at large.

Also in train is the installation of a 64 megawatts power plant in Tobago and this is expected to be completed in 2009. When completed some 48 megawatts of power would be available by October 2009 at the Cove Industrial Estate. This will release some power to the national grid in Trinidad since power today is supplied to Tobago via an undersea cable. This single act will make Tobago self-sufficient in power while retaining the backup link to Trinidad.

T&TEC is also carded to upgrade its communication and control system to stabilize voltage and reduce power outages. The utility would also upgrade substations across the length and breadth of our country. In addressing the needs of our citizens T&TEC has and will continue to do the following:

- Extension of electricity to communities which today are without electricity;
- Upgrade and install street lamps at higher wattage—that is to say, make areas brighter;
- Provision of lighting around sporting facilities to encourage youths to utilize their time productively and promote healthy lifestyles.

This Government recognized that as it spreads electricity to more and more communities across the nation there were areas and citizens where it was either uneconomical to provide electricity or the citizens simply could not afford. We all note that T&TEC is a commercial entity and thus this caring PNM Government recognizing the needs of its citizens, agreed to absorb the expense associated with getting electricity to people in a number of communities.

However, it did not stop there. It recognized while some people had access to electricity they did not have the resources to have their homes wired and in so doing enjoy the quality of life and amenities that some of us have grown

accustomed to. Once again, this PNM Government agreed to absorb the cost of wiring homes under the NSDP programmes subject to qualifying criteria.

In addition to this, T&TEC has embarked on a programme of installing meters capable of being read remotely at all commercial and residential installations. In fact, if I am not mistaken, all large commercial facilities have already been converted to remote meters. This will have the effect of improving billings and improving the efficiency of connecting, disconnecting and billing customers. Soon, no more will T&TEC staff have to enter a property to read an electricity meter, no more would the meter man have to scale the fence to avoid those vicious dogs that inhabit some yards.

In his contribution, Sen. Mark stated that the Government should stop spending, but he spoke mainly in generalities to support his message of doom and gloom. However, I ask rhetorically whether he was saying that the assistance detailed above to our citizens and the upgrade of our infrastructure in this area are items that we should be cutting back on? On the other hand, I would like to say that we remembered that the people had spoken to us. We responded to their cries. We did not forget the people. When we were in a position of power we used that power to significantly impact on their lives as we move along on the journey to attain developed nation status on or before the year 2020.

I indicated earlier that T&TEC was building a power station at Cove Industrial Estate in Tobago. However, at that time what I did not state is that while T&TEC is building a power plant to make Tobago self-sufficient in power, NGC has allocated funds to complete the construction of an undersea natural gas pipeline to Tobago. This new pipeline, starting at bhp Billiton Central Processing Platform in Trinidad and terminating at the Natural Gas Plant in the Cove Eco-Industrial and Business Park at Tobago's South Coast will provide fuel for T&TEC's 64 megawatts Power Generation Plant being built at Cove Estate in addition to supplying gas to all light industries at the estate via a gas distribution system. This project is expected to be completed in 2009.

It must be noted that Cove Eco-Industrial and Business Park is aimed at the development of small industries in Tobago to facilitate diversification of the island's economy from tourism.

In 2001 the production of water nationally was 175 million gallons a day. It is a much stated fact that it is estimated that at least 50 per cent of the water produced is lost in the distribution system due to leaks in pipelines, improper use and other means.

**1.50 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, I am sure we will all recall the UNC government proudly boasting of, "Water for all by 2000". Let me quote from the submission of the hon. Minister of Public Utilities—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Dr. Nanan:** Mr. Vice-President, I thank the Senator for giving way. Are you saying 175 gallons per day?

**Sen. L. Rogers:** One hundred and seventy-five million gallons per day.

"In 2000, the percentage of the population getting water 24 hours a day and seven days a week was less than 15 per cent; five days a week supply, less than 25 per cent; three to five days, was less than 20 per cent, and about 40 per cent of the population"—at this time—"was getting water less than three days a week."

I continue to quote, Mr. Vice-President.

"This is where fraud comes in. It is more a political fraud I am speaking about."

He goes on:

"The UNC marketed to this population water for all by 2000, on the basis of the construction of one desalination plant to produce 20 million gallons of water per day. A single plant they intended to construct, adding to the production from 175 to make it 195, and they sold that to the population as being the measure required to ensure that the entire population would be provided with water. What else other than fraud could I call that? It is a deception, and they knew it was not true."

Mr. Vice-President, today, we produce about 200 million gallons of water per day and we propose to ensure that our water production capacity increases to just over 400 million gallons per day. To do this, we propose the expansion of the existing Arena Dam to give an increased production of 15 million gallons of water per day; a new dam at Moruga with a capacity to deliver 20 million gallons of water per day, and five desalination plants, four of which will have the capacity to deliver 20 million gallons of water per day. The improvements do not stop there because while the large project is being worked on, a number of smaller projects have been undertaken to provide water to various communities, and a number of communities have been benefiting from these smaller projects.

Mr. Vice-President, the final area I would like to highlight has to do with the telecommunication sector. In the 21st Century, it is acknowledged by all that ICT will play a significant role in the development of all countries. It is and would be an enabler for a number of initiatives. In education, we speak of computers in the classrooms and the Internet; in health we speak of e-health; in commerce, we speak of e-commerce. I am sure that most of us give little thought to the ICT infrastructure in place that makes most of our transactions possible. In fact, in today's world most will agree that most businesses would certainly slow down if they did not have access and/or the use of computers, and access to data at high speeds for those are platforms they can lever for economic gain.

We noted the impact that ICT has in raising the quality of life through the provision of information and opportunities to realize dreams. If you would recall, Mr. Vice-President, earlier in my discourse on premium gasoline, I noted the use of computers in vehicles. As we address the existing needs and prepare for the future, let us take a brief look at the telecom sector, and in doing that, I will share a few excerpts from an Annual Market Report: Telecommunications and Broadcasting Sector dated September 22, 2008, published by the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

On page 44, Appendix I of the Domestic Telecom Statistics, it gives information for the period 2001—2007:

- In 2001, for a fixed or land line, the number of main lines in this country was 293,200; in 2007, that figure grew to 307,300.
- In 2001, mobile phones were 160,100; in 2007, it was 1,509,800: keep in mind, we have a population of 1.3 million.
- Internet, and in this respect I am speaking to Internet subscribers. In 2001, we had 39,600 Internet subscribers; in 2007, 81,700.

Let me share something else that this report points out. It points out that if we were to look and compare ourselves to some countries that we all take as being leading edge within the world, and we take Singapore as an example, let us compare the three areas: fixed lines, mobile lines and Internet.

- The number of subscribers per 100 inhabitants in Trinidad is 23.5; in Singapore, 41.9.
- Mobile—the number of subscribers per 100 inhabitants in Trinidad is 115.3; Singapore, 126.7.

- Internet—the number of users per 100 inhabitants in Trinidad is 33.2; Singapore, 60.9.

Mr. Vice-President, I am showing this because I am trying to show you, the Senate and the nation at large, that as we move along this continuum in different areas, we will be at different points in our development towards developed nation status. And I am using Singapore which is taken by and large as a benchmark of our country, around our size, that has made the transition to developed nation status to be in a developed nation and comparing what is happening, keeping in mind also that I hold the view that ICT is an enabler within our society, that will enable business and enable a number of other things to happen. I am pointing out between 2001 and 2007 the change that existed under a PNM administration and what has happened over the six years of a PNM administration.

Mr. Vice-President, if I may share one last piece of information. It is focused mainly on the Internet, and it is really reflective of what is as of 2007 and if I could reflect back in the 2001 period, we would not have had some of these speeds; on page 47 of the same report I quoted; speeds from dial-up which is 56 kilobits, up to 10 megabits offered within the country. This is based upon the annual report from Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

In closing, as I reflect on the budget, it comes to me that there is an urgent call for citizens to participate, keeping in mind the theme for the budget in the way forward. Too often in life, people abandon ideas at the point of ignition or while the flame is being burnt because they do not allow themselves or they become distracted by the naysayers. This budget is a budget with a purpose. This is a Government with a vision and as we move towards a developed nation, I implore all to become involved and work towards that goal. I will acknowledge that all may get their individual request, but I ask, what kind of nation are we building? Is it a nation for the person or a nation for the people? This budget calls on all of us to stay the course, so that we can reach our desired goal of developed nation status on or before the year 2020.

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

**Sen. Basharat Ali:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I intend to proceed straight into the subject for this debate. I have to say while I appreciated the statement prepared by the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance, I think it is a well prepared document, all my references are in fact to the budget statement of the Minister of Finance in the other place. So, whenever I give a page or read from the budget it will be a matter that was raised there.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to start by speaking to the energy related projects some of which are listed on page 11 of the budget statement. Let me start with one project which is called the gas to polypropylene project, properly called natural gas to polypropylene project. This project is being developed in pursuance of a Project Development Agreement signed on September 09, 2008 by Basell Service Company B V, which is a wholly owned Netherlands subsidiary of Lyondell Basell Industries; NGC who we all well know; NEC and Lurgi GmbH, a German company which is a subsidiary of the French company, Air Liquide. My information on that comes from a press release, not locally, but from Lyondell Basell and Lurgi and the intent of the project development agreement is stated there. It says:

“It is intended to provide the relevant framework to govern the relationship among the parties, to evaluate jointly the construction and operation of a fully integrated polypropylene complex in Trinidad and Tobago.”

So, there we have quite succinctly stated what this development agreement is. It is not an investment decision yet, that is to come.

For the benefit of particularly the newer Senators, let me give a brief outline of what the project parameters are for this very major project, and the only real big project in the listing as an energy project. This complex will consist of three main plants. The first plant is the 5,000 tonnes of the methanol plant which is the conversion of our natural gas to methanol in what is called a mega methanol process. We have two of those already in Trinidad and Tobago, the Atlas plant which is the same technology that is proposed for this plant by Lurgi the technology supplier. We have the M 5000 which is from Methanol Holdings Limited which is a different technology. Both are probably the biggest methanol plants in the world today. So this is the third one being proposed for Trinidad.

### **2.05 p.m.**

The second plant or process will be methanol to propylene, which is like propane to propylene, that is the second element, olefin, as it is called. That is a brand new process from Lurgi. It is their patent; they have licensed it; they have done a demonstration plant on it and this is the biggest one of the plants for this process which is being proposed. That plant has a capacity of 490,000 tonnes a year of propylene. Those numbers are a little different to what appears on page 11, but since this came from their press release I presume it is more accurate than what was given in our documentation.

It should be noted that the methanol plant produces 1.7 million tonnes a year of methanol, and the propylene plant produces only 490,000 tonnes a year of propylene; so the yield going from methanol to propylene is only 29 per cent. I had questioned this before, because it seemed to be against the chemistry of the process. You take natural gas, which is primarily methane, you convert it into methanol by adding some oxygen, and then you take out the oxygen to make propylene and in the process you only have 30 per cent yield, while a good part of the rest of the yield is, in fact, water. That is the chemistry of the process. I have challenged it before and I am not yet convinced that is the route we have to go.

In terms of our use of natural gas for this process, the amount in my calculation is 165 million standard cubic feet per day. If I want to put this in a long-term context, in 20 years, if the plant comes to 20 years, we would have consumed 1.2 trillion cubic feet of gas. I think that is not an unreasonable length of time to consider, for a plant of this magnitude. The provider of that gas, of course, will be the National Gas Company; that is why they are part of this project.

The plant location is the responsibility of the National Energy Corporation, which is also the entity mandated to develop export projects based on natural gas. They would also look for the industrial estate to develop a site for this plant. Originally this plant was listed as a plant for Union Estate, so keeping company with the Alutrint smelter and there was supposed to be an ammonia complex going in there. But I had seen it as a marked out plant area in that Union Industrial Estate; whether it is still going to be there or not, I do not know. I do not know if our acting Prime Minister is also the Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; perhaps, he would be able to answer my question.

Mr. Vice-President, the capital cost estimate of this project in our document is listed as US \$2.5 billion. Last year the same project, the same scope, was given as TT \$9.5 billion. So this is speaking to an increase of 58 per cent in the capital cost. I presume that number, US \$2.5 billion, is correct. If it is, then we are looking at an escalation of 58 per cent in the capital cost of the project.

If we are going to provide a framework to govern the relationship between the parties, I have a certain view of what matters need to be addressed before an investment decision. I have listed them in no particular order. First of all is the availability of natural gas and the price of that natural gas to this complex. Mr. Vice-President, a 20-year availability is 1.2 trillion cubic feet, and is quite a substantial amount of our present proven reserves; so we would have to find more gas in the time that this project would reach fruition, if it ever reaches fruition.

The price of natural gas is very critical to us; most of our Members would not be familiar with the fact that in treating with natural gas in relation to these downstream projects like methanol and urea, there is a particular kind of arrangement where the natural gas price is indexed basically to what applies in the market for these products. Both ammonia and methanol projects have that kind of formulation. Of course, there have been various tranches of gas supplied by the NGC, being bought and sold by the NGC. I am not sure, I do not know whether that kind of formulation goes back to the producers, the BGs, the bpTTs and the BHP Billiton. Those are the principal providers of natural gas. I am not in a position to answer that question, but I know that the model being used for the downstream side by NGC as a reseller is to base it on what the market price of the products are. In this case there are two sets of products.

Let us look, first of all, at the primary product we are going to make in this and that is methanol. I want to just give you a feel for what the price of methanol has been over the last few years. The New York posting is the one that we would normally use. In the year 2006, that was US \$417 per metric ton; in 2007, US \$445 per metric ton; up to September 2008, it was US \$588 per metric ton. That means that any manufacturer of methanol here would have to face a gas price well above the average or the base price, so to speak. Let me say also that we have already got an October price; it is US \$499 per metric ton.

Methanol prices may be quite volatile; the lowest I have seen was in August of 2005 of \$299, the highest was December 2007/January 2008 of \$832. Last year I asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, "Can this project pay for methanol, because you are looking at opportunity cost for your natural gas?" That is what we are looking at, the target prices to be negotiated; so this is the basis, as I see it, where we as Trinidad and Tobago with 100 per cent owned National Gas Company, which is a reseller of gas, would have to look at.

The second item I have raised here, and to me this project would not fly unless you have this. I speak of a firm commitment to downstream usage of, at least, part of the polypropylene resin. Polypropylene resin is a basic material for all the polypropylene products that you meet in the market: plastics, whether they are containers, carpets, et cetera. We as a minimum should have a commitment to downstream processing to finished products. I have heard mentioned, in the press even, that 100,000 tonnes a year of the polypropylene resin, that is the product made from these three plants, would be dedicated to downstream development in Trinidad and Tobago.



I would like to know that we have more than an MOU. I do not believe in MOUs; MOUs can come and disappear just as quickly as anything else. I told somebody yesterday that a memorandum of understanding sometimes becomes a memorandum of misunderstanding. So it could come from either one of the partners of the joint venture. Basell is in the business; Basell is Shell, and BSF, Lyondell also is in the business. Are they coming forward to say, "Well, okay, we will build the first of that", or are they going to bring a partner? They have quite a lot of business as marketing people in that area. Are they going to bring to the table someone who is prepared to commit to go downstream? Otherwise we would find that all the material is being exported and we would just be using up our natural gas to provide an export product for the downstream business of Lyondell Basell.

The third item is an important one, because I have asked whether Government is going to be an equity partner in this. If they are, what level of equity are we looking at; is it up to 51 per cent or less? We have a number of different partners, so it is a question for answer. I do not have an answer to that.

My fourth point is commitment to training and development of our local personnel at all levels, from craftsmen and technical sub professionals to technical, marketing and administrative managers. If particularly we are going to get into the plastic part in a big way, then we need to make sure that we start very early on to develop those persons, at all levels as I said. The partners would have adequate means of training and development of the persons in all the industries they own in North America, Europe, et cetera. To me it is a very important element that has to be negotiated before an investment decision.

My fifth item is commitment to best practice in mitigation of potential environmental hazards. I see the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment is coming in. I want to bring this to her attention, that we must be careful, because a project like this must have all the basic environmental protection provided and agreed within the country.

Finally, I know any big capital intensive project like this would be looking for incentives. The incentives which are available under the Fiscal Incentives Act for a project of this size, would be tax holidays. The maximum, I think, is 10 years; other projects have gotten that. This is part of the negotiation of the deal that would have to be struck between the Government and the partners—duty-free importation of plant and equipment, catalysts, chemicals. Even sometimes as an alternative to tax holidays one might look at accelerated depreciation and things

like that. That is a separate package which would have to be dealt with, with the Government as a collector of tax as opposed to its position as an equity holder.  
[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** I am not the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. When I do speak, I will be speaking as the Minister of Trade and Industry.

I just want to tell you that since that time it has moved beyond an MOU; there is now a firm project. The analysis has been done; a gas price has been set; equity has been allocated. The Government is taking 30 per cent of the equity.

You raised the question of capital cost increase, and it tells you what is happening in the industry and why we are even having overruns in capital projects in this country. Yes, the cost of constructing plants has gone up; in some case almost 100 per cent, but taking all these figures into account, the study was done, an investment decision has been taken; Government is committed to 30 per cent. The partners are committed to provide a minimum of 100,000 tonnes for the local market and are working with the Government to encourage industries. In fact, seminars have been held with eTeck and they brought Proctor and Gamble. They are bringing users down to do it. We are also hoping that it is raw material which could help the other islands in developing industries, because you would make all the propylene available.

There are no tax holidays; we have changed that. Now there is the normal VAT and duty-free, but we have removed tax holidays now. The idea is that if you are not making a profit, you would pay no tax; if you are making a profit you should pay tax. It is all part of the thing. The price of the gas is tied to end product, as we are doing all other things now; so that when there is an upside we share it.

The technology, I defer to you that is your field, but from the point of view of the elements of the project, we are satisfied that it is a project that could now start. We are hoping that its location is going to be at Point Lisas; basically, we are looking north of where the ammonia plant is.

**2.20 p.m.**

**Sen. B. Ali:** Thank you very much, hon. Minister for bringing me up to date. I am pleased to speak to you about it and, as I said, there are still a lot of matters to be finalized before we get there. I would be very pleased if people like those you mentioned, Procter and Gamble, come here to look at the plastic industry otherwise it will not make sense. We would be like the old export refinery and that is not where we should be.

In looking at this project, I want briefly to look at the market side of the polyolefins. These will be polypropylene and polyethylene. To me, those are the competing elements. Polypropylene resins have been fetching record prices recently and this is primarily due to high prices of the propylene monomer, which is a starting product for the propylene.

It would appear that these high prices are driven by the relative scarcity of the propylene and this has been identified. Last year, when I spoke on this, I drew attention to an article in the *Chemical Express Report*, which said that Basell was restarting an idle plant in Bayport, Texas, which produced some 220,000 tonnes a year of propylene. This plant had been idle since 2001. It has probably started up now because it was carded for the second quarter of 2008.

This shows that after seven years a plant is being restarted because there is such a scarcity. What is happening now, from what I can read, is that the current price of polypropylene resin is about \$1,540 per metric ton. There is the expectation of a substantial drop in October due to decreased demand as a result of a slow down of the economy. So there is a word of caution in this particular atmosphere where we may have a slowing down of the economy and polypropylene products, as with all plastic products, are driven by consumer demand.

My word of caution here is in formulation; that it is connected to pricing in this particular case, apart from methanol, which we know may be the final product, polypropylene. We will have to be extremely careful because if that market really drops, the sufferer will be NGC because it is quite possible that NGC, if they have negotiated price on a certain basis, will go below their floor and for every million BTUs they sell, they will be losing money. I am sure we have the capability to do the negotiations, but we can only bring that word of caution to the Government and people who will negotiate.

My favourite project always has been ethane to ethylene to polyethylene. That is because we are supposed to have a certain potential of ethane in our gas. I see the Minister is shaking his head. I know the situation is getting worse, because we did not do it when we should have—extract that ethane. When we said we had the critical mass of ethane, we probably did. This ethane is mainly in the gas from the east coast. Gas from the north coast has very little ethane; it is almost all methane.

I see a problem there and I recognize that you cannot take the gas from the north coast marine area, which is now the developing field of gas and so we may not actually have access or sufficient material to do a project the size where it

becomes economical. I heard the hon. Prime Minister in the other place speaking about the virtual ethylene cracker, which was something that bpTT wanted here because they did not extract the gas in the first place. It is still a possibility because in terms of the widespread nature of the downstream end, the polyethylene outstrips other polyolefins any day. It has always been the way to go. We have worked a long time on polyethylene as a base from the 1970s to now but we have not reached anywhere.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** Please give me one more try at the conversation.

**Sen. B. Ali:** You are using my time.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** Yes, the gas we are getting now is short of ethane, but there is another route to get to polyethylene and that is through the refinery. We are looking at that configuration because we need to produce polyethylene in the country.

**Sen. B. Ali:** Mr. Vice-President, I hope you will give me injury time.

I would now like to go to a couple of projects which are also on this list on page 11. The first one is called a methanol to power project. I had great difficulty when I first saw the project. I could not figure out what it was because looking at the value—they said that the capital cost of the project was US \$1.2 billion—I could not figure what it was, but I remembered that some time last year, 2007, Methanol Holdings Limited signed an agreement with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) to develop a little plant to demonstrate the conversion of methanol to power. This was set up at the Point Lisas plant of Methanol Holdings, which was to run a power generator for 8.5 megawatts, which will be enough power for two methanol plants.

This, I presume, is the project which is here and it is not \$1.2 billion; it is US \$12 million. That is a big difference. I am sorry that that misinformation had to appear in our budget statement. Somebody must account for that. All the information is wrong on that, even when they say that the joint venture is between UTT and the Natural Gas Institute of the Americas. The Natural Gas Institute of the Americas is a creature of the UTT, so there could never be a joint venture between them. *[Interruption]* That is not a mathematical error. The sum of \$1.2 billion is a mathematical error. The other one is a practical error.

The question of a virtual pipeline to supply energy to our Caribbean neighbours is an interesting one. It is really an alternative if it works because the little generator is really a standard one modified by Ferrostaal, the partner of the

methanol company in order to make electricity. Instead of having expensive submarine pipelines going to these little islands, you can have a little methanol tanker running there and they can take our methanol and make cleaner electricity because methanol is a very clean fuel. If this project works, it is better than any costly Caribbean pipeline project. I do not know what the status of that is and I do not intend to ask. Each time I hear of it, it is \$100 million more. It must be twice that amount by now.

This is the other project and those who wish can read about it on the website of Methanol Holdings Limited. It gives a nice list of parameters associated with this project. As a Caribbean project, it is interesting and if you can establish this, it is another outlet for our methanol, although it is a small quantity. We have our commitment to our Caribbean neighbours in terms of providing them with a stock of reasonably priced energy and to generate clean electricity.

That is one project. The second project, which is also a UTT project—I have not seen really any advertisement on this particular one, but this is for methanol or natural gas to single cell protein. The budget speaks to that too. This project is aimed at the construction and licensing of a plant to produce animal protein from natural gas, that is, a single cell protein as an alternative to soya bean.

Once again, they said who the company was, UniBio Limited, so I had to go into their website to find out what it is all about. There I found out what it is from a press release. On January 11, they entered a contract with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the production of protein called “uni-protein” from either natural gas or methanol and they gave you all the people, who were there.

The first stage is a pilot plant, a total investment of US \$6 million, to be built at Point Lisas, Trinidad. I do not know whether it is Point Lisas campus, but the next stage, if this works, is that they will be going to the construction of a 100,000 tonnes-a-year plant of single cell protein at an estimated capital cost of US \$125 million.

That is really what this project is all about. It is not a new project. I myself have worked on methanol to single cell protein and I have been aware, since the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, that there was a project by ICI where they set up a demonstration plant in the north of England, in Yorkshire—I visited that area—and that was to take methanol—ICI was then a producer of methanol—to convert it into single cell protein, which they called Pruteen. Instead of the normal yeast fermentation; this was different; they were using bacterial action.

In about 1985, that project was abandoned because the plant was 70,000 tonnes a year. They found that the cost of production of the protein was two to

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three times the cost of soya bean or fish meal. Maybe we are seeing a revival. The Budget Statement only speaks of single cell protein from natural gas, but the press release speaks about natural gas or methanol. There are a number of patents on both of those and presumably this is an attempt to license and complete an agreement whereby we will share somewhere in the profits of the project.

As I said, the production of single cell protein from methanol is not new. I wait to hear where we are going since we are doing this pilot project. I would like for the community to get more information on these. Just a one-liner in our budget does not make sense. In this case, they got it right. I would like UTT and its parent Ministry, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to get on the ball and get correct information and disseminate it.

**2.35 p.m.**

The next topic which I bring up very reluctantly, is the question of the University of the Southern Caribbean. This would be the third time I am bringing this to this Senate, in the First Session of the Ninth Parliament. To bring our Senators up to date, let me relate where we are. On July 01, 2008, during a debate of the Accreditation Council (Amdt.) Bill, I raised the subject of perceived religious discrimination in recruitment of non-ecclesiastical academic staff, where there was a requirement that applicants must be committed to high Christian standards and ethics.

Subsequently, I wrote a private and confidential letter dated July 12, to the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, on the subject of Government's subventions to institutions that I felt were not providing equal opportunity to all of our citizens. I drew the hon. Minister's attention to a change in the website requirements from: "committed to high Christian standards and ethics" to "committed to high spiritual, moral and ethical standards of the University of the Southern Caribbean." I put the hon. Minister on notice that I proposed to speak on Sen. Wade Mark's Motion on Implementation of that Equal Opportunity Act on July 22, which I did. I requested her informal comment by letter, phone or email. I did not get it, so I did proceed to speak on July 22. That is the second time I spoke. I pointed out what the changed requirement was. I said that I was convinced that there was blatant discrimination. There was a spirited defence by the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment of what I said. Her defence was mainly in defence of Christianity. I will not go into that.

I would like the hon. Minister to note that I never did make a distinction between a big "C" and a small "c". In my book, all religions are spelt with an

uppercase letter, noun, or adjective. There is no distinction, as the hon. Minister may have misunderstood. This can be verified very easily by going to the *Hansard* of July 22. I say nothing else on that, because I spoke on it. The hon. Minister also spoke on it.

On August 08, 2008, in the *Newsday*, there appeared a three-page spread: “Career Opportunities for the University of the Southern Caribbean.” A number of jobs were advertised and there were a number of positions. This is Friday, August 08, 2008. The jobs ranged from an Associate Vice-President, Academic Administration to Estate Constables. Each position required the applicant to be committed to high spiritual, moral and ethical values of the University of the Southern Caribbean. The deadline for applications was August 15, which was one week from the date of that advertisement.

A similar advertisement appeared in the *Daily Express* of August 12, with the same deadline of August 15. I am not aware of any earlier advertisements in our local press for the same position and I stand corrected if any such advertisement is brought to my attention.

By letter dated August 10, 2008, I wrote to the President, Dr. Trevor Gardner of the University of the Southern Caribbean and I raised the issue of the employment practice of the USC. I copied this letter to the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and the Chief Manpower Officer of the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, to whom all applicants are required to send a copy. That is for obvious reasons. That is related to work permits. I also sent one to the Chairman of the Equal Opportunity Commission. Allow me to read just a paragraph or two of this letter. I think it needs to be aired and this is the only opportunity I would have to air it. I spoke of the other requirements before, but let me read verbatim:

“The change has been noted in ‘Other Requirements’ from “Committed to high Christian standards and ethics’ to ‘Committed to high spiritual, moral and ethical standards of the University of the Southern Caribbean’. I am of the view that, in the interest of transparency, prospective applicants should be made aware of these standards by your publication of the standards to which they are required to be committed. I have browsed through your website to check whether they are listed. The closest I have found is a statement of ‘CORE VALUES of USC’”—when I am finished with this paragraph I would read what those core values are—“If these are representative of the USC standards referred to in the advertisement, then, in my humble opinion, they should have appeared in the print advertisement. I note that Applications

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Deadline is August 15, 2008 and that only short-listed applicants will be contacted. Since some of your requirements, other than qualification and experience, may be subjective, I would urge you to clarify this issue I have raised before closing date for applications if only in the interest of equity and fair play.”

In my letter, I acknowledge that on July 22 I paid tribute to the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic institutions, which I attended in Trinidad. I said:

“Nonetheless, I will do my part to ensure that all our citizens have equal access to employment in accordance with the laws of our country.”

I spoke of the core values. Let just read two or three of them. Under the core values there is:

“Love—The love of Christ constrains us to love as Christ loved.  
Compassion—Sympathetic willingness to be engaged in the ministry of caring for our students, and going beyond the call of duty, is biblically based, as portrayed in the story of the Good Samaritan.”

I do not know either of those because I do not belong to the Christian faith.

Honesty is general.

“Justice—The commitment to equality and treating others fairly, without discrimination.”

which is fair enough.

“Humility—The willingness to serve others in a sacrificial manner, with self respect that renounces haughtiness or arrogance.”

That, basically, is the main element of this letter, which I sent to the parties concerned and I did not receive a word, either from the University of the Southern Caribbean or from, disappointingly, our Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education.

This is a budget debate. If you look through the budget estimates for the recurrent expenditure of that Ministry, you will see that in addition to the 2008 subvention of \$30 million, there is an additional appropriation of \$30 million under the same subject: current transfers and subsidies in the 2009 recurrent budget of the Ministry. I am left with no alternative but to continue to pursue this matter as I see fit. I hope the Government, through the Senate, will take notice of what I have said, so that nobody would be surprised in the long run.



I go to the next subject from the budget, “Budget Priorities.” That is on pages 19 and 20 of this document where the budget priorities are listed. The subject “Infrastructure” is what struck me. At the bottom of that page were two little paragraphs on a subject which I have a lot of hope for in the long run. It spoke to the Government’s White Paper on the Reform of the Public Sector Regime. That is a White Paper of August 19, 2005, laid in Parliament before the end of September 2005. It is three years since that document was laid. Let me read.

“Mr. Speaker, the Government’s White Paper on the Reform of the Public Sector Procurement Regime sought to address the deficiencies and weaknesses of the present public sector procurement and the Central Tenders Board Ordinance 1961 including lack of uniformity of procedures across agencies; absence of standardization; and a perceived lack of transparency and accountability.

We propose to (i) provide online procurement in the form of an e-government platform for tendering process as well as the dissemination of procurement information to the general public; and (ii) strengthen the present public sector procurement tender rules and (iii) standardize the rules and processes to be used by the State Enterprises.”

That is bald statement in this document.

Let me read from—

**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. Prof. R. Deosaran*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. B. Ali:** Thank you very much to my colleagues. I must remind you, Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Acting Prime Minister robbed me of some of my time. I am hoping that I would get five minutes of injury time, because I am running a little short of time.

In my notes it says that it would appear that the hon. Minister may not have read the executive summary of the White Paper on page four of the document, which states:

“To achieve some measure of uniformity in the procurement process, policy directives of Cabinet in 1979 and 1980 required State enterprises to invite a representative of the CTB to sit on panels considering tenders above a certain

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level. Not all comply with this directive. In 1985, Cabinet agreed that the tender rules of the National Hospital Management Company be used as model for the tenders' rules of all State companies, which were to be submitted for vetting to the CTB. Not all companies have complied. However, the award of contracts by these agencies is subject to monitoring by a Central Audit Committee, established within the Ministry of Finance.”

The budget document, particularly the document prepared by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, did address the question of e-auctions. I appreciate that there are certain goods which can be properly and transparently bought through the e-auctions process. This applies particularly to our big corporations like NEC, NGC, Petrotrin and WASA, because they order materials which are according to very strict specifications and they will have lists of people who are approved and who will be proper suppliers. I can see a certain amount of transparency in that aspect of procurement. I do not have much of a problem with it. You have to be very careful and vet what you have. Once we get to the services, and when we start tendering for services for projects, where we just write a scope, how are we going to do that, unless we have proper tenders rules that are transparent and we can say that we are committed to transparency, accountability and value for money? This is why I say that we do still require, notwithstanding this, the legislation in accordance with what the White Paper has said. If you do not agree with what the White Paper said, then come forward and say so, but I think it is still a requirement.

I think we should do so very much sooner than later, because if we really do it much later we would not have anything to procure. We cannot just pay lip service to the process of transparency, accountability and value for money.

**2.50 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, I want to speak briefly to the Ministry of Public Utilities programme. I have a certain unhappiness with the programme of the four desalination plants; the extension at Arena Dam, which I know is one of your projects; the new Moruga Dams which are surface water collectors, but the four desalinators which are located in Ortoire, Chaguaramas, Point Fortin and Point Lisas, I do not see how they are going to work when we cannot account for 50 per cent of the water that is being produced. All these contracts are going to be on the basis of design/build/own and sell water to WASA. All I can see is more water being wasted and we are going to pay for it. Any of the private sector desalinators would be getting their pound of flesh. Whatever you do with it—you can throw it away or whatever—but if I provide you with so much water, then you have to pay me.

I heard there is talk about this national grid but I do not buy that. We should get our feet on the ground in WASA and repair those trunk mains that are leaking. We have that Navet Dam Pipeline which has shut down the whole of South as far as I read yesterday. I did not even know that when I was writing this. All those leaks we see every day—who does not see a leak must be driving with his or her eyes closed. We do not want to have the desalinators there and the pumps are on and we are just wasting the water. This is what has happened with some of the houses.

I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that the housing is ahead of the infrastructure; water and electricity. It is not much use for someone to have a house and they cannot use it and the only reason is that the houses are going more speedily than the installation of infrastructure. It just does not make sense. That only makes sense when you have plenty money. There is no discipline in spending.

I do not have much time left, but I wanted to speak about the rapid rail. I just want to say one thing directed to my dear friend, the Acting Prime Minister, and that is with respect to this phase I that is going to cost a lot of money.

I remember when I raised this issue it was mentioned to me that the RITES project which I was quoting as a basis of a feasibility study will really be the basis for the work being done. When I read that we are almost going seamlessly into the next step after this first step which is US \$71 million—that is a lot of money—then I get very concerned.

How many of us here know where this train line or route is going to be East to West? That is the first stage. Anybody here knows? I do not know. Is it going to be underground, overhead or is it parallel to some road? I have asked an engineer here and he said that he does not know.

**Sen. Browne:** That is what the study is for.

**Sen. B. Ali:** Well, if you have said it before I did not hear it. That seems to be the modus operandi now; you start a feasibility study and then you pull out bits and pieces from it and then you do the next step. That is not how I know it.

I believe that the coastal water taxi service is going to come in a short while. So, I am looking forward to seeing what is going to happen. We still have four vessels outstanding. There is an advertisement from NIDCO. They are the ones who are talking about proudly building a new modern Trinidad and Tobago. This has more information than has been given in this budget in the other place. The hon. Minister of Works and Transport spent his 75 minutes attacking everyone

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and his junior Minister only said what is in this document. I am really disappointed that we did not hear anything new and we await what is happening here. I wait to see what these four new water taxis would be. They look like catamarans to me, and they might be Australian catamarans. There is a picture of it here. [*Picture in hand*] It looks very much like Australian catamarans. I do not know whether they are the preferred bidder on this one and I would not go further.

I have to speak to petroleum revenue and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. I left it for last and I may not have sufficient time. The petroleum revenue that I got from the revised summary 2008 taxes on oil companies, royalty, share of profits from PSC totalled \$25.028 billion for last year, and those same lines give me \$18.363 billion estimate for this year. Because the figure of \$19.9246 billion appears as energy sector revenue, I could not reconcile those. I added up all the miscellaneous that do not come under the HSF; signature bonus oil imports, et cetera and I can only manage \$18.863 billion. I am still \$1 billion short, So, I was tempted to ask where that \$1 billion gone! [*Laughter*] Someone else asked about \$10 million. I suspect that \$1 billion will be going up in smoke.

I suspect that for the first time the collection from the subsidy which is 4 per cent of gross income from oil, which is the petroleum product levy, is included there. I cannot say otherwise. In this case, taking into account the additional sum approved by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries will take the subsidy to \$2.9 billion including this addition.

Mr. Vice-President, on the gasoline subsidy reduction, there are so many experts and I did not really want to get into it. I have experience. I have been a laboratory chemist in a refinery. I have been in charge of all kinds of octanes that you can talk of. So, it is not as simple as everybody is making it out to be. Suffice it to say that the easiest way to get it is to go back to your owner's manual. So, do not compare us with America or any other country. I think the dealers in this country have a responsibility to put out a notice saying if you have so and so car this is what you—My owner's manual says that I can use 95 research octane number in my car and I may use 91 research octane number in the car and it will do no harm to the engine, but I would lose some power. It is my choice if I choose to spend the extra dollar, the 33⅓ per cent increase on my car. I will leave that argument for another time. Many people have spoken about this. Even the Attorney General talked about the Academy of Auto Mechanics. I do not know who they are, and maybe that was good advice. My advice is to go back to the owner's manual or to your dealer and ask them.

I had intended to speak to the HSF and I just want to say that the HSF is not working. It is not working in its present wording from two points of view; the method used for calculation is flawed and it is not working. I say that without any fear of any contradiction by anyone. I would be willing to argue it out, because I have done those numbers time and again and all that I am saying is that \$70 that the hon. Minister used is low. If you really look at it, it should be \$80 plus. I am saying that is low. I may have to come back to the HSF another time.

I want to make one final point with respect to natural gas. We have to be a little more transparent in natural gas. We have two tranches of natural gas: one goes to LNG which we should be able to work out at well head value. If you say \$10 Henry Hub, you could subtract \$3 or \$4 and you get to a well head figure.

In the case of the others which are going into the projects that have very high export values like ammonia which is selling at almost \$1,000 a tonne and methanol at \$500 plus, there is a big bonus there. I believe there is a strong case for the inclusion of taxes and dividends from those companies like the National Gas Company and the Phoenix Gas Processors for their income to be added. We cannot say we are a gas economy when those big gas producers are taking up virtually half of the production of gases at the moment. All those gas producers income should be part and parcel of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. I agree with many persons who say that should be so. That is as much as I can say without using anymore of my time. I did not get much in the way of injury time from the hon. Vice-President, but I thank you and I hope that my contribution has given food for thought to the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Mr. Vice-President, it is my pleasure to join in this debate on the 2008/2009 national budget, and to have the opportunity to make a contribution in respect of the work of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Let me congratulate my colleague, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, for his presentation in this House, and since the Senator generously quoted from the presentation in the other House, to congratulate the Minister of Finance in the other House for her presentation. Before I get into my contribution and because I owe Sen. Basharat Ali some time which he cannot get, I will spend a few minutes on the point he raised about the rapid rail.

The Rapid Rail Project is being overseen by a ministerial steering committee which I head. It comprises the Minister of Works and Transport, the Attorney General, the Minister of Finance and a number of other Ministers. There is a

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technical group, and a unit in the Office of the Prime Minister which supports it. It is a design/build/operate/maintain.

The figures coming out of the national transportation studies over the years and the latest one indicated that a mass transit system was needed in the country. There was no question of doing a feasibility study on that. The traffic figures on the East-West Corridor and North-South demand a mass transit, if not we are going to cover the entire country with highways. There was a clear indication that a mass transit facility would be needed. It was on that basis that the Government sought to get proposals for the provision of a mass transit using the rail system. That is why I was confused as to what is a light rail, heavy rail and so forth. It is a rail system. To me, light rail and rapid rail is the same thing. It is a passenger system. Heavy rail would be goods and services; a rail system as distinct from a road system.

We went out and got expressions of interest from people who felt that they could provide it. It started with about 100 people coming to the first meeting and in the second meeting we had the consortiums. Ultimately, I think it ended up with about four persons who had to put together a team—it is equipment; civil engineering works; it is operational, how you operate it and how you maintain. Those four teams went through a process of evaluation proposals. They were not priced proposals in the sense that you did not have the design, but they were priced proposals in phases; what would be your phase one, two, three and four.

### **3.05 p.m.**

Phase one is basically what you will call a feasibility study; what I call it is determining the parameters of what this thing is going to be. At the end of that we could cost it, and the way the contract is set up at that point you could say we are going with it, or we are not going with it. The next phase would be to start doing some of the construction. When that is finished you have the third option, we want somebody else to operate it; you could operate it.

Phase one—if you do not mind, let me just read what phase one is—is TT \$460 million, it ends at the end of February 2010, so it is about 18 months. It consists of the following: workshops, a ridership study, which is going on right now; what is the real figure of ridership that will be using this; an assessment of the alternatives; a short list of conceptual design; method and pricing; geological and geotechnical investigations; topographical surveys; the right of way analysis; the acquisition that would be required, real estate; the survey of the existing utilities; the environmental basis for the design; what would be the architectural

basis of the stations, and where they should go; what would be the preliminary engineering of the tracks, would it be elevated, would it be on the ground; how you do it; and all the preliminary engineering that takes you to a point where you could cost it.

It is at that point that you know what the route is, where it is; you know where the stations are going because you now have ridership; you now have what kind of equipment that you require to put on it. It is only on that point that you have a detail, which allows you to proceed with it. It is not that one is not doing the studies right; I could not tell you right now, where the route is going to be; it is possible it could go north, south, it could go along the whole railway line; it could go above something; it could go outside of the existing highway. Those are the items that are being done, so to say that this went out without a feasibility in the traditional sense is not quite correct. The feasibility was done even when we did the 1972 transportation survey, when I say “we” I had put on my old hat and when I was at Trintoplan.

We knew that given the growth of traffic that you had to go for mass transit; that time we talked about the Priority Bus Route. The fact is the growth of traffic has been even greater than anyone could have predicted—including the hon. Dr. Carson Charles—on it. I just want to let you know that there is a rigorous process of analysis. *[Interruption]* The reason I am not giving way is because I did not come here to talk about this one. I just wanted to make the point that this is where we are. *[Interruption]* Well, if you promise me it is not going to be long.

**Sen. Dr. Charles:** I do not want to waste time, thank you very much Member for giving way. Is it not a bit premature then for the Minister of Works and Transport to be stating that the rapid rail system, 10 minutes from Port of Spain to Arima and such things, which gives us the impression you have actually decided some of these things and you are just doing the feasibility? That is why we came to those conclusions.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Well, I hope I can disabuse you of the conclusions that you came to. I can assure you it is rigorous and those members of the committee who sit with me understand that it is rigorous and I bring my own discipline to what we are doing.

Mr. Vice-President, I hope time permitting to talk about the Ministry in the following way: What is the mandate of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, given the fact that we have all agreed that we cannot forever remain an energy-dominated economy. I think we have all agreed and I think the Government has

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articulated that we must have hand-in-hand with energy, a strong manufacturing and service sector, a strong tourism sector and a strong Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector.

In my previous incarnation, I was responsible for the ICT and I was pleased with some of the figures that Sen. Rogers indicated about the growth in telecom, Internet access and all the rest. As Trade and Industry, we need to develop a manufacturing and service sector, so I want to talk a bit about our mandate, and how we will carry out that mandate, which is how do we expand trading opportunities, because you could only increase your manufacturing sector and your services sector if you create more and more markets for them.

The specific industries that we have targeted for development; the promotion that we have to do for investment, because to create this you have to have investment, both foreign direct investment and local investment. We have to create an environment that when the investment comes or is made it is an environment that is conducive to that. And finally, if I have the time, I will talk about some of the statutory bodies and state agencies which come under the Ministry and which assist in this activity; the Business Development Company (BDC); eTeck, which is responsible for industrial estates; the Bureau of Standards; the Exim Bank and Plipdeco.

What is the mandate of the Ministry? The Ministry has to generate economic growth by promoting and developing trade, growing industries in the non-energy sector, and attracting investment. The Ministry is the policy making body, and it has to develop the initiatives, the legislation, the business strategy and the enabling environment, as I indicated, to create the environment in which it—

The Ministry's mandate fits into Vision 2020, where it talks about enabling competitive businesses, because at the end of the day if we do not have competitive businesses in today's world, you do not have the wherewithal to generate economic activity in your country. We have some things going for us; we have a strategic location between North, South and Central America.

I was in Dubai two years ago and they showed me Dubai and they had circles. They said, we are two hours from Russia, two hours from Europe, two hours from India, two hours from Africa and therefore, this is our strategic advantage. We have to develop the infrastructure here to enable people, even the media, so that CNN could send a report to Russia, but in two hours they could come to the media house here. So, we have that strategic advantage. We have low energy and low utility cost, notwithstanding the \$4 for premium gas, we still have low energy and low utility cost.



We have relatively skilled labour and we are investing heavily in education, education training, and training to improve the quality of our labour. We have a fairly strong financial sector and one that with the International Financial Centre (IFC), can continue to grow to have the magnet for the financial flows that we need. Because of our location we can be a transshipment of— So, there are some things going for us. I think I would be less than honest if I said that some of the social problems and the crime would not have an impact on how fast we do this, and the Government understands that and is committed to dealing with it, notwithstanding that we do have things going on.

We have to, as I say, grow and expand trade, target industries, promote the country and create the environment. How do we grow and expand trade? Right now in the region we account for about 80 per cent of inter-regional trade; that is in 2007. Our exports in Caricom have grown, \$136.2 billion or \$137 billion from an estimated \$4.8 billion in 2002 to \$11 billion in 2007. We have grown; we are the dominant trading partner. [*Desk thumping*] Extra-regionally United States remains our largest market. Exports to the United States, \$46 billion in 2007; EU, \$11 billion; Dominican Republic, \$2 billion, Colombia, \$41.7 billion; Netherlands, \$1.5 billion.

So, we have basically in this space, almost maximized our market access and therefore, we have to expand, go outside of that. Caricom, I think has reached its limit, but the major vote has to come to the kind of trade arrangements we make with the United States, Canada, Central America, Latin America and with the European Union. How do we do it? We have to use the multilateral negotiations; we have to use the agencies of trade in the world and take an active part in starting with the World Trade Union (WTU). WTU is the governing body for world trade; we do participate actively in the work of the WTU, and we remain optimistic that the discussions which are taking place—albeit slowly, but these things take time—will ultimately lead to a trade regime from which we could take benefits, so, we continue. The European market is one that is very important to us—I indicated this, probably second—and we have now been part of the Cariforum negotiations with the Europeans which has led to the European Partnership Agreement (EPA).

Let me spend some time on the EPA because I think it is an activity that has come to its fruition this year; it has drawn many criticisms, both for and against, but there are points for. Let me say it replaces an arrangement that most of the Caribbean countries had with Europe; it was a one-way preferential agreement. I think as a region we have to face the reality, the days of preferential treatment is

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over; even if we wanted it, the WTU will not allow it. As countries of the region we need to look beyond, in today's world, a continuation of preferential treatment.

We also know from empirical evidence that the faster countries integrate themselves into the world trading system, the faster they would see economic growth. Preferential treatment cannot, in the end, sustain you in economic growth.

### **3.20 p.m.**

We had as I said preferential treatment with Europe, but it dealt only with goods. The EPA is the first attempt to widen how you trade with Europe—I think it is 27 nations—in a predictable manner, in a manner that you could plan for, in a manner that everybody is agreed and you are not subject to the whims and fancies of somebody who because they are giving you something could take it back tomorrow.

So the EPA provides, as I said, a permanent predictable basis, duty free/quota free access for goods into Europe. People will say that you have to give them the same to come in. Yes, but the time frame for them coming in ranges from 10 days to 25 days. The time frame for us going in is like tomorrow, so that we have a period of time to allow our manufacturers the opportunity to become as competitive as they need to be to take advantage of the market. It also provides for about 13 per cent of our imports from the EU to be protected: agricultural products, milk, cream and alcohol, so that a certain level of security is being given to industries that will take much longer than that to grow.

So on the goods side we have now got this predictable duty free/quota free access and we have had a period to—Now people might say why are you signing it? Well the reason we are going to this is that right now we do not have a system. WTO can be applied anytime, which means in the absence of this agreement duty can be placed, using the WTO agreement, on goods that are being exported to Europe. The European nations have been continuing this preferential treatment knowing full well that it has to come to an end because there are other countries in the trading system that are saying, no, you got to stop it.

So having done that we also took the opportunity to—and when I say “we”, I mean the Cariforum countries negotiating with Europe—to widen it to include services, because if we are saying services, it is an area that we see growth, then we also have to have a proper mechanism for defining how the services sector will operate.

The agreement now provides that 75 per cent of our services market will be open to the Europeans—75 per cent. Now in reality more than that is already

open, because most of the services which are coming in we do not provide. But the EU is required to open 90 per cent of its services to us. The services include things like engineering, communication, tourism, but it also includes things like music, entertainment, culture; where access to that market we can take an immediate advantage. Now an engineering firm will take years before it could compete, a construction firm, if they ever want it—but the things that we have indigenous to ourselves can and will allow our people to go to Europe without having to be regulated. You have the legal right to go and practise your trade in Europe and I believe it gives us, at least for Europe, an opportunity to really look at how we develop our service sector outward look.

It also gives investors opportunities because you have a secure market. You have the investments provisions in the Act which complement the existing bilateral investment treaties. So, there is a regime to protect investments and therefore an investor now has double indemnity in a sense, he has his bilateral, but he has this whole umbrella investment protection. The agreement provides for funding for development. The EDF, \$132 million euros and under the WTO aid for trade 1 billion euros to assist countries that need to do things to make transitions in their countries to compete in this world.

Like any negotiation you have to have give and take. I do not think everybody got what they wanted. The Europeans did not get what they wanted, we did not get all we think we should get, but it an agreement. It is an agreement that has taken four years to negotiate. It is an agreement that was done under the Ministerial Committee of Caricom and there have been regular meetings of COTED (Councils of Ministers on Trade) to oversee this process. We have been doing some education on the thing. I think if you go on our website you will get a full—The Ministry has in fact been having seminars and I would encourage every Member, because it is important, to go on the website and pull down and understand, because I think it is the first of the new agreements that will enable us to expand this market. That is a multilateral negotiation. On the bilateral side, as you know—

**Sen. Mark:** Through you, Mr. Vice-President. I would like to ask the hon. Dr. Lenny Saith, what measures or steps are being taken by the Ministry and the Government by extension to provide the manufacturing sector with the necessary wherewithal to prepare for fierce competition from those developed states that would fall under this EPA agreement, particularly when the imports begin to come fast and furiously from the European Union? What steps are being taken? What incentives are being given? What concessions are being made to prepare the manufacturing class to deal with that onslaught?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Mr. Vice-President, as I go through my contribution I will come to that. I talked about enabling legislation and I am also going to talk about the \$250,000 that you raised. [*Interruption*] So we have bilateral negotiations with Caricom, we now have six trade agreements existing: the Caricom Venezuela Trade, the Caricom Colombia Trade Agreement, which we signed in 1998 and where exports from Trinidad have increased from \$347 million in 1995 to \$1.7 billion in 2007. We have, Sen. Dr. Kernahan, the Caricom/Cuba Trade Corporation signed in 2000 where export has increased from \$79 million in 2002 to \$101 million in 2007. We have the Caricom/Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement signed in 2001, export increased from \$1 billion in 2001 to \$2.2 billion in 2007 and we have the Caricom/Costa Rica Trade Agreement signed in 2004, exports have increased from \$43 million in 2004 to \$398 million in 2007.

So that trade agreements do in fact sharpen your manufacturers and they can take advantage of them. Each one of these agreements we had the same thing; the Venezuelans will send cheap goods, the Costa Ricans will send cheap goods; we have been able—and I will come back to it as well—to make our manufacturers competitive. Right now we are having discussions with El Salvador, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, that is Central America, for a similar arrangement and the idea is to take Central America and Latin America at a natural market pace that you want to develop.

We have Caricom/Canada, we have a trade agreement that is coming to an end next year and we have already begun discussions with them about where we are going in the future and the EPA will in fact provide some kind of guide as to how you want to move from here. We have to move—at least from Trinidad's point of view—beyond just goods, because we have to develop our services sector as the one that is also going to give us an opportunity to use the brainpower of our people in the future.

Same in the Caricom/United States, the CBI, what we now call the CBTA (Caribbean Basin Trade Agreement) which is coming to an end this year and has been extended to 2010 but serious discussions have to take place with the United States in respect of that agreement, because this is a natural market for us. So that is the framework for expanding your market to generate development in your manufacturing and service sectors.

I just want to say a word about the contribution to the TTMA. Those contributions were to assist in putting an international trade negotiating unit in the Chamber of Commerce and in TTMA with funds. Some people who have been put

in those agencies dealing with international trade, so that they have been able throughout these negotiations, and in all negotiations of trade, to have an input. In fact, they sometimes sit on the negotiation team. So that the manufactures and the Chamber of Commerce have all been part and parcel, not at the end, but from day one, having an input and making the necessary requirements. I see a sign over there. I think we gave NATUC money too, “eh”?

**Hon. Senator:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** This year? [*Inaudible*] You got last year? [*Interruption*] Year before.

**Sen. Mark:** Lenny Saith.

**Sen. Narace:** Senator. Senator.

**Sen. Mark:** Sen. The Hon. Dr. Saith—[*Laughter*] [*Interruption*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** So that is what the money is being given for. It is to ensure that as the Government moves forward with its trade negotiation there is constant dialogue and input and input of a nature that allows them to hire the resources that we require to put— They not only do that, they also work with us in policy formulation and implementation of what we are doing so that there is a direct link with the sector, Ministry of Trade and Industry, not Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. We have also last year, I think encouraged and supported the formation of a coalition of service industries. That is the service sector: engineers, architects and accountants, a coalition of service industries to begin to support them that they will do for the service industries what the TTMA is doing for the manufacturing sector, which is to provide them with information and access to the opportunities for market access because we got to build that sector as well. [*Interruption*] So that deals with that.

**3.35 p.m.**

**Hon Senator:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** When you finish in the last five minutes and you have not touched it, I will. I may touch it. As I said, the first one we targeted was the market. For the second one, what are you targeting for priority development? I think one of the Ministers talked about the seven areas: food and beverage, seafood, entertainment, film, maritime, printing and packaging and yachting. Those were developed under a standing committee on business development which I chaired in the last term. They were developed as industries which you can begin to support.

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Industry teams have been convened in all these areas from the private and public sector. They have come up with plans, some more advanced than others. We have begun to implement some of those plans, in particular, I think film, food and beverage, which was already a strong sector but plans are well in hand. Printing and packaging is a strong sector. Film is doing well and we have put incentives in various budgets to assist the entertainment as well. Again, it will take time, but these are the areas and we are moving methodically by private/public sector participation to develop these sectors.

I mentioned the services sector. In addition to the correlation, the Ministry has set up a unit called the services unit to focus on the services sector. We are using that unit to have consultations with all the stakeholders to develop programmes, and briefs that we will use in the United States of America, Caricom and Canada. In all our negotiations now, this unit has the responsibility of working with service providers in the country, and working with the private sector to develop position papers for the Government that will inform its negotiation position. We are developing a draft services trade policy and when we complete that work, we would include that as part of the trade policy for Trinidad and Tobago on which the Ministry is working. A subset of the trade policy will focus on the service sector.

You may want to say what are the things that you need to look at. Our policy point of view; we have to look at domestic regulations; service rules; how to liberalize the health sector; and how it fits into the overarching World Trade Organization rules that are governing trade. The third element is to promote investment because if you have to develop the market, then you have to encourage investment. As I said, we are working on an investment policy which we will make available to all stakeholders, the country as a whole. It will set out clearly to anyone who wants to invest in Trinidad and Tobago, domestic or foreign, the policy by which the Government will seek to encourage that investment.

Mr. Vice-President, the general aim of this policy is to provide market friendly policies; clear, transparent and non-discriminatory rules; business entry and exit; support innovation which includes R&D; promote a friendly business environment; reduce the obstacles to investment and continue to protect and promote foreign investment because you must have clear rules for the investor to understand how he is protected in making his investment in the country. We have been successful in attracting record levels of foreign direct investment, and we possess one of the highest FDI per capita in the Western Hemisphere. Over the last 10 years, the average annual FDI inflows have been approximately US \$900

million annually. The vast majority is energy. [*Desk thumping*] About 92 per cent is energy and that is because we have developed a model that is working. There are other countries that have energy like we have and have not been able to do it. In this hemisphere, Venezuela, Nigeria, and I can call a number of countries that have more than we have. The fact is, we got it and it is energy, but there is a reason we got it and we have developed a model which works. Therefore, we have to look now and see what is the model we have to develop for the non-energy sector.

**Sen. Dr. Charles:** Not the same model?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** No. I am saying we have to look and see what is the model that we have to develop for the non-energy sector. Of course left to you, if you were still in government, we would not have that because you would have been building no ammonia plant, no methanol plant, the sunset industries and all the rest of it. But, that is water under the bridge. We cannot look back. The point is, yes; we have done it there. If we have done it, it would not be beyond our capability to put on our thinking caps and see how we could do it here. It is quite clear that one of the things that you have to do in addition to the laws—I think we are well known now. We are a law-abiding country in terms of our ability to honour agreements that we make, regardless of the government. I think we have that reputation. In addition to the fact that we have a system of jurisprudence that most people are comfortable with, we have to find a way to make doing business in Trinidad and Tobago easier and more efficient. In my view, that is the model we have to go for.

Last week I was in Singapore and I went there simply because Singapore is number one in competitiveness and it is a small country; number one in the ease of doing business. Looking at what they have done, you do not need to reinvent the wheel. I have said to my Ministry that I am tired of hearing of one-stop shops; we have been talking about that for years. By the end of this year, we must have a one-stop shop. It is more than a one-stop shop; it is using technology that is now available, especially information technology to make that happen.

We are setting up in the Ministry what we call a Business and Investment Secretariat, whose mandate it would be to make it easy for businesses to operate and to be set up. We must establish a single window for investors, whether local or foreign, to establish business in the country. We are going to use the platform of the Government's e-portal to do that because we can now link all the ministries. We have the capability for all ministries to be linked together. So it is finding a way to use that base of connectivity to move it forward. The "ol" days of having to move forms from one ministry to another ministry can be replaced physically.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** That unit has been charged to do this work. I have said to them that Singapore, South Korea, Ireland and a number of countries have been able to do this. I think we have the basic building block which is good connectivity between ministries to begin to move it forward. It is my hope that we substantially reduce the time it takes to set up a business in this country and for people to get approvals, because that is the competitive edge that you could bring to people coming to do business in your country. Of course, we continue to work on bilateral investment treaties, which is an integral part of your tools to attract people. If they are coming in they want to ensure that their investment is protected and how tax is treated. We have signed treaties with Spain, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Mexico and India. We are looking at one with Italy, Switzerland, Finland and El Salvador. That also has to be an accelerated part of your development to put the framework in place, so that when people come they would also have the comfort of knowing that there are bilateral investment treaties with their countries.

The Government has been working with the private sector on trade and investment missions. That continues to be a means of selling yourself, but it has to be done in the context of making sure that you have the other things as you go out. I keep saying that if you go out and sell the country, and people buy that the country is a good investment haven, but when they come here, our port is inefficient, our infrastructure and communications are not up to mark, then you start with a disadvantage. So as part of this whole development of the model, Sen. Dr. Charles, it has to be a concentrated effort to develop the infrastructure to support that.

**Sen. Dr. Charles:** Maintain it?

**3.50 p.m.**

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** And maintain it. I have said to the people at eTeck at Tamana Park, your park, at the end of the day, must be of such that when you build these buildings and somebody comes here, they should be able to come into your building, plug in a telephone network, plug into the electricity network, plug into their Internet communication network and start work the next



day. That is the way you are going to compete. It has to be a holistic approach to providing the thing. You could have good investment laws, but if you do not have the basic infrastructure, it will not work.

You also have to have, by education or otherwise—I am sorry Sen. Annisette and the other trade unionist, Sen. Mark, have left—clear guidelines for how labour and government operate in the country, and we have to move away from adversarial arrangements. Attracting industries that come to the country is not only for the Government, it is not only the private sector; the trade unions have a major role to play, because, at the end of the day, if people come and they are not happy or they do not believe that there is a responsible group of people in the country, then they would not want to come. There must be dialogue. We all have a stake in this, because in this new competitive world if we do not become competitive, then we will all suffer.

My appeal again to all of us is that there are some things, from the nation's point of view, which transcend the bickering that takes place. We have to be a competitive nation. The world demands that now; you cannot survive if you are not competitive. Nobody is going to give you protection, and you are not going to get it if you do not earn your way in the world.

The last portion of the puzzle, if you want, is how you create this enabling environment. We have started; we have a Fair Trading Act, which sets out the rules by which we compete in the country. The Act was passed in this House, I believe, last year, and we are setting up the commission that goes with it, so that people would understand that there are rules by which you operate in the way you trade.

We have put aside some money for a research and development facility, which the Business Development Company (BDC) is administering, to give assistance for R and D. My own view when I look at it is that it needs to be expanded. We need to think out some more about it. I do not believe that it would do what we want it to. If I look at the BDC, the amount they have been able to disburse is not large. Therefore, I want to go back to the drawing board and look at it again, because to be competitive you have got to have your industries and your businesses R and D conscious. The Government has a role to play in encouraging that and subsidizing it if necessary.

We have established a trade office in Cuba where the Government has, in fact, taken the initiative to put an office there. We believe that it is a potentially large market. If we get in early enough, we should be able to get our manufacturers in before the rush starts when the US formally moves in.

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We have to strengthen the Ministry itself; the Ministry has to play a key role in getting all this done. We have gotten money from the IADB for that, and some work has already been done on a structure and reorganization, but that has to be a priority for this coming year. To get the Ministry operating we have identified some new units which we have to put in, and the Ministry itself has to be reorganized and strengthened.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry is a key Ministry, in my view, as energy is, in developing the economic model for this country; so is tourism; so is ICT; but these two Ministries have the greatest potential in the shortest possible time to move the country forward.

Mr. Vice-President, I indicated that there were some state agencies and statutory bodies under the Ministry; the Business Development Company is one, they do trading and capacity building. They have a subsidiary for leasing so they could buy and lease equipment to enable small businesses to acquire machinery. I think they had 27 businesses last year. There is a business to business exchange website which is supported by the Government. They now have the responsibility for trade certification, issuing trade certificates, which was previously in the Ministry, but because being there it would take a long time to do, we placed it in the hands of a company. Last year they facilitated over 39,000 export certificates under the trade agreement. They have funds for export promotion and an R and D facility which I think we should revisit and improve.

We are moving to do e-certification, that is trade certification, so that we could do it electronically and save a lot of the paper work; eTeck as you know has the responsibility for industrial parks. There is Tamana, which is being built and there are existing industrial parks which they maintain. They have, under construction, parks at Frederick Settlement, Debe, Dow Village, Reform, Factory Road, Endeavour and Preysal. These are on lands which, when Caroni was down, a group of Town and Country Planning and other agencies did a land use plan and out of that they identified areas for light manufacturing. So you have seven parks under construction, and, hopefully, they will be completed in this coming year, 2008/2009.

We also have the Bureau of Standards, a fairly comprehensive programme. The most important one is that we want to have a Quality Management System Section set up in the Bureau. We want to house a National Standards Body in the Bureau of Standards to coordinate the whole question of standards in the country, because as you begin to export and compete, it is necessary, not only to have standards, but to have a certifying body that could certify the goods in a way that

would be acceptable to the importing nations, so they do not run into the non-tariff barrier for standards. We have the Export/Import Bank, which the bankers do not talk about. You have Plipdeco, which continues to manage the Industrial Estate and to operate the port.

Mr. Vice-President, as usual matters like these put a limit on what you could say. During the course of various debates in this House, I am sure I will have an opportunity to report on other things.

There is the role and vision of the Ministry to continue to cooperate with all sectors in fulfilling the Vision 2020 Strategic Development Plan.

Thank you.

**Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan:** Mr. Vice-President, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Appropriation Bill 2008/2009.

This debate is taking place in the context of an unprecedented meltdown of the global financial systems and in the capital markets of the world. Globally there is tremendous uncertainty and fear among investors as stock market values plunge and tumble overnight with the domino effect across continents.

Formerly revered names, the untouchables, the unregulated giants in the capital markets like Lehman Brothers and Bear Sterns have been wiped off the financial landscape, while the US Congress has been forced to spend over \$700 billion to salvage the once proud free enterprise economy. In fact, the conservative elements of the US Congress oppose the salvage operation on the basis that the US would now be placed on the slippery slope to socialism. Others objected to what they call the nationalization of the financial sector of the economy.

The fundamentalists of the free market philosophy economy proposed instead that the market be allowed to correct itself, that investment and commercial banks, insurance companies, mortgage and other financial institutions be allowed to fail, that millions of persons worldwide be left to financial ruin, if that is the price to be paid for the preservation, purity and inviolability of the tenets of the free market system on which the political philosophy of Western democracy rests.

The inescapable irony of this nationalization and socialization of capital in the most developed countries of the world, lies in the fact that it is occurring at the very zenith of the globalization thrust by these very vocal self-righteous free market proponents, former architects of the failed Washington consensus policy

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of structural adjustment, which has brought misery to millions in developing countries, including Trinidad and Tobago between 1986 and 1991, because the former PNM with its failed, flawed policies led this country into the clutches of the IMF.

In spite of the feminine optimism of the Minister of Finance, the tide of globalization led by multinational corporations and international capital, clearly has deepened the vulnerabilities of all the economies of the world to the unprecedented shocks and failures in the most powerful economic and financial centres in the US, Europe and Asia.

**4.05 p.m.**

The repercussions are potentially destructive in small developing open economies like Trinidad and Tobago, whose economy is still basically a plantation, one-crop economy dependent on depleting energy resources, mainly gas, with the spectre of having peaked in oil production, looming large on the horizon.

The experts have been monitoring and predicting the possibilities of the reverberations in our economy. PricewaterhouseCoopers' 2009 budget memorandum has made the point that:

“To believe you will escape unscathed is naive in the extreme.”

and supported this statement by making the following major points:

- Much of Trinidad's development is driven by direct foreign investment and it is highly likely that this will slow significantly;
- the anticipated slow down in world growth has already had a major impact in reversing energy prices. Just a few months ago it was thought that the fundamentals of high demand and limited supply would keep energy prices high, but already reduced demands are reversing this equation.”

Actually, that is a direct contradiction of the position taken by the Minister of Finance who, in a post-budget discussion, insisted that while growth has abated in emerging economies, the demand for our commodity particularly is still high.

Apparently the Minister is confident, having consulted her crystal ball, that demand for our gas will continue to be high.

The second point made by PricewaterhouseCoopers is that the evaporation of business confidence in the United States and the capital problem faced by

financial institutions are likely to reduce the supply of capital into the Caribbean. Interest rate spreads are likely to increase as institutions preserve their capital and seek their exposure to risk.

The third point and the conclusion was that the immediate local impact will be seen initially in reduced petrochemical investment in the real estate market and the stock exchange and then later through weakening domestic demands and pressure on corporate profits.

The Central Bank Governor, in an address at a TTMA seminar “Crisis in Global Financial Markets: Implications for Trinidad and Tobago”, on September 26, 2008, indicated that he does not have a crystal ball to predict how the global economy will evolve in the short term. He did indicate that even if in order to quickly restore the US financial system with the approval of a \$700 billion package, the consensus is that the global economy is scheduled to undergo a pronounced slow down. Some are using the “R” word, recession.

In this scenario, the Governor agreed with the PricewaterhouseCoopers analysis that the slow down or recession could prompt a fall in international oil and energy prices. The Central Bank Governor warned that the slow down in the growth of the Caribbean neighbours will adversely affect our manufacturing sector which contributes US \$1 billion in exports and has, therefore, implications for employment.

The Central Bank Governor then outlined the options which will face us at that point:

1. Reduction in government expenditure;
2. Reduction in savings through the HSF;

and cautioned that either option has unpalatable consequences.

The Governor of the Central Bank finally recommended that in order to meet the downturn in the global economy, we should strengthen our economic fundamentals by doing three things:

- reducing inflation;
- increasing productivity; and
- accelerating the diversification of our non-energy sector as the surest way of ensuring self-sustaining growth and improvement in the quality of life of our population.

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This Government's stated commitment to the policy of this so-called accelerated development in order to achieve the purported goal of what they imagine to be developed country status by 2020 precludes any realization of a reduction in the rate of inflation.

The Minister of Finance pronounced this budget to be part of a continuum in the Government's strategy for achieving its objective. Therefore, the budget reflects the commitment of this Government to huge fiscal expenditure through the all-powerful special purpose companies financed by the Infrastructure Development Fund. These companies are the drivers of accelerated development.

This Parliament approved \$3.9 billion to this fund to ensure that the fund would be endowed with over \$5 billion even before the 2008/2009 budget is approved by Parliament. The allocation to the Infrastructure Development Fund of \$5 billion in fiscal 2008/2009 is an additional sum which means that these companies will have the power to spend to the tune of \$10 billion in fiscal 2008/2009.

All the commentators, the stakeholders and the citizens have understood that this policy of accelerated development, simultaneously with the execution of megaprojects, infrastructure development, housing projects, public and private developments, renovation and maintenance of schools, have overheated the economy and is a major driver of excruciating inflationary trend. An inflationary spiral which, while it is driving poor people into the ranks of the indigent and the middle-class into the ranks of the poor, is enriching a small elite clique in our society with massive transfers of our wealth to foreign multi-nationals and more developed countries.

The recommendation by the Governor of the Central Bank with respect to accelerating the diversification of the economy into the non-energy sector is at odds with this administration's declared policy of diversification of the economy down the energy chain. The Minister of Finance has made it clear in various fora with stakeholders that we are now a gas-based economy and that the policy is to reap the maximum benefit from gas.

It is on this basis that the establishment in Trinidad and Tobago of toxic industries that will pollute our lands, air, rivers and seas is justified. These include the Alutrint Smelter plant and Essar Steel, among others. These industries are touted by this neoliberal, neocolonial regime as important for the achievement of value-added products of our gas economy and I will elaborate on this issue a little later in my contribution.

The Central Bank Governor called for increased productivity, but one of the most obvious and heart-rending obstacles to increased productivity in this country is the fact that this administration, like previous PNM administrations in this continuum, have completely abandoned responsibility for the establishment of an efficient, effective, nationwide transport system to get our people to and from school and to go about their lawful business.

After seven years and over \$250 billion spent, women, children, fathers, mothers, the elderly and the pensioners still spend hours waiting on the highways and the transport hubs all over this country for transportation that will come when it will come. All of us who use public or private means of transport spend hours on the roads in gridlocks because the only alternative left to citizens is to acquire private means of transport.

Sen. Seetahal SC made the point that this administration could not possibly think that with the provision of 300 PTSC buses there will be any semblance of a quality public transport system. To add insult to injury, citizens are now being penalized in this budget by way of higher gas prices for acquiring, at great sacrifice, transport facilities without which it is impossible to function or to be a productive member of the society.

Mr. Vice-President, the unimaginable number of productive man-hours and productivity lost due to the lack of an efficient, reliable national transport system, including a rural transport system, is linked to the patent neglectful approach to planning and implementation in terms of land use—the physical, economic and spatial development of our land—which is a scarce resource and must satisfy competing uses.

In the absence of coherent planning with respect to the location of housing developments, commercial centres, light industrial centres, service industries, financial sectors, schools, recreational facilities, health services and government services, we have an untenable situation where there is a lot of unnecessary travel time lost, expensive waste of household resources, pollution of the environment, contribution to increased carbon dioxide emissions and excessive use of gas and oil resources by our population to access services, employment, schools, places of worship, et cetera and the Government is a major contributor to this by the overconcentration of its services in Port of Spain.

#### **4.20 p.m.**

This situation has been created by an administration that abandoned planning in an open, transparent manner and has resorted to blaming and penalizing the helpless citizens for its failures. This administration is guilty of flagrant illegality,

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by refusing to bring to Parliament a National Physical Development Plan for sustainable Land Use in Trinidad and Tobago, as required by law, so that all the glib promises and ideals that they espoused in every single budget and in their Vision 2020 document, with respect to the environment, the protection of agricultural lands and sustainable development, are not translated into a plan with which we can agree or disagree.

One example is the case of a Government agency, the HDC, bulldozing over 40 acres of producing agricultural land in La Horquetta Trace, between 2004 to 2008, with another 30 odd acres earmarked for clearing for the development of a housing estate. This administration is guilty of refusing to implement the Planning and Development of Land Bill, which was passed in 2000, by both Houses of Parliament and despite repeated calls to do so by all concerned citizens who are aware of the great dangers of unsustainable land use in the short, medium and long term. In fact, what obtains is an autocratic, corrupt, profit-driven approach, in addition to naked political expediency, which drives the decisions of land use in the absence of the Planning and Development of Land Bill. That is why the watersheds of the Northern Range are being destroyed by unscrupulous land developers who are unrestricted by a lawless administration. Sen. Merhair spoke to that.

The abandonment of planning and the refusal to implement legislation passed by Parliament is the reason thousands of our citizens lose millions of dollars every year, due to the unmitigated flooding in the East-West Corridor, in Central and South, as a direct result of private and Government projects which are undertaken, apparently without any regard for preservation of watercourses and the implementation of infrastructure for proper drainage and even optimal land use.

The World Bank document, *Environment at a Glance*, a report for 2004, shows extremely disturbing trends in our treatment of our forest biodiversity and nationally-protected areas. In 2003, our annual deforestation index was extremely high, .81, in relation to the index, .47 for Latin America.

In 1990, we enjoyed 2,810 square kilometres of forest; by 2000, we were down to 2,590. Forested area as a percentage of total area in 1990 was 54.8 per cent; by 2003, it was reduced to 50.5 per cent. Nationally-protected areas in 2003 was 6 per cent in relation to a target of 10 per cent.

The implications for depleting our forested areas means that we are more susceptible to the vagaries of climate change. In this context, the pretensions of the administration, through the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment, with respect to the grandiose plans for carbon sequestration rings



hollow in the context of the decimation of hundreds of acres of forest at Union Estate, to facilitate the infamous Alutrint Smelter Plant.

This caring, loving environmentally-friendly administration has agreed to the destruction of over 3,000 acres of forest in Chatham to accommodate the powerful multi-billion dollar multinational Alcoa to dump a dirty toxic smelter industry in our pristine environment; an industry which is almost impossible to establish in the United States, because of strong environmental legislation.

The communities affected, led by the Chatham/Cap-de-Ville Environmental Protection Group, led a national protest in which 80 per cent of our population expressed objection to the establishment of smelter plants. Our female Attorney General may or not be aware that women are also concerned about industrial pollution of our environment by powerful multinationals. The women of Chatham, Cedros and other districts laid down in front of bulldozers in Chatham to protect our patrimony. They braved the might and the force of police brutality along with their menfolk to protect their children's heritage of the forest of Chatham and environs.

In spite of this, the plan for the destruction of Chatham is not definitely shelved, nor is the expressed criminal intention to wipe out the fishing village of Otaheite and surrounding areas, with the implementation of the preposterous idea of a smelter on an island. The Alutrint Smelter, which will dislocate hundreds of families is on the way in spite of the demonstrable risk to the health of the hundreds of families who live in the surrounding villages. The popular Vessigny Beach will be obliterated, just as Clifton Hill was and apparently, according to the Senator from Tobago, just as Charlotteville will be in the future.

Because of an alert and vocal environmental lobby and strong public opinion in the United States, the polluters there are complaining that restrictions to the establishment of industrial developments in the US are based on the "Banana policy". This is an acronym for "build almost nothing anywhere near anything." We have our own unenlightened and globalized version of this "Banana policy" in keeping with our newly confirmed banana republic status, which we officially obtained when the Prime Minister stood in Parliament during the budget debate in the other place and announced to the country that he has been monitoring a Member of Parliament, Kamla Persad-Bissessar for years.

This administration is now the proud advocate of the "Banana-p policy", an acronym for which stands for "build anything near anywhere not a problem." This banana-p policy is fully manifested by the Government's policy accelerating

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development, based on political expediency and dirty industrialization and complete acquiescence and subservience to the interest of foreign multinationals to the detriment of our country, our people and our environment.

The placement of Essar Steel Plant in Claxton Bay upwind the Franz Gardens Housing Development is another example. But, of course, this is in keeping with the banana-p policy: “build anything near anywhere not a problem.” The Franz Gardens Village Committee, supported by Concerned Citizens and Environmentalists protested against this project and have elaborated the cost to Trinidad and Tobago of the Essar plant. I want to quote a pamphlet produced by the Resource Protection Group. What are the costs that they outlined of this Essar Plant to Trinidad and Tobago? There are a number of costs. I would outline some of them in the interest of time: 500 acres of valuable Caroni, port and farming lands; 30 to 50 years of steel dust raining down on the villages; cheap prices and tax holidays on our scarce gas; destruction of protein-rich mangrove; destruction of marine-rich sea-grass beds and mudflats; destruction of the mullet industry; the cost of building the NAC port, including cost of the loan; the cost of laying gas infrastructure for Essar; the livelihood of 100 fishermen; and pollution of Claxton Bay. There are a number of other costs, including uneconomic jobs. Basically, we would be paying Essar to provide jobs, but because of the vast over-cost, the price per job is uneconomic.

What are the benefits? An uncertain amount of United States currency. The summary that they outlined is that basically we would be exchanging the health of our people and real wealth-producing resources for paper; a declining US dollar economy. This is the view of the people of Claxton Bay, with respect to Essar.

This is also the experience of larger and more resilient countries and economies than ours, which have embarked on the path of accelerated development and dirty industrialization. This administration has been looking to China for smelter technology. The Alutrint plant is based on Chinese technology. It is important for us to look at the Chinese experience to understand where we are heading, with a flawed policy of accelerated development in dirty industrialization.

In a document called *Environment in East Asian Pacific*, the China Environment, it says:

“China’s rapid growth is now a driving force in the global economy and is achieving unprecedented rates of poverty reduction. However, growth is also seriously damaging the natural resource-base and generating major

environmental liabilities. The country's environmental problems include land degradation, deteriorating water quality and water scarcity and severe air pollution in declining natural forest cover. These problems threaten the health and the prospects of current and future generations and are undermining the sustainability of long-term growth."

Does this not sound familiar? Is this the path that we as a country want to follow on the road to the so-called developed country status? This is a very high price to pay for accelerated development and dirty industrialization. One commentator on the subject expressed it as follows:

"This is our dilemma in the developing world to acquire the new generation of technologies, not to be a depository for antiquated dirty technologies."

In fact, China has deliberately de-accelerated its plans for high levels of growth, based on traditional industrial development, because of the pressures on the environment. In 2000, they set up the Chinese Renewable Energy Industries Association to promote the industrialization in the use of green energy. China is building the world's largest solar plant, 100 megawatt project, costing £400 million in Gansu province. The world's largest right now, is in southern Germany with a 12 megawatt capacity. The Chinese have articulated the position that:

"Using renewable energy can promote economic development in an environmentally-friendly way, which would be the key method to balance China's economic development and its environmental protection."

As a Member of the Joint Select Committee, Part II of Parliament, I asked the most senior member of the Ministry of Energy: What plans do you have for alternative energy/renewable energy in Trinidad and Tobago? He looked at me as if I had suddenly grown two heads. Then I got the usual story of all the things that they are doing to develop the Petrotrin plant.

This is extremely alarming, especially since Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Being a signatory commits us to:

"Implement and/or further elaborate policies and measures in accordance with its national circumstances such as..."

They have a number of measures, but I would quote two. One is, research on and promotion, development and increased use of new and renewable forms of energy, or carbon dioxide sequestration technologies and of advanced and innovative environmentally-sound technologies. Another, which I would like to

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quote, is very much in relation to the dirty industries and the technologies that we are embarked upon, progressive reduction or phasing out of market imperfections, fiscal incentives, tax and duty-free exemptions and subsidies in all greenhouse gas-emitting sectors that run counter to the objective of the convention and application of market instruments. We signed the Kyoto Protocol and promptly signed on to the establishment of two or three smelters in Trinidad and Tobago. This administration, according to Sen. Dr. Charles, demonstrates a total disconnect between the lofty ideals that they espouse and the actual policies that they implement.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, it is now 4.30 p.m. We will take the tea break now and resume at 5.00 p.m. This sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Sen. Dr. J. Kernahann:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. The interests of this corrupt, autocratic, power-hungry, dictatorial administration are totally in sync with the interests of the multinationals like Alcoa and Essar which are looking for precisely such administrations and countries where they can dump toxic industries unfettered by stringent environmental laws, monitoring ability and enforcement by strong regulatory agencies.

The interest of this Government, as espoused by our female Minister of Finance lies in promoting its patently flawed and failed policy of diversification of the economy in the energy sector. This policy ignores the major challenge of our economy, which is the recreation of sustainable high quality employment opportunities and the opportunities for employment and self-employment for the thousands of young people who expect to establish a stake in this land.

The fact that thousands of young people feel marginalized and ostracized and without a sense of being recognized as potentially productive, important, valued members of this society, is the basis of the widespread rebellion which has taken the form of gang warfare as it did in the 1950s and 1960s, when young, talented men of the emerging steel band movement fought for recognition and acceptance in this society.

The PNM's failed, flawed policy and diversification of the economy and inattention to the employment generation in the non-oil sector is responsible for the bloods that Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke about. The total lack of regard for human life, which is blatant on the streets, has its origin in the indifference and

disregard for the value of people's lives, livelihoods and the right to decent work and a living wage, as seen in the policies of the Government.

This Patrick Manning administration, in this continuum, like the administration of the former Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams then, refused to encourage the development of the vast potential of our young people in the field of music, art, drama, literature, creativity and sports in a country where the only musical instrument created in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century originated here; in a country which has astounded the world with the wealth of creativity and innovation displayed in our Carnival; a country which has produced Nobel laureates such as Sir Vidya Naipaul in the field of literature; which produced giant intellectual figures like CLR James, Kwame Ture and George Padmore, who were influential thinkers and advisors of the important PanAfrican anti-colonial leaders such as Kwame Nkurma; the country which has produced Olympic and world-class sport personalities like Hasley Crawford, Jean Pierre, Ato Boldon and Richard Thompson, among many others. This is the land. This is the people. This is the talent. This is the potential that successive PNM administrations in this continuum, over the years, have converted into recipients of Special Works, DEWD, URP, CEPEP and Smart card.

The PNM energy-dependent policy on employment then and now is based on a clear political objective, that is, it ensures that the Government is a major employer of labour. As a result, it is easy to keep large portions of the population politically insecure and dependent, believing that if the leader falls, all falls, so that you can summon them at will whenever, wherever to target and harass the Opposition.

What is the evidence for this? The six energy projects proposed by this administration in 2006 were CLICO, AUM, ANSA, UAN, Alutrint aluminium and downstream, Alcoa aluminium and downstream, Essar Steel, hot bricket iron and downstream and methanol to polypropylene. These six energy projects propose a capital investment of US \$5,000,900 with the generation of 2,525 jobs, which suggests an investment of over US \$2,000 to generate one job.

### **5.05 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, even then, there are no indications that the permanent jobs indicated in this programme are for local persons. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in his budget contribution reinforces this Government's consciousness of its employment policy. He said it over and over that everyone who wants a job can get one. The Minister is clearly referring to the Government's sponsored programmes like URP, CEPEP and the On-the-Job Training Programme.

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In the first place, I want to refer the Minister to the fact that in the 1970s, the late James Brown reflected the sentiment of a whole generation when he sang, “I do not want anybody to give me nothing, open up the door I will get it myself”. Give the people who have talents the opportunity to open up the society and they will create their own job opportunities. Why should they feel that this Government has to create job opportunities for everybody and create all these Government sponsored programmes? Open up the society so that people would create their own employment opportunities.

In the second place, I assume that the Minister knows what he is talking about, and the Minister knows that to get a URP job you have to know the community leader who is in charge of your area. You have to approach him and get him to put your name on the workforce and then you have to pay him half of your salary. I hope the Minister knows that is what he is talking about.

There are other programmes, then as now in this continuum of successive administrations that are tightly controlled by PNM operatives. Everybody knows that. Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke to that in his contribution. In order to get a job you have to know who is the head PNM operative in your area; you then have to go to him; and you then have to convert to PNM and baptize and get a whole new identity including your party card, confirming you on the PNM membership; and then you still have to stand in line behind the close friends and family of the operative before you get a job in CEPEP or any of those On-the-Job Training programmes and so on.

Mr. Vice-President, that is why there is blood on the streets in this country; that is why our young people know, as Sen. Mark said, that they are being given crumbs. You cannot fool them. They know that they are being given crumbs and they are in open rebellion. Economically, these young people are the survivors of structural adjustments. Check their age groups! When thousands of families are impoverished, split apart, lost their homes, lost their jobs and communities fell apart, there was a deeper penetration of foreign cultures and value systems which destroyed our cultural value system. Sen. Merhair spoke to that a while ago.

Socially and culturally, these children are the survivors of the brutal policy of the so-called Father of the Nation, an intellectual, former Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, who banned progressive and revolutionary literature, which he described as subversive and he wiped out a whole generation who was striving to understand the world we live in and to advance themselves intellectually. [Laughter] So, this generation, generation X, grew up under the intellectual stranglehold of BET propaganda, MTV propaganda and PNM propaganda. They

may not be clear on whom or what is their enemy. They feel that their enemy is the guy down the street or the fellow in the next village, but they are sure that they are being given crumbs; they are sure that they are being marginalized and ostracized; and they are sure that they are refusing to live in a society in a system which denies their humanity.

This generation X will now be faced with the economic, social and cultural decimation of the EPA agreement that we are bulldozed into signing in a few short months. We are about to sign the EPA agreement. This agreement is called the WTO plus. It is even more intrusive than the WTO agreements. It contains trade-related issues that were rejected by developing countries during the WTO negotiations. These are known as the Singapore issues. They were rejected for inclusion in the Doha Round negotiations of the WTO by developing countries as this would mean additional restrictions on their development policy options and impose on us implementation obligations. This is what the Minister of Trade and Industry came here to gloss over today, trying to sell us this nice story of how good the EPA is, good for us and so on. Since when Europe, European countries and multinationals are so interested in alleviating poverty and so on in these islands? They are architects of colonialism, slavery and the dehumanization of our people. Since when they are interested in our welfare!

Some of the trade-related agreements that are part of this EPA trade policy; a competition policy—I am reading from Trade Brief Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), Ministry of Finance, Volume 1, Issue 1, November 2007. There are six trade-related areas covered in the EPA and these trade-related areas were rejected by developing countries who refused to allow these non-trade issues to be part of a trade agreement.

The competition policy where the countries commit to have in place within five years of the EPA the relevant laws and institutions to address matters related to competition policy. What does that mean for us? What does that mean for our local businesses?

With respect to innovation and intellectual property it says:

“This chapter covers a range of issues related to intellectual property such as copyright, brand names, trademarks...plants varieties.”

We know that there is a whole issue of developing countries losing their rights to indigenous plants, because powerful multinational companies are coming into their countries and patent these plants and they are saying now for you to use these plants and so on they have to charge us because they are the owners of this plant.

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Under public procurement it says:

“The rules would prohibit discrimination against CARIFORUM and EU supplies and set out rules for valuation and bid challenges.”

What this means is that huge multinationals from the European Union would compete on a level playing field in terms of procurement and opportunities for the supply of goods and services. Obviously, this is not a level playing field. Our companies will not be able to compete with these huge issues.

Why did the Minister of Trade and Industry not stand and tell us these things and the challenges that we are about to face and how we can face these challenges? Why did he get up and try to sell us? Because they are a neocolonial, neoliberal government which is selling out the people of this country. In our neighbouring country, President Hugo Chavez calls them *vendepatria*, sell-outs. [Desk thumping]

Under environment it says:

“In the absence of national or regional environmental standards, the chapter requires the adoption of the relevant international standard.”

Has the Minister of Trade and Industry explained to our local producers what these international standards entail and how we will be able to compete? These are serious issues.

I was interested to see what is happening under agriculture and fisheries and it says in Article 38:

“The Parties recognize that the integration of the agricultural, food and fisheries sectors across CARIFORUM States, through the progressive removal of remaining barriers and the provision of an appropriate regulatory framework, will contribute to the deepening of the integration process and the realization of the objectives of this Chapter.”

What does this removal of barriers mean to our agricultural sector? This is what the Minister of Trade and Industry should have explained to the farmers and the agricultural sector this afternoon, and not try to put a plaster on it and make it seem as if everything is hunky-dory and we live happily ever after because they love us so much. That is not true! Mr. Vice-President, these are just some of the issues. I do not want to go into all the issues.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to quote the former Secretary General of the Caribbean States, Prof. Norman Girvan who said:



“The EPA provides for nearly full reciprocal trade liberalization over 25 years, the majority within 15 years, and considerable liberalization in services and a host of other commitments in areas like intellectual property, investment and trade.

Girvan said that while CARIFORUM states would receive market access for goods and services and the promise of development support, they would also face obstacles like ‘rules of origin, technical barriers to trade, and sanitary and phytosanitary standards’, all of which, he added, needed fuller explanation for the smaller Caribbean countries, which were not as developed as Barbados.”

We need explanations from the Minister of Trade and Industry, and to just get up here and try to whitewash the situation and make us feel that everything will be fine—everything will not be fine! I assure the people of this country of this.

Mr. Vice-President, to my young brothers and sisters on the other side, who have been seduced by the siren sounds of the PNM and their neocolonial policies, I want to commend them to the exhortation of a great West Indian, Martiniquan, poet, writer and freedom fighter; words that are as relevant today as they were to the generations of the anti-colonial struggles of the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s. This was Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* and I quote:

“When I search for man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man and an avalanche of murders. She has only shown herself parsimonious and niggardly where men are concerned, and it is only men she has killed and devoured. So my brothers, how it is that we do not understand that we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe?”

Mr. Vice-President, this is the same Europe that tells us that it is concerned with poverty alleviation and they are coming here to help us.

Finally, I would like to make the point that it has always been clear to those of us who—

**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. Dr. J. Kernahan:** Mr. Vice-President, we have heard much hype in this Senate—all this excitement about the first reading of a budget speech by a female Minister of Finance and so on, but I would like to dispel this afternoon some of that hype, because it is really not important to the majority of women in this country whether we have a female or a male, unless the ideological positions and the policy positions that they are going to take are in the interest of the majority of the people. [*Desk thumping*] Let me dispel all that bourgeois hype about whether it is female or male. [*Desk thumping*] We have to look at the realities of the situation in our country.

It was so interesting that the Attorney General got up and said that she went to Woodford Square and met with a network of NGOs and they had this slogan, “A Woman’s place is in the House of Representatives”. I do not know if the Attorney General did not know, but the same leader of the network of NGOs, Hazel Brown, who promoted this programme to put a woman—30 per cent representation in Parliament and so on because that is part of the whole Commonwealth agreement on gender initiatives and so on—was present at a post budget forum with the hon. Minister of Finance and after the Minister spoke and presented her case on the budget, she got up and said, Madam Minister, I give you an “F” for fail, because this budget has no aspects of gender sensitivity. You have not addressed the gender sensitive issues, and Hazel Brown was very upset.

### 5.20 p.m.

The answer that the hon. Minister of Finance gave to that accusation; she said if you look in all provisions of the budget it includes women and everything we do women are part of it. It shows that this administration has no idea of what they are talking about when they talk about gender sensitive budget, because the whole idea of a gender sensitive budget is that you do not include women as an afterthought—women, girls or men and so on. You structure a budget, you monitor your budget to understand how your specific policies target the implementation of whatever policies you want to promote for each group.

Therefore if you say you are going to present a budget that does include everybody it shows that your budget is not gender sensitive, and you do not know what you are talking about and that was the response the Minister of Finance gave to Hazel Brown, when she told her that she got an “F” for a gender sensitive budget. Our Member of Parliament for Siparia made the same comments.

It has always been clear to those of us who understand that politics is a function of a corresponding bedrock of economic theory and practice, that the number of women in the Patrick Manning Cabinet is irrelevant to the social, political welfare and advancement of women, children and families in general. The number of women are irrelevant when the political ideology, philosophy and class interest of these females are in line with the neoliberal, neocolonial, flagrantly flawed, fraudulent and failed policies of the Patrick Manning regime. [*Desk thumping*]

The price of cocoa, bread and milk continues to increase whether this administration boasts of 30 per cent, 40 per cent or 80 per cent women in Cabinet. The politics of arrogance, dictatorship, collusion and sell-out to foreign interest does not change with 30 per cent or 40 per cent women in Cabinet. The annexation of our economy to the European Union will not change with 50 per cent women in Cabinet.

In addition, there is no brand of perfume in this Patrick Manning Cabinet exotic enough, expensive enough or powerful enough to mask the stench of corruption and the horrible odour of oppression and fear that envelops our society. [*Desk thumping*] There is not enough perfume in the Patrick Manning Cabinet to sanitize the stench of the rivers of the spilled blood of our children flowing in the streets like flood waters in the Caroni plains. The multiple clicking of expensive designer heels on polished premises in the palace will never drown the cries of our precious children on the streets, rejected, neglected and abused as they cry silently through this long and yielding night. “Have mercy! Have mercy on them!” cries the Member of Parliament for Siparia.

Mr. Vice-President, there is not enough glossy lipstick, masking lotion or flawless foundation—[*Laughter*—]in the Patrick Manning Cabinet to soften, to beautify the hard hideous face of fascism, because we know fascism with a feminine face is still fascism.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

**Sen. Michael Annisette:** Mr. Vice-President, other Members of the Senate, let me first of behalf of my colleagues of the labour movement begin by commending and congratulating the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. the Hon. Mariano Browne, on his first budget presentation.

Mr. Vice-President, democracy is not only about working of a political system, but more profoundly about individuals being empowered and enlightened, therefore a democratic society must continuously create new attitudes, new

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vocabularies, new outlooks and new visions, which must be subject to scrutiny. It is in that context that I make my contribution today.

I want to take the unusual course in raising issues that I believe are fundamental to the very existence and survival of Trinidad and Tobago. These are issues that I believe we should be debating in this Senate, because it is so critical as we begin to understand what the global market is all about and to begin that, notwithstanding all the ideologies and philosophies, the reality of life is that we are competing in a global market and therefore, our responsibility is to prepare our nation for that task.

In so doing, the issue of cost competitiveness, the issue of efficiency, the issue of productivity is so fundamental for us in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region I must say, if we have to survive in this global village. Therefore, notwithstanding what kinds of sums that we may put on the budget, if we do not address those issues in a meaningful way, the budget will mean nothing to us and by extension the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

How do we deal with productivity? How do we as a society begin to inculcate in the minds of workers and children to come, that productivity is so essential to our very existence? How do we begin to tell our workers that if you work four hours and get pay for eight hours, well then that inefficiency is going to catch up with you in the long run and will destroy our society, because oil and gas are not commodities that will last forever? I think those are issues that we did not speak of or speak to in this budget, therefore from where I sit in the trade union movement I think we need to start to address those issues.

The other issue is the industrial relations climate in Trinidad and Tobago. I heard Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith mention the issue of the involvement of the trade union movement in what is happening, and I welcome the concept, I welcome the idea, but I think that we must take the idea and concept beyond just words and make it a reality.

Therefore, how do we justify that in an industrial relations climate when you submit proposals for negotiations under the public sector negotiating committee, that sometimes it takes you two years or more to have a collective agreement completed? If we are talking about having a stabilized industrial climate, which is absolutely necessary for foreign direct investment, well then we have to speak of that issue and we have to think out of the box, because that is the only way we are going to transform Trinidad and Tobago.

We cannot continue to believe that we will continue to do things the same way over and over and get different results. We have to start to think out of the box and come up with systems and processes that speak to the efficiency that is necessary for the country to move forward. I am hoping in that context that this will be a priority item of the Government, because the industrial relations climate is also fundamental to the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

While I am on the industrial climate landscape, the issue of the security of tenure for Industrial Court Judges must be a priority item, because industrial relations is an important ingredient in how we do things in Trinidad and Tobago. The issue of the pension rights of judges in the Industrial Court has to be addressed. We cannot continue in 2008 and have a situation where an Industrial Court Judge has to work 10 years before he qualifies for a pension. We cannot continue to do that in this enlightened industrial age. I think in dealing with the budget all these issues are critical and all these issues are important.

Another issue that is dear to my heart and dear to the SWWTU is the question of employment and when I say employment I talk about sustainable employment in the offshore and maritime industry. We cannot be talking about doing all these things; we cannot be talking about our budget is 46 per cent from the energy sector, but when we look at the employment in the offshore and maritime sector, it is almost zero.

Would you believe last year we had over 1,700 vessels plying trade in Trinidad and Tobago in the energy sector and not one local seafarer was employed on any one of those vessels? That is important; that is sustainable employment and what is more disturbing to me is that we set up this maritime school; young men and young women go to the school and train, and they come to the SWWTU seeking employment and there is no employment for these young people. It is a waste of opportunity, it is a waste of training, it breeds the kind of frustration in a society that leads to all kinds of behaviour, anti-social and otherwise that we need to look at.

I am making a plea tonight that Legal Notice No. 132, which was enacted and which gives foreigners the right to come to Trinidad and Tobago and work for 28 days without a work permit must be repealed if we are serious about local content, and if we are serious about employment of our local offshore and seafarers workers. I cannot go to Venezuela and get work in the offshore sector; I cannot go to Antigua; I cannot go to the United States; I cannot go to Nigeria; why should we allow in Trinidad and Tobago that an AB from India, the Philippines, Russia, China and all over the world can come into Trinidad waters and work, while we

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have qualified, certified ABs and offshore workers in keeping with international standards, which is the STCW 95 standard, on the basis that they have a right to work in our country for 28 days without a work permit. I think that we owe the maritime offshore workers and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago something better than that. I am asking that we deal with that particular issue.

**5.35 p.m.**

Additionally, the issue of the housing programme, and let me congratulate the Government on that programme because you see the time has come when we have to be able to call a spade a spade, when we have to forget about our political leanings and deal with issues as we are supposed to deal with issues in a mature and responsible way. We have to be able to say that if something is right it is right, if something is wrong it is wrong, because no one can get me to believe that in a society and in Trinidad and Tobago where we have had this unprecedented growth over an extended period, where all the macroeconomic indicators and fundamentals are so right that we are doing something wrong. No one can get me to believe that.

Yes, we can argue in terms of whether the policy is wrong or right; yes, we can argue as to whether we need to look at it but to convey the impression that Trinidad is like Haiti, Trinidad is like Zambia; I mean, it is something that irks me and hurts me, and sometimes I wonder where the hearts of some of these debaters are; whether it is in Trinidad and Tobago or whether the intention is to pull down Trinidad and Tobago and destroy Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I have a concern about that. [*Desk thumping*] I have a serious concern about that.

Therefore, I would compliment the Government on the housing initiatives. [*Desk thumping*] I will go further to say, because I heard one of my—I normally say in the Trade Union Movement “Comrade”—Senators [*Laughter*] saying that we should develop a programme whereby we give people land to build houses, because mortgage will be a rope around their necks. When you give the said workers or the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago the land to build houses, where are they going to get the mortgage for that same house? Because they have to get a mortgage to build the house and therefore the Government policy of 2 per cent as opposed to the commercial rate makes the houses affordable [*Desk thumping*] for the people and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, who under normal circumstances would have been disenfranchised because of the commercial rate that is required in the banking sector to get a loan for a home.

While I am on that point, I would like to humbly recommend and suggest to the Government that the issue of the \$8,000 ceiling be seriously looked at and

revisited simply because when negotiations continue the wage rates of these workers go up, and therefore the band that you were looking at two, three, four, five years ago, their salary has gone up. I am suggesting that you look at a \$15,000, because no one in Trinidad and Tobago can go to the private sector—you know those cartels that mouth all kinds of things in the construction sector, that does not build anything for the workers of Trinidad and Tobago. They do not build “no” houses because it is not profitable, and therefore that group of workers are left to the mercies of the prices of houses which is obscene—\$1-plus million, \$2-plus million, exploitation to the highest and they cannot own a home.

Therefore, I am saying that the Government must seriously look at that \$8,000 and raise the ceiling to afford housing accommodation for that group of workers who are left to the mercies of the commercial banks and financial institutions, because a quick calculation will demonstrate—hon. Minister of Finance—that the Government mortgage rate, \$495,000, you get your 2 per cent. If you look at a 30-year mortgage term period at the 2 per cent, monthly installment will be \$1,829.62; at the 8 per cent your monthly instalment is \$3,632.12, but when you look at the total interest you are talking about \$163,000 for the 2 per cent person, but that same person if he goes to the commercial bank will have to pay over \$812,000. That is what we are talking about. Those are fundamental and those are facts, those are truisms that cannot be denied.

Therefore, when you come to this Parliament or if you come to this Senate and make it appear that the system that the Government has done is a bad system and allow people to get land and go to the banks and get the loans, we do not know what we are talking about because we did not do the kind of analysis and in-depth study to understand what is happening, because house and a home means something to people in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It means something!

It is an asset that under normal circumstances given what is happening in the market that you would not be able to afford. So, I make this plea again that the Government—and I am hoping that when you are winding up I will be able to say, yes, the Government has listened and has ears to hear and eyes to see, and therefore the \$8,000 will go up to \$15,000. [*Laughter*]

Additionally, let me deal with another issue, the issue of the inflationary situation that is global, the issue of the inflation that affects workers on fixed income—and as I said in my interview, I was a little disappointed that the Government did not use the opportunity to demonstrate to those groups of workers who did not have the ability of union representation so that their wages

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would have changed over the three-year period and who have been living on \$9 for the last three or four years that the Government did not demonstrate that they will give them an increase and put that in this budget and I am asking that this be done.

While the hon. Minister has said that there is a minimum wage committee that has been set up and they are working on it—you know we have a saying “While the grass grows, the horse must not starve” and we have many problems in Trinidad and Tobago in terms of timely delivery of goods and services. Therefore, those groups of workers who have been devastated, who are vulnerable, who are weak, must not suffer and I request that notwithstanding the Minimum Wage Board looking at it, that the Government can demonstrate that you are concerned by lifting the minimum wage. Even if it is in the context of the inflationary number that is existing presently we can do that and we can demonstrate to those groups of persons that we are concerned.

I say this because as a trade unionist we understand and we appreciate these issues, because at \$9 an hour and a pack of milk that goes to as much as \$110, you are asking a worker to work more than 12 hours to buy a pack of milk. That is what we are talking about, you know. I want to bring economics in a simple way so that we could understand. I do not want to go in the neo-capitalism and all those high flairy things. *[Laughter]* Because the working people outside there do not want to understand that. They want to deal with the bread and butter issues and I am saying, you understand that that is fundamental, and more importantly if you are travelling from Arima, the cost per month for the transport situation where the taxis make you pay two fees—exploitation—is hard on these groups of workers and we owe it to these groups of workers to demonstrate in this budget that we care and we took them on board.

Maybe it was an oversight, I do not know, but I am making that request from where I sit and from how I see it. I can go on and demonstrate what \$9 an hour means or even \$10 an hour, what it means in the context of what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago. That brings me to the fundamental point, what are we doing about agriculture? I am disappointed that the Government is going down a track wherein and whereby the Government continues to project that the private sector is the be-all-and-end-all for every issue that it talks about. I have a concern about that. Why has the Government not embraced the trade union movement as it relates to food security, as it relates to setting up a cooperative, given the fact that we have a number of workers from Caroni who are part of NATUC who are willing to form that kind of cooperative?



When you talk about private sector—and it is a reality, private sector is not going to come into agriculture unless there is a profit for them to make. Make no bones about that. They are going to take all the incentives and everything that you give them to set up agriculture and if it is not profitable they are going to walk away and leave you. So that we have to start to deal with the small farmers, we have to start to do the kind of analysis that is necessary. What are the basic food items that we need in Trinidad and Tobago? Let us do the kind of scientific analysis to determine that when we set up these small farmers we will know that we are planting the kind of goods that are required for the market, not just plant airy-fairy. We have to start to do this and we have to start to look at it.

The question of wages, that is a fundamental issue. How do we then attract workers back to the farm given what is happening with farming? Can we not allow the farmers to offset the wages by some special grant by the Government, so that the issue of wages would not be an issue? Can we not develop a kind of insurance to protect the farmers? Can we give them the kind of incentives that are necessary, bearing in mind that food security—to me—is like national security? Because you have to be able to feed your nation and as we have been saying, inflation is imported and some of the imported inflation is in the foodstuff, and then therefore if that is a fact, we have that responsibility. And that can get off the ground immediately. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Ramkhelawan:** Yes, yes, you are now talking.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** The bigger agro-industries and down-stream industries can come overtime, but those little acreage, pepper, sweet pepper, tomatoes, all of these things, we can do that immediately without disrupting anything.

So, I want the Government to take that on board. When the Government talks about they want to embrace labour and everything that they talked about is the private sector to drive it and labour is left out, it is worrying.

**Sen. Browne:** Labour is private sector too.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** No, not in the context of what private sector is.

**Sen. Mark:** But he should know that, he is a banker.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** So that is something that we have to look at. That is something. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

How do we in the education system—I have a concern about that. Let me tell you what is my concern. We are fortunate as a seaman's union and a union that has offshore and seafarers to interview people for jobs from time to time, and

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therefore I insist as the President General, we must do our literacy test for anybody who comes for employment. One of the most disturbing things and one of the things that have me worried is that inevitably about 75 per cent of the young citizens who come seeking the employment cannot read and write properly. That is a reality. It is a fact, and therefore our education system needs to be looked at. [Interruption]

**5.50 p.m.**

**Hon. Senator:** It is a worldwide experience.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** I appreciate what you are saying, but the point I want to make, while that is a worldwide experience—[Interruption]

**Sen. Dr. Dick-Forde:** You are telling us to look at worldwide.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** Because I am getting to that point. I can point to Cuba. Cuba has been able to demonstrate as a country [Desk thumping] that they have put a system in place where they have been able to make almost everybody literate in Cuba. I have been there five times. Our problem is that we look too much to America and the metropolitans for solutions [Desk thumping] and we have solutions here. That system has been extended to El Salvador; it is now being done in Venezuela and you are seeing the kinds of success stories. So there are lessons to be learned. I have no fear. I have faith in my young people in Trinidad and Tobago and I am not going to give up. [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Senators:** No, no, do not give up.

**Sen. Gronlund-Nunez:** Thank you.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** If we give up, we would die and there are many people who will want us to give up. That brings me to another point that I have been making. Why it is that the Government cannot partner with the trade union movement to assist these young people? I would like to do some kind of programme through my organization where I can go into Laventille, Nelson Street, and really do something. Because of the fact that—I coming back to the offshore industry. If you move Legal Notice 132, it will afford me that opportunity. So the proposal is the removal of Legal Notice 132 which gives foreigners the right to come into my sweet country and work without a work permit for 28 days, and have my young seamen crying everyday at my doorsteps. We need to look at that.

On the issue of the education system, I have another suggestion for the Government in terms of this budget. There are several different industries that the hon. Prime Minister in the other House said, that the Government is setting up. I

ask the question, given the fact that we have this employment, situation where we almost have full employment—which I do not agree with and I will tell you why—the time has come for us to revisit CEPEP and URP to determine whether it will be better to make it mandatory that we train these young people and send them into productive employment by way of the farms and other industries where there are shortages.

Why is it that we cannot determine what is happening in the construction industry, where people accuse me of supporting the Chinese—which is not a fact, but this is Trinidad and Tobago? I could live with that—but the reality is, because of the buoyancy of our economy and because of the overheating in the construction industry, the issue of our manpower and the question of supply and demand, which is a basic economic issue, came into play. Therefore, we had no other choice but to go outside and bring in labour to do what we have to do. But I am saying that this must not be inevitably at an infinite— No, no, no, it has to be within a context, and the trade union movement is going to be monitoring that situation, the Government must set up a training programme for those children who may not be academically inclined. I have no issues with academic because it is important and an educated labour force and an educated Trinidad and Tobago is what is going to make us survive in what is happening globally.

I am saying it is not everybody who is academically inclined, and therefore, we can set up these training programmes where you can have on-the-job training in the construction industry, thereby, dealing with the issues of some of those shortages, and making employment more productive. I have a concern where we have people in URP, CEPEP or whatever it is, working three, four, five years and we have to be careful about that because what we are actually doing is practising a kind of employment practice that is not good for where we want to go as a society and as a people. Therefore, you have to mandate that. And I have no issue with CEPEP, because CEPEP at the time it came, was necessary, but I think we have to evolve and start to put these groups of workers into productive employment, sustainable employment and employment that brings return to Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, I am saying that the trade union movement has to be taken on board in a serious way because we are an integral part in what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago. I am saying that it cannot be and must not be that the manufacturing association gets \$250,000 and you said they are part of the negotiations with the EPA and all the other things, but the trade union movement and the workers are the ones who would ultimately suffer and feel the first blow in terms of what happens, are left out the loop.

**Sen. Browne:** You must ask or put a proposal and we will take it.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** No, I have a problem with that when you are talking about the involvement of the trade union and Government, but I have to come and ask you.

**Sen. Browne:** But that is what the others do.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** No, no, no. I have a problem with that. If we are partners, we are partners.

**Sen. Browne:** That is what the others do.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** No, no, I do not want to know about the others, I am talking about the trade union movement. If we are partners and then—what I will do and I will say it, today, as the President of NATUC, I am asking to be on board and I am using this forum. So I asked.

Hon. Senators, I have been trying to analyze in my mind, how we can deal with this crime situation and I cannot come up with a solution yet. I know it is a serious problem, but I have confidence that if we put our collective wisdom together; if we understand that crime is not a PNM problem or a Patrick Manning problem; if we understand that crime concerns all of us; if we understand that when the first young black man in Laventille got shot, if we had taken time off to take note of that and not do like somebody and say, "Well, that is in Laventille", and pay no attention to it and the only time we start to march is when it happens in a certain area, maybe, maybe, this escalation would have been nipped in the bud. Just maybe and I think there are lessons that we ought to learn from that. Because whether you are from Laventille, Gonzales, Westmoorings—  
[Interruption]

**Hon. Senator:** Eastmoorings.

**Sen. M. Annisette:** Eastmoorings—we are all human beings; we are all God's children, and therefore, there should not be any discrimination as it relates to that particular issue. But we have to understand too, and I want to believe that if we make crime an issue where it is not profitable, and if we have swift justice, I think that maybe we might be able to nip this in the bud. Because if I believe I can do whatever I want and get away, well then it will continue. More importantly, when we talk about crime, we have to talk about crime and breaking the law in the context that all those who do not have bus passes for the priority, and you come down on the bus route driving, you are breaking the law. So, we have to

start to look at the man in the mirror, and we have to start to set values and standards that speak to obeying the law, so that we send the correct signal. We cannot only look at crime within a particular narrow confine because of what is involved.

In conclusion, as I have said, I have hope for Trinidad and Tobago. I believe that if we put, as I have been saying, our collective wisdom together, if we start to reevaluate, rethink everything that we are doing to determine whether or not what we are doing is making sense, or what we propose that we are doing is getting the reward, well, I think we will be moving forward. Because what I have observed, while many programmes are in place—and I want to compliment the Government for that because there are many social programmes in Trinidad and Tobago that are unheard of all over the world and nobody can deny that. You could twist, you could turn, those are realities and that tells me that the Government is trying to take the oil money and use it in a way to reach those who are unfortunate. [*Desk thumping*]

Sometimes you may do something with good intentions, but the results are not what you are expecting, or it is not what you are getting and we need to relook and reevaluate what we are doing to see whether what we are doing is serving the purpose. If it is not, what can be done to improve it, and if it is good, what we can do to make it better. Because life is not static, life is dynamic; life is a living organism, and therefore, we need to change our thinking from time to time to suit the times and the circumstances that face us.

So I would again call on the Government to take a look at these programmes to determine whether or not it makes sense because—a fundamental point was made by Sen. Sharma and it is a fact. Yes, we are spending all this money on school feeding programmes, but everybody is getting food; those who need it and those who do not want it. Does that make business sense? Therefore, this programme should be extended to those who are really in need and we can save some money and redirect that into something more productive. Because it does not make sense in my opinion, to be spending that kind of money and we have that kind of wastage. Those are things that we have to sit and face and look at.

The other issue is how we deliver goods. For example, I am trying to get a licence to bring in 8 tractor trucks for 19 months now. How can we be serious about moving forward when we still have those issues to deal with?

We need to look at the public service to determine whether the public service in its present configuration suits what we are trying to do in this new situation that we are in. We need to start to look at that because the public service was designed

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at a particular point in time, and maybe the time has come for us to revisit that to determine whether or not it fits into our plans to move forward. If it does not fit into, we restructure, reengineer, re-architect, whatever word you want to use, so that the public service can fit into what is required. It is a public service, and a lot of people do not understand that it is a public service that they are offering.

**6.05 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, that brings me to the issue that if I am employed and I get \$18 an hour, I work hard, and the next man does not work and he gets the same \$18, what are you saying to me? Therefore, the question of paying persons for what they produce may very well need to be part of the DNA as we move forward, as we try to develop as a people, as we try to develop as a society.

In my conversation with a lot of people they ask me, "Mr. Annisette, how could we deal with that?" All I simply say is that the very said worker when he leaves here and goes to the United States to work—I see them. The question is whether or not the issue of consequences for what you do, rewards for what you do, become part of our mantra as we move forward. You are rewarded for what you bring to the table. I think we have to start to think about that.

We cannot continue like if it is business as usual. For example, Customs; the port opens 24/7, Customs closes down at 4 o'clock; a disconnect. Why is it that way? I have been to Singapore; they tell you that you could get a container in three minutes. Why can we not work towards that? Could the Government tell me why it is that since 1995 we have been trying to put a computer system in Customs, we are in 2008 and it is not up and running yet? These are issues that we have to deal with; we cannot sweep those issues under the carpet, because it is not only about money; it is not only about how much money you spend in the budget, whether \$50 billion or \$49 billion; that is not the issue.

The issue is that we are in a world where we have to be competitive; we have to be cost effective and where productivity, proper work ethics and discipline are going to guide us and carry us to the next level. Why can we not set our bar high?  
[*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. Prof. R. Deosaran*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. M. Annisette:** Mr. Vice-President, we have a saying on the port that we are from Docksford University and we get our degrees on the port. I got my PhD on the port, my university is Docksford. I got my doctorate on the port too. *[Laughter]* What that means is that when we speak, we speak bread and butter issues; we speak issues that confront the poor man; we speak issues that are real and true to people who face their lives every day. It was in that context I was trying to make my humble contribution to this debate.

You would realize that I did not go into all the moneys and the allocations, because as I said that is not important. To me what is more important is what we are prepared to do as responsible citizens, as persons who are elected, as persons who have been placed in this honourable House to guide Trinidad and Tobago, because we have a responsibility. While we may have different ideologies or while we may sit on different sides, we cannot and must not continue to politicize every living thing. The time must come that Trinidad and Tobago must be first. *[Desk thumping]*

If we approach our other debates that way, as we meet here over the next five years, I think that we would be able to accomplish so much, that our children whom we are building this foundation for and whom whatever we do is for—because the young people will have to take over here, so we have to leave a foundation for them that will be solid; a foundation that is not based on quicksand, but a foundation that is so solid they would thank us for a job well done.

I understand that there would be times when we would have differences of opinions. I have a saying that if all of us agree with everything every time, it means then that there is no need for the Senate. I understand that we would have disagreements, but the criticisms must be constructive and not destructive; the criticism must not be that we use our parliamentary privilege to malign and pull down people, *[Desk thumping]* whether inside or outside Parliament. The public is talking about that; they are watching at us.

I am of the view that we have to seriously start to consider and examine whether this issue of parliamentary privilege needs to be relooked at in the context of what is happening. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]* We have to start to do it; it is unfair. I have seen it happen too often that we destroy a person's name, character and family under the disguise of parliamentary privilege; it cannot be right. If we love the country and if we say that we love Trinidad and Tobago, well then that is a no-no. *[Desk thumping]* *[Crosstalk]* And it goes to everybody. Wherever the cap fits, pull the string. *[Desk thumping]* I have no issues whatsoever with that.

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Therefore, as a humble dock worker—[*Interruption*] I do not ever forget where I came from—I would finally say that we need to start to embrace the social partners. All the countries that have been able to move forward, and there are studies about it—I walked with it, but Sen. Dr. Saith mentioned them, so I will not go into them.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** [*Inaudible*] [*Laughter*]

**Sen. M. Annisette:** Sen. Dr. Saith has spoken to it. The countries he mentioned have been able to, in a meaningful, serious and genuine way, embrace the social partners in social dialogue, in social compact. Trinidad and Tobago is not about the Government; Trinidad and Tobago is not about the union; Trinidad and Tobago is not about the Opposition; Trinidad and Tobago is not about the private sector. Trinidad and Tobago is about all of us and, therefore, the social partners have to start to get on board.

We cannot continue to live in the old concept of the adversarial way of industrial relations. We cannot just talk about "mashing down Trinidad and Tobago"; we have to talk about building Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I am almost certain that each and every one of us here has that intention in their minds. [*Crosstalk*] I have no issues. I do not want to get political, but I understand that in every society you are going to have the elitist; you are going to have all these kinds of social stratifications. I do not want to get into all those kinds of discussions; we will talk about that privately, social stratifications and social classes and whatnot.

Notwithstanding all you are saying, the example is right there for us to look at; we see what happened on Wall Street. Wall Street had to run down by Main Street to help Wall Street; that should tell you something. We should learn from that. So all those who believe that they are in glass houses and ceilings, let them understand that one day, one day.

Thank you, brothers and sisters.

**Sen. June Melville:** Good evening to Members of the Senate and, indeed, a very good and warm evening to the members of the listening public.

Firstly, Mr. Vice-President, let me congratulate the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne and also the Minister of Finance, Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, on both budget presentations in this honourable place.

I intend to give an objective perspective of Tobago's situation in this republic. I will highlight some of the many positive developments which have improved the standard of living in Tobago, and I intend to make some recommendations to



Tobagonians on the way forward. Indeed, I rise in support of the budget for the fiscal year 2008/2009. As a Senator based in Tobago, again, I wish to bring a Tobago perspective to this debate, bearing in mind that what happens in Trinidad affects Tobago and vice versa.

It has long been lamented that this nation, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, is Trinidad first and Tobago after in all areas. After perusing this budget, I see a very positive effort, indeed, an affirmative action to see that the two islands develop side by side, not one behind the other. [*Interruption*]

**6.20 p.m.**

**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 Senate continue to sit until the completion of the contribution of Sen. June Melville.

*Question put and agreed to.*

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**Sen. J. Melville:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. After perusing this Budget, I see very positive efforts and affirmative action to ensure that the two islands develop side by side; not one behind the other. I am confident that Tobago is now getting its just due.

One of the areas that need to be examined is Tobago's contribution to the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago. I will highlight three areas: human resource, geographic location and its contribution to the National Treasury.

Please allow me to focus on the human resource. The population of Tobago is approximately 55,000 persons and there are probably another 200,000 Tobagonians and descendants of Tobagonians living in Trinidad, regionally and internationally. Most of these persons are skilled at different areas from the highest levels in the public service, some are professionals—nurses, doctors, lawyers, bankers and even politicians.

It may be argued that probably the best and brightest Tobagonians have migrated from our shores. This has contributed significantly to the underdevelopment of Tobago. These individuals took with them Tobago's culture, family life, hard work, savings and investment and good manners and they have succeeded all over the world.

With reference to geographic location, Tobago's strategic geographic location has enabled the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to capitalize on our marine resources contrary to the claim made by Barbados.

During the consultation on Local Government Reform held on Monday, September 15, 2008 at the Centre Pointe Mall, Chaguanas, by Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning, Chaguanas Mayor Surajrattan Rambachan compared his population and allocation with that of Tobago.

Tobago has a unique and different history, culture and people. In my view, a serious lack of understanding of this has allowed the Mayor of Chaguanas to claim that his borough is entitled to more financial resources from the national purse than Tobago, because of its population. This gentleman has totally overlooked the importance and significance of Tobago's geographic space and unique situation.

The mayor and individuals with similar mindset must be reminded that Tobago is not a regional corporation: Tobago's business is governed in Chapter 11A of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, page 105, where the Tobago House of Assembly was given the powers and functions to manage Tobago's affairs. There is a stated recognition that Tobagonians must manage their own affairs and this level of autonomy is clearly stated in our Constitution.

Mr. Vice-President, furthermore, the Fifth Schedule of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, 1996 gives the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) specific areas of responsibility under the guidance of the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly. Added to this, the THA must be held fully accountable for all its actions in managing the people's business. Please allow me to read some of these responsibilities: these are tourism, agriculture, sport, forestry, library services, marketing, housing; to name a few.

Tobagonians expect good budget allocations from the national purse. Over the past seven years of PNM administration in Tobago, the budgetary allocations have positively increased prosperity, progress and the living standards for the vast majority of Tobagonians.

Thirdly, Tobago's contribution to the National Treasury continues to be meaningful. Mr. Vice-President, you and Members of this honourable Senate would be surprised as to the revenue generated in Tobago. If in doubt, ask any of our major banks, public corporations and financial institutions that have branches in Tobago. They will confirm that Tobago's contribution is significant. Quantifying this figure is difficult because most of these organizations pay taxes in Trinidad.

The relationship between Tobago and Trinidad has not always been as good as it is today. The present relationship is as a result of the mutual respect of the leadership of the PNM administration in Tobago under the hon. Orville London and the PNM Government in Trinidad and Tobago under the leadership of our Hon. Prime Minister, Patrick Manning. There is genuine partnership that augurs well for our nation.

When one looks at the development in Tobago, one must be truly satisfied that we are on the right pathway. Presently, Tobagonians are experiencing very positive improvements in their daily lives, so much so that June Melville returned home after 30 years. I knew there was something good at home; in fact, better than in the First World.

Again, Tobago is not just experiencing positive improvements; it is the best place for young persons to be at this moment. There are many individuals from our sister island who are also seeing Tobago as a viable option for relocation as Tobago strives to remain clean, green, safe and serene.

Allow me to mention a few areas in which Tobagonians have received value for money from our promised budgetary allocations. Firstly, I want to share some information with regard to education. A few days ago, I received this document in the mail from the Senate and it was a reply to question No. 99 of the 2007/2008 Session, from Sen. Cindy Sharma. She asked:

“Could the Minister inform the Senate of all the Secondary Schools that were constructed and in operation during the period 2002—July 2008?”

I am very proud to let you know, Mr. Vice-President, that in Tobago there were three new secondary schools in that period at Mason Hall, Goodwood and Speyside. We must congratulate the Orville London administration for a job well done. [*Desk thumping*] In the 20 years prior to this, during the NAR, there was not one new secondary school built. I really think that Mr. London and his team have done an exceptional job.

Let me continue with regard to schools. In terms of refurbished schools—because of my work at YTEPP, I visit schools from time to time, especially secondary schools. Indeed, the primary schools in Tobago are in good shape. There has been a lot of refurbishment. This *Tobago News* article of Friday, August 29, says that the THA boasts of \$16 million being spent on the refurbishment of schools. I advise you, Mr. Vice-President and the honourable Senate that the schools in Tobago, though small in number, were ready in time for the September

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opening. They were refurbished on time. I think we ought to applaud the Secretary of Education, Mrs. Claudia Groome-Duke on a job well done.

In terms of education, the Tobago House of Assembly has many programmes. Of course, we have the free school education and so on, but we also have the tertiary education financial assistance programme which says that students who have to attend classes in Trinidad are given allowances for transport and accommodation. That in itself is extremely good because there are students whose parents are not in a position to assist them as they would like. The fact that the Tobago House of Assembly has put a system in place speaks very well for the Assembly.

There are a number of technical and vocational programmes that have been adapted to the relevant skills for Tobago's developmental needs. There is MuST, Helping Youth Prepare for Employment Programme (HYPE), the OJT Programme, YAPA and indeed the number one and most patronized programme, the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) which celebrated its 20th year in both Trinidad and Tobago. One of the things I must say in terms of these programmes is that, because of Tobago's developmental thrust, they are meaningful and they are meeting the needs of Tobago.

In terms of land, I am very pleased that the Tobago House of Assembly recognizes land ownership as an integral part of Tobago's culture, which I consider both applaudable and strategic. The Tobago House of Assembly has invested in lands for use by Tobagonians who cannot afford to purchase their own lands.

Please allow me to read from the THA budget statement for the financial year 2009, which says:

“Because Tobagonians are better off, a residential construction boom is occurring in every village; and what is most pleasing is that, unlike other Caribbean islands, the beautiful homes that are now being constructed all over Tobago are owned, in the main, not by foreigners but by Tobagonians.”

This is absolutely applaudable. Indeed, as I drive around Tobago, I do not only see large beautiful houses—we refer to them as little hotels because many individuals are using their homes as guest houses for the local tourism industry.

The expectations of many Tobagonians in the new arrangements with respect to stamp duty to facilitate the intergenerational transfer of lands have been realized. Let me just show this little article in the *Daily Express*, Wednesday,

September 24, 2008, where Dr. London, our Secretary for Finance, has said that Minister Tesheira is now a friend of Tobago because of her many positives in the present budget statement.

**6.35 p.m.**

Please allow me to congratulate our Chief Secretary, Orville London, who championed this cause, in terms of the stamp duty and wrote the Minister of Finance, Hon. Nunez-Tesheira. The stamp duty caused some financial hardship to many Tobagonians. I am happy indeed that good sense has prevailed and, as the headline says, we are happy in Tobago.

Let me now turn to housing. I have been monitoring certain housing developments in Tobago and we find that there is a significant number of younger Tobagonians who wish to have their own home. Some of them simply do not have the land; their parents do not have the land and they want to be more modernized and have their own homes. What the THA is doing at the moment is that it aims to build 4,000 houses to assist Tobagonians with their housing needs. I have been monitoring housing developments, especially at Roxborough and Blenheim in Plymouth. I had a conversation with the Secretary of Housing up to yesterday evening. He has reassured me, as this newspaper article of August 22, 2008 says:

“Spencer says Plymouth houses would be ready by Christmas.”

I am really heartened to know that there would be a significant number of Tobagonians who would have a wonderful Christmas present, which is a new home. I visited some of the new houses at Plymouth and the workers there have demonstrated goodwill to complete these houses on time. No doubt, again, there would be a lot of happy families who would have a good Christmas gift.

Let us look at infrastructure. Tobago boasts of some of the best roads in our nation. I enjoy driving in Tobago. I live near the airport. My parents live in the east. We have a lot of tight corners. At one time, I counted about 50 odd corners on the way to my mum. It is sheer driving pleasure on our roads at this time in Tobago, with this London administration. When I first returned home, eight years ago, I had to be careful where I drove my car because of the potholes. Now, from time to time, when our sisters and brothers from Trinidad visit, I would hear them saying: You guys have the best roads in the nation.

More than that, please allow me to invite Members of this honourable Senate to drive on our new L’Anse Fourmi to Charlotteville Road. I am not sure if any of you would have used that road and enjoyed the ecotourism with the majestic

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beauty and tranquility on this road. That road cost approximately \$40 million. That was completed in this PNM/Orville London administration. I think that is—  
[*Desk thumping*]

Let me look at transportation. The recent purchase and use of the fast ferries have revolutionized travelling between Tobago and Trinidad. Indeed, one can experience the smooth comfortable boat rides that are subsidized by over \$200 million annually. It was reported in the Budget Statement 2009, that domestic tourism has increased from 358,000 in 2001 to over 800,000 in 2007 and it is expected that by the end of this year, it would be about 1 million. I think that is extremely good. That is a tremendous achievement.

In the budget, Minister Nunez-Teshiera would have spoken of free travel between the islands for persons over the age of 65. This is good, because it increases mobility, especially for older Tobagonians who mainly travel to Trinidad for business or health care. Indeed, individuals may now travel for recreation and interaction that would mutually strengthen the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago.

In terms of the air bridge, we have experienced and we continue, even as Senators, to experience immense challenges on this air bridge. I know for a fact that the THA is working assiduously with the management of Caribbean Airlines to improve the services. A flight from Piarco to Grenada takes almost the same time as a flight to Tobago. Even though I am appalled at the cost of a flight to Grenada, let me reassure this honourable Senate that Tobagonians are very appreciative of the subsidies provided to keep the cost of air travel between Tobago and Trinidad at an affordable rate. It must always be remembered again that Tobagonians travel to Trinidad on business, educational purposes or to receive health care. It must also be noted in this Senate that the THA continues to assist individuals who travel to Trinidad on special circumstances as some of those listed above. Again, as I mentioned, there is still a great need for improvement on the air bridge services.

The THA collaborated with the Public Transport Service Corporation to engage buses to better meet the transportation needs of Tobagonians. On Saturday, September 20, there was the launch of the new buses in Tobago; 20 spanking new state-of-the-art buses. What this speaks of is that now Tobagonians all around the island can, instead of using cars—in fact, I intend to purchase some tickets and travel around the island. I have heard that one of the services would be from Scarborough to Roxborough, through the rain forest to L'Anse Fourmi to

Charlotteville and return. Members of the Senate, when you come to Tobago, leave your cars behind and enjoy our new PTSC buses. As a result of the improved bus service, new bus shelters are being installed across Tobago to provide a degree of comfort and shelter for passengers from the natural elements.

Let me briefly mention some issues with regard to diversification in Tobago. We know that Tobago depends heavily on tourism, but presently the THA is making the necessary changes, in terms of diversification. The THA is in an enviable position, as it engages in programmes to diversify the economy, whilst maintaining sustainable progress and prosperity that Tobagonians now expect and enjoy. One of these programmes is the Cove Eco-industrial and Business Park. When completed, this area would provide close to 200 sites for micro entrepreneurs.

One of the things I do in my office where I work in Tobago, is that I have copies of these application forms and I would talk to some of the trainees at YTEPP who would have done some courses. We have a programme in Tobago, not just Tobago, but YTEPP, where we encourage a lot of our young persons to start their businesses. This application form is basically an application for tenancy. Our Secretary for Finance, hon. Dr. Anslem London, is absolutely determined that when this project is ready, the 200 units will be occupied and that Tobagonians would take advantage. The fact that the Tobago House of Assembly is making the effort to diversify our economy in Tobago and to take advantage of new developments, I think it is a wonderful effort.

The Tobago House of Assembly spends tens of millions of dollars to keep Tobago clean, green, safe and serene. In terms of damaging the environment, I know my colleague, Sen. Nicholson-Alfred would have been concerned about the laying of pipelines at Man-O-War Bay, Charlotteville. As far as I am aware and I have received this information from the head person in the THA, hon. Orville London, the THA has no intention whatsoever of installing pipelines in Charlotteville or at Man-O-War Bay. The pipelines that we are looking forward to, indeed, are at Cove. Of course, these would be laid under the sea, for that matter.

Again, in terms of diversity, there is an Enterprise Assistance Programme that has provided financial assistance and guidance for over 150 entrepreneurs all over Tobago.

Small businesses are crucial to job creation of a nation's or an island's development and, indeed, I am heartened to see the number of young persons even in my work area at YTEPP, who have started businesses in so many areas:

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catering, hairdressing, selling hair products, and tailoring. There are many new businesses in Tobago. We are encouraging more and more young persons to start their own businesses.

It is amazing. There was the thought of yesteryear that certain persons cannot do business. No, it is amazing. It is truly amazing to see, and it just excites me even as I stand here, so many persons taking the plunge and initiative and starting their own business. It is absolutely wonderful to know that they are intent on improving their own standard of living, that of their families and, indeed, the island of Tobago and by extension Trinidad and Tobago.

There is collaboration between the Division of Finance and the Department of Agriculture, to positively position Tobago as a serious player in agriculture and food production.

On October 19, we would be having, at one of our villages, a beautiful village called Bloody Bay, our annual blue food day. I am inviting as many persons as possible to come to Bloody Bay on October 19, you would be absolutely amazed at the number of dishes that you can get from dasheen: dasheen wine, dasheen this, dasheen that. In fact, October 19 is my birthday, so I am not cooking, I intend to go.

**Sen. Mark:** I am coming.

**Sen. J. Melville:** I would certainly welcome you, Sir. On October 22 and 23, the Tobago House of Assembly would also hold its annual World Food Day. I know, from time to time, over the years, we would have mentioned that the Department of Agriculture is not doing much in Tobago. That has changed tremendously. Agriculture has changed tremendously in Tobago. Let me give a little example. I know a very young 76 year-old female and a young 71 year-old gentleman. He is our only Speaker in Tobago. We have a Speaker in the Lower House, but in Tobago we also have a Mr. Speaker.

**6.50 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, you would be amazed how energized these two individuals are. First thing in the morning, they are in the garden. Over the past few months they have planted tomatoes and patchoi. They would have sold over \$800 worth of tomatoes and they would have given away as much. At the moment, my refrigerator and freezer are full of patchoi and bodi beans from the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. In fact, I do keep him up-to-date from time to time. That 76-year-old mother is my Mom, Mrs. Pearl Melville Pollard, a former Assemblywoman and presently an author. She is busy in the garden, and she keeps me healthy with good food products.



Our new farmers in Tobago, and there are a significant number of them—

**Sen. Mark:** I am going to Tobago.

**Sen. J. Melville:** Yes, please do. We would certainly welcome you. Our new farmers would be able to use the fast ferries to transport surplus food to Trinidad, and return to Tobago on time to supervise their workers in the afternoon. I think that is absolutely wonderful. This is progress, courtesy the present PNM administration in Tobago.

What is also important is that there has been significant work on some of the access roads in Tobago leading to these farms. Much work has been taking place. Furthermore, on page 14 of the THA budget and it says that to ease the current food shortage, there has been an introduction of new and improved planting material—5,000 banana and 5,000 plantain plantlets, 100,000 dasheen plants, along with ginger, yam, cassava and cocoa planting material. These were distributed to farmers in Tobago.

As I mentioned, there have been repairs and upgrade of more than 25 kilometres of agricultural access roads in various parts of the island, including Shaw Park, Main Ridge, Cardiff and Indian Walk.

The Tobago House of Assembly has purchased a large commercial fishing vessel for fishermen in Tobago. In Tobago, we take our fish dishes very seriously. I am hoping that all Senators in this Senate would have tasted a good Tobago fish broth. It is a very healthy meal.

Presently, in Castara, there are a number of fishermen who are undergoing training to effectively manage a new large commercial fishing vessel that has been purchased by the THA. The vessel has not been delivered as yet, but it should be delivered sometime later in the year or early next year. We are taking our fishing industry very seriously.

What we are hoping to do is to use that fishing boat so that Trinidad and Tobago could have access to the flying fish that tends to runaway and just litter over the waters, because that is a very special dish in Tobago. Further, there are new fishing facilities that have been constructed at Delaford, Studley Park, Argyle and Courland. I am from Roxborough and there is a new jetty in its final stage of construction.

Let me just mention briefly some new initiatives that the THA has undertaken during the past year in terms of youth affairs and sports. There have been many developments. There is the Youth Development Programme Centre at Union;

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there has been extensive development and renovation works at Shaw Park recreational facilities—I know we are still waiting on our complex at Shaw Park; there have been renovation works at the Roxborough Cultural and Sport Complex and Plymouth; there was a creation of Courland Recreation Park; and the completion of the Signal Hill and Speyside Sport Pavilions and the lighting of the playing fields across the island; I know for a fact that the Goodwood Sport Ground and Charlotteville. The THA's aim is to put lighting on all the sport fields across the island.

Mr. Vice-President, let me just mention health care. As a former health care professional, not in Trinidad and Tobago but overseas, I have observed that the provision of proper health care continues to be a challenge, though hard we may try in both Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, we are waiting on our new hospital, but let me give you some information.

On Sunday, October 05, 2008, we had 35 workers who are employed with the China Railway Construction Company. This is a very reliable company and it has been engaged to complete the Scarborough hospital. These persons arrived on Sunday and there were others already on site. By the end of October, we should have the full workforce.

As I said, there have been challenges with the hospital and Tobagonians are very concerned. I have much faith in Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace. [*Interruption*] I take his word when he said that Tobagonians can expect to have a hospital that is not just completed, but equipped and ready for use in 16 months. [*Desk thumping*]

May I just say this? My Mom, Mrs. Pearl Pollard, was a member of the NAR administration in Tobago. She has informed me that when she was assistant secretary for health, Mr. Hochoy Charles, who was then the Secretary for Health, had the chance to start that hospital and he never did. She has informed me that the hospital should have been completed by the year 2000, so let us give some credence to our present administration. [*Desk thumping*] The Orville London administration is doing its very best, and I am taking Minister Narace's word. If the hospital is not completed in that time, I will return and say that it was not completed in time. [*Desk thumping*] I am going to hold him at his words.

Nevertheless, Tobagonians are enjoying many improvements in health care, notwithstanding the fact that we do not have the new hospital but there have been many new arrangements and improvements in our present facility. May I just say that Tobago boasts of more health centres per population than anywhere else in this nation. More than that, the Division of Health, under the superb management

of the hon. Oswald William, is in the process of constructing new health centres at Scarborough and Charlotteville. These would be new state-of-the-art health centres.

One of the things about our new health care system that we have in Tobago—the reason we are putting so much focus on health centres is that we are looking—the Minister of Health may have mentioned this at primary health care. We do appreciate that chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity and cardiac diseases which are basically lifestyle diseases, are rampant in our nation. We are trying to encourage in these health centres early learning, health education, health promotion and healthy lifestyles. [*Desk thumping*] We are hoping that by using these health centres in an effective way, there would be a drastic reduction in hospital visits for treatment for these diseases. So, the hospital environment would be more suited for acute illnesses.

I just want to be a little modest here. There is a document here, *Toward Vision 2020; A Modern Technological Perspective for Primary Health Care in Tobago*. This was printed in July 2005 by someone called June Marilyn Melville, and I do believe it is me. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure I would have given the Minister of Health a copy of this document a year ago. I know our current Secretary of Health has a copy. As a health care professional of yesteryear, I have some extremely good ideas which were given free of charge. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, some of the health care services that we now have in Tobago are specialist medical officer, in the accident and emergency department; a full-time ophthalmologist at the Scarborough Hospital—we know how important it is to have your eyes tested and so forth; new clinical services, such as spinal anesthesia for cesarean section. I know ladies of child bearing age would prefer to be awake if they need to have a cesarean section. Midwifery was my specialty of yesteryear; I was a very senior midwife. I know that spinal anesthesia is very important for couples who wish to be awake during the birth of their newborn infants. We also have improvements at the hospital laboratory with the engagement of a microbiologist and a biochemist.

Mr. Vice-President, the Secretary of Finance, Councillor, hon. Dr. Anselm London, in his budget statement for the financial year 2009 on June 19, 2009 under the theme: “Sustaining the Progress and Prosperity” proposed direct for the Tobago House of Assembly, a figure of \$2.93 billion for that fiscal year.

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On page 18 of the budget statement from the hon. Minister of Finance, Karen Nunez-Tesheira says:

“In the next fiscal year, the people of Tobago will have access to budgetary resources in the order of \$2,650 million, up from \$2,238 million in the last fiscal year ...”

**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. J. Melville:** Mr. Vice-President, thank you. I must say that Tobagonians are extremely happy with this allocation. Indeed, I have an article where Dr. London, our Secretary of Finance, said that Minister Nunez-Tesheira is, indeed, now a friend of Tobago.

The Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, hon. Dr. Orville London was in the Parliament during the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance. He indicated that he was comfortable with the level of the budget allocation for Tobago. He is a very modest gentleman.

He added, in addition to the allocation, the central government has already committed itself to provide the financing for the completion of the Scarborough Hospital; \$0.5 billion for the electricity plant at Cove; \$600 million for the natural gas plant at Cove as well; and \$50 million for the airport expansion. [*Desk thumping*]

**7.05 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, even the hon. minority leader in the Tobago House of Assembly praised the bigger budget, but for the wrong reason. He said the NAR, he forgot to say PNM, [*Laughter*] but he praised the budget too. Please allow me to join the Tobago House of Assembly and the people of Tobago in support of this budget.

In order for the Tobago House of Assembly to execute the mandate of the 5th Schedule, there is need for additional human resource skills to meet our current and future developmental needs. Currently the unemployment rate in Tobago is just 3.5 per cent. This means that virtually every person in Tobago who is looking for a job is likely to find one. For developed nations this is an enviable position.

The low unemployment is good, but at this stage of Tobago's development, it is also awkward. In view of this, there is an acute lack of capacity to implement. Tobagonians have concerns about our library, which has been in progress for many years, and the contractor who is building it is a Tobagonian; Shaw Park cultural complex, and of course, our hospital. We do give Tobagonians choices with contracts and a chance to build, but they do let us down from time to time.

How do Tobagonians address these challenges? I am recommending that the Tobago House of Assembly make a special effort to locate, motivate and encourage Tobagonians—local, regional and international—to return home, and share their skills and experiences, and indeed their positive attitudes in Tobago's energetic developmental thrust. And where possible, the Tobago House of Assembly must provide the necessary incentives such as accommodation, school placements, and free health care in these circumstances. I am an exemplar, as I mentioned before, of a national who gave up the First World environment and returned home to share my knowledge, experiences and positively contribute to the development of Tobago and by extension, Trinidad and Tobago.

I am pleading to Tobagonians especially those living abroad to return home and take part in this wonderful experience. See what you can do for your island; see what you can do for our country Trinidad and Tobago, as we move forward towards Vision 2020, side by side.

Tobagonians have always been identified as strong persons, religiously, spiritually, morally, culturally and physically. Hard work was the order of the day in order to improve one's living standard; to achieve and to contribute to one's family and the greater Tobago society. Even though we have remained a caring society, we Tobagonians need to change our thinking. We need to reposition ourselves for higher goals. Tobagonians must be passionate about our personal development, our family's development and Tobago's development within the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

We must demonstrate sincerity of purpose. Good work ethics must be the order of the day. This speaks of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Tobagonians must be responsible for their actions, their inactions and misdeeds, rather than blame others. Our children are fast learning the technology and all the technological skills of this global environment. I believe that our actions must motivate our children to stand tall and take charge of Tobago's business, as we work together with mutual respect, and travel side by side with Trinidad, as the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, towards Vision 2020 and beyond, with God's grace.

Members of this honourable Senate, Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

*Adjournment*

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**ADJOURNMENT**

**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 Senate do now adjourn to Thursday, October 09, 2008 at 1.30 p.m., at which time we will complete the debate on this Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.12 p.m.*