

*Leave of Absence**Tuesday, March 10, 2009***SENATE***Tuesday, March 10, 2009*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Helen Drayton, who is ill, but Dr. Balgobin, who is to be sworn in, is not yet here, so we will take this later on in the proceedings.

PAPER LAID

Annual Report 2008 and the annual financial statements of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago (NIBTT) for the financial year ended June 30, 2008. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne)*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, we will revert to item No. 3.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

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

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: DR. ROLPH BALGOBIN

WHEREAS Senator Helen Drayton is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of illness:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(c) and section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do

Senator's Appointment
[MR. PRESIDENT]

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hereby appoint you, ROLPH BALGOBIN, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the period of illness of the said Senator Helen Drayton.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 10th day of March, 2009."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Ministry of Education Tower
(Details of)**

6. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment:

Could the Minister inform this Senate of:

- (a) the current status of the Ministry of Education Tower located on Lower St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain;
- (b) the total sum expended on the project as at December 31, 2008;
- (c) the estimated sum required for the completion of the project; and
- (d) the expected completion date of the project?

The Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Emily Dick-Forde): Thank you, Mr. President. The response to the question is as follows:

- (a) Senators are asked to note that the tower located on St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, was designed specifically to cater to the varied needs of the clients of the Ministry of Education. There are two buildings under construction on the site: a 16-story, 237,370 square foot office tower and a five-story, 35,420 square foot secondary building.

The buildings include inter alia, the following features: contemporary meeting rooms, large open workspaces, technologically advanced infrastructure to support modern telecommunication systems, and an open landscape area at street level.

The status of the Ministry of Education's tower, located on lower St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, is as follows: construction works are ongoing and the project is 78 per cent complete.

- (b) The total sum expended on the project as at December 31, 2008, is \$291,100, 554.
- (c) The estimated sum required for completion of the project is \$76,747,714.
- (d) There were a number of factors that impacted the completion date of the project, which included design issues and the use of nominated sub-contractors. However, the expected completion date of the project is June 2009.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, I would like to ask the hon. Minister if she can share with the Senate, when was the original period that the tower was supposed to be completed; what was the original time and date?

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: Mr. President, I do not recall, I do not have that information in front of me, and I do not recall

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, through you again, could the hon. Minister indicate to this Senate whether the project is coming in within time and within budget, given what she has indicated to us here?

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: Mr. President, I believe the hon. Senator knows that it is not within time because the time has been extended, and I cannot speak to the “within budget” part as well. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, could the hon. Minister indicate to us what was the original cost of this project?

Mr. President: I think that question is redundant. The Minister said that she could not say what the original cost was, and she could if she knew what the original cost was. So, that is the same question in a different form. Do you have any other supplementals?

Sen. Mark: No.

Mr. President: Very well.

**Manager of Communication in the Ministry of Health
(Details of)**

20. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister inform this Senate:

- (a) of the name of the Manager of Communications in the Ministry of Health;
- (b) of the terms and conditions of employment of the Manager;
- (c) of the currency in which the Manager is being paid, whether US\$ or TT\$;
- (d) whether the position was publicly advertised;
- (e) of the number of applications received for the position; and
- (f) whether the interviews were conducted in Trinidad and Tobago or overseas, if overseas, why?

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Thank you, Mr. President. We do not have an approval for that answer at this time. I think in another two weeks or so we should have that answer.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Global Economic Recession
(Measures Taken to Protect Citizens)**

21. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

- (i) Could the Minister state the measures being taken to protect citizens against the global economic recession?
- (ii) Could the Minister also state how the government intends to address the effects of high rates of inflation, unemployment, rising interest rates with specific reference to mortgage interest rates?
- (iii) Could the Minister further state whether it is government's intention to adjust the foreign exchange rate?

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne): Thank you, Mr. President. The answer is as follows:

- (i) The global economic recession has led to a fall in global aggregate demand, which has negatively impacted all commodity prices, in particular, the prices of products in the hydrocarbon sector. This has led

to reduced revenue flows to Government. This recession has also led to a cutback in international travel, thereby adversely affecting and impacting the tourism sector of our Caricom trading partners and their ability to purchase exports from Trinidad and Tobago.

These factors can affect economic growth. The situation would be further exacerbated should the Government's purchase of goods and services decline when coupled with falling exports. Notwithstanding, the projected decline in revenue, the Government has opted to maintain a critical level of expenditure that would sustain economic growth while minimizing the impact on unemployment.

In this regard, expenditure on selected capital projects will be reduced. Special care will be taken to ensure the preservation of the Senior Citizens Grant, disability grants, training programmes and social assistance programmes of all types. There will also be no cuts in salaries and wages.

- (ii) High food inflation is one of the major factors behind the relatively high domestic headline inflation. In 2008, food prices increased on average by 26 per cent on a year-on-year basis, which prompted the Government to introduce a number of measures to tackle rising food prices.

The Government, through NAMDEVCO, has introduced a number of farmers' markets, with a view of establishing a more direct link between farmers and consumers, and thus improving the efficiency of the food distribution network.

The electronic board at the intersection at Macoya and Churchill Roosevelt Highway displays prices of agricultural produce to allow consumers to make more informed choices at competitive prices.

The Consumer Affairs Division of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, regularly publishes price data on a basket of basic food items sold at supermarkets. This has allowed for greater comparison shopping among consumers.

Secondly, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is championing the establishment of a number of commercially large agricultural farms, with the primary objective of increasing food production and to fuel the growth of agro-processing.

The commercial demonstration farm at Tucker Valley is a public sector led endeavour, while the PCS Nitrogen model farm is private

sector led. Internationally, lower fuel and transportation costs are beginning to impact the price of imported food. Also, there are signs that the real estate market is stabilizing, and the rate of consumer credit expansion is slowing.

These positive trends all point to an appreciable reduction in inflation, which is expected to fall to single digits during the second quarter of 2009. Inflation has already fallen from 15.4 per cent to 11.7 per cent.

With respect to interest rates, it should be noted that interest rates are determined in financial markets and are not set by Government. Rising inflationary pressures have led to significant monetary tightening by the Central Bank, which has sought to dampen demand and contain inflation through increases in the cash reserve requirement applicable to commercial banks as well as increases in the repo rate.

Since most mortgages in the domestic economy are extended on a variable-rate basis, some mortgage rates were increased in response to the increases in the repo rate. In the wake of the current global financial crisis and its anticipated impact on the domestic economy, commercial banks have signalled their intention to look at ways to avoid passing on increases in mortgage rates to their clients.

The Government has also been playing its role in the mortgage market and has introduced a number of innovative schemes to assist in financing home-ownership for low- and middle-income groups. In this respect, the Housing Development Corporation and the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company (TTFM) offer mortgages to qualifying first-time homeowners at mortgage rates from a low of 2 per cent to 8 per cent.

Unemployment: As indicated before, the Government will maintain a level of expenditure to sustain economic growth and minimize the negative impact on employment levels. According to the data from the Central Statistical Office, unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago resumed its downward trend in the third quarter of fiscal 2007/2008, falling to 4.6 per cent from 5.3 per cent in the second quarter of fiscal 2007/2008. This is lower than the international full employment standard of 5.0 per cent, as well as unemployment rates for Canada, 7.2 per cent, and the United States, which at the time of writing stood at 7.6 per cent, but is now above 8 per cent, and the United Kingdom at 6.3 per cent.

1.45 p.m.

Government remains committed to infrastructural development which will add impetus to broad based growth and create opportunities for significant segments of the economy.

With respect to the adjustment in the exchange rate: Since April 1993, Trinidad and Tobago has liberalized its foreign exchange regime and continues to operate a liberalized foreign exchange regime. In short, this means that it dismantled the fixed exchange rate system and adopted instead a floating exchange rate regime. Unlike a fixed exchange rate regime where authorities could adjust the parity of the exchange rate through either a devaluation or a revaluation, the interplay between the demand for and the supply of foreign exchange determines the rate in a floating regime.

The floating exchange rate regime has worked well since its inception in 1993. After some initial depreciation, the exchange rates stabilized between TT \$6.29 and \$6.33 to US \$1. This has boosted the confidence of investors and savers as well as provided a competitive edge to our manufacturers.

Moreover, gross foreign exchange reserves stood at US \$9.4 billion at the end of December 2008. There is an ample supply of foreign exchange holdings to meet existing demand and the exchange rate has continued to remain stable.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Mark: Could the hon. Minister indicate to this Senate, given the wild and reckless speculation that is pervading the market at this time, whether he can give the national community the assurance, based on what he has just said about the exchange rate that there is no intention on the part of the Government and the Central Bank to depreciate the national currency in the foreseeable future?

Sen. The Hon. M. Browne: Notwithstanding the fact that that is a completely different question and we have answered that several times, I would like to give the assurance to the public and to the nation at large listening today that the Government has every intention of remaining committed to a flexible exchange rate system and that there is no intention to move away from that. Inasmuch as the Government does not determine the exchange rate, and the exchange rate priority, there is no intention on the part of the Government to devalue the currency and the Government will make every effort to maintain the system as it stands. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, may I also ask the hon. Minister, given the large scale or the increasing number of workers who have been laid off and who are

being retrenched giving a rise to the unemployment rate in the country, could the Minister indicate to this honourable Senate what steps the Government intends to take to at least cushion the unemployment crisis that is being faced by thousands of workers at this point in time? Could he indicate that, Sir?

Mr. President: I think the Minister answered that very clearly in his answer. He dealt specifically with the measures that the Government was using to stabilize the—

Sen. Mark: No, well I did not get the answer.

Mr. President: Well he cannot repeat it again, it would be in the *Hansard* and you should have paid attention because I heard it very clearly.

Sen. Mark: He answered this question?

Mr. President: Yes he did! He did! He answered that very clearly.

Sen. Dr. Nanan: Mr. President, in the Minister's reply he mentioned that the Government is maintaining expenditure in such a way that there will be economic growth, if I am correct. I want to ask the Minister at this point in time, because we are hearing about recession, if there is economic growth existing. Because the policy of the Government as far as I am aware in terms of the Minister's reply, he pointed to maintaining expenditure to have economic growth. So, I am asking him now if there are signs of economic growth or if we are heading in a recession, which will mean negative growth.

Sen. The Hon. M. Browne: Mr. President, I think the exact phrase I used is that the Government has opted to maintain a critical level of expenditure that will sustain economic growth while minimizing the impact on employment. I think that was the statement that was made. I think we have come to this honourable Senate on several occasions and indicated the difficulties that we have had and will have in terms of maintaining the budget numbers.

The Government has indicated that it will revise the numbers but if necessary and when necessary will maintain its budgetary expenditure in line with its objectives. At this stage of the game there is no wholesale unemployment, there is no remarkable rise in unemployment numbers. Certainly, the statistics do not say that and we will make every effort to maintain the rate of growth that we have. The country is not yet in recession. It is not in recession although the numbers internationally indicate that most of the major countries are in recession. It is clear that we will have some difficulties in terms of our measures and maintaining our level of expenditure, but at this stage we are not in recession.

Sen. Mark: May I ask the hon. Minister as to what steps rather his Government intends to take to cushion the effect of foreclosures of homes by workers and middle-class families that have begun to take place given the current economic circumstances in the country?

Mr. President: Senator, I do not think that really flows from the answer. It is predicated on a supposition that there are foreclosures of which I have heard nothing on the news—[*Inaudible*]

Well I do not think that flows from the answer, I do not think that says to elucidate the answer. [*Interruption*] Well, that has nothing to do with foreclosure, so I think while it may be worthwhile you really ought to file a new question on that matter. Do you have any other supplementals?

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: Senator, be careful!

Heritage and Stabilisation Fund (Details of)

22. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

- (A) Could the Minister provide this Senate with a detailed list of:
- (i) the names of the financial, commercial and investment institutions in which the funds from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund were invested; and
 - (ii) the sums invested in each institution mentioned at (i) above?
- (B) Could the Minister also state whether there were any financial losses sustained by the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund from the global economic meltdown?

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Ministry in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne): Thank you, Mr. President. This question, part (A), asked for the names of the firms in which the HSF is invested. As at February 28, 2009, the names of the institutions in which the funds from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund are invested are as follows:

Bank of America, London

Bank of Ireland, Dublin

Bank of Montreal, London

Oral Answers to Questions
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Bank of Nova Scotia, New York
Barclays Bank plc, Miami
Bayerische Landesbank, New York
BNP Paribas, New York
Credit Agricole Indosuez, France
Deutsche Bank, London
HSBC plc, London
ING Bank N.V., Amsterdam
Ixis Corporate and Investment Bank, Paris
National Australia Bank, London
Rabobank, London
Rabobank International, Utrecht, Germany
Royal Bank of Canada Capital Markets, Toronto
Royal Bank of Scotland plc, London
Svenska Handelsbanken, New York
UBS AG, Zurich
US Bank NA, Washington
Wells Fargo Bank, California
ING Bank, Brussels
JP Morgan Chase Bank, New York
US Government (Treasury Securities)

The approximate distribution is 95 per cent near cash, 5 per cent securities.

Data on the value of the HSF as at February 28, 2009 is presently being compiled and I am not in a position to give you the balances as at that date.

With respect to the respective dollar investments in these institutions, they do not exceed the amount allowable in law and the investment guidelines.

With respect to part (B): The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund did not incur—once again, did not incur as often repeated in this Senate—any financial losses as

a result of the global economic meltdown. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund's investments returned 0.78%—this is 78 basis points—during the first quarter of the financial year 2008/2009. That would be the calendar period, October to December 2008.

For the calendar period January to December 2008, the return amounted to 3.12%. Since its inception from March 31, 2007 to December 2008, the investments in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund have returned a yield of 7.53 per cent over the period—not annualized, just over the period, cumulatively.

Provisional data show the net asset value of the HSF as at January 31, 2009 as US \$2,909,439,397.45.

Mr. President, I now take the opportunity to provide this honourable Senate with some information in respect of similar funds established by other countries also known as sovereign wealth funds:

- The Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) has announced that it lost last year from the period March to December 2008 the sum of US \$30.7 billion.
- The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, has not been spared and may have lost last year, US \$125 billion, according to a Council of Foreign Relations Report.
- The Government of Singapore Investment Corporation had an investment loss of, approximately, US \$33 billion in 2008 as a result of the tumbling asset prices around the world. Temasek Holdings Pte. Limited, Singapore's other sovereign wealth fund, saw its investment portfolio fall by 31 per cent or US \$39 billion in the eight-month period ended November 30, the senior Minister of State for Finance said last week.
- The Alaska Permanent Fund had a loss of approximately 24.67 per cent of its value in 2008.

In the light of this I am sure that hon. Senators opposite will agree that our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of Trinidad and Tobago has done very well indeed on the basis of this prudent management. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, in question 22(A) (ii), I asked specifically the sums. I did not get a response to the sums. I got a vague answer, so I would like to ask the hon. Minister, could he provide this Senate with a breakdown of the sums?

Sen. The Hon. M. Browne: As the hon. Senator on the other side ought to know, there are provisions in the Act establishing the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund about disclosure and disclosure provisions. That is point one. Point two: Inasmuch as this fund is run on a competitive commercial basis, to disclose the individual amounts invested in each individual bank does expose the managers of this fund to a certain level of competitive bidding which we will not want to encourage. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, may I also ask the hon. Minister that given the financial global meltdown, whether it is the intention of the Government to switch its investment portfolio from banks into more securities like treasury bonds and treasury bills issued by the United States government, as an example?

Sen. The Hon. M. Browne: Mr. President, we have indicated in the past that we have gone to the market to search for investment advisors on a competitive bidding process and we have indeed, come up with a portfolio allocation strategy for the fund. However, given the decisions or given the turbulence that currently exists, prudence suggests that some of those investment decisions on that portfolio management position should in fact be deferred until we are more comfortably profiled. In the meantime we will continue to exercise as prudent judgment as can be required and is demanded by the circumstances. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Sir, I have only one final question. Through you, Mr. President, did I hear the hon. Minister indicate that we as a country had not experienced any financial losses as a result of the global financial meltdown? Is that what he said, Sir?

Sen. The Hon. M. Browne: Yes, that is what I said.

Sen. Mark: Okay, thank you very much, Sir.

Sen. Dr. Nanan: Mr. President, in the reply by the Minister, the Minister pointed to a 7.8 per cent cumulative. I would like to ask the Minister in terms of the projection for 2009, if he has a figure in terms of that particular percentage for the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund?

Sen. The Hon. M. Browne: We do have a figure but I do not remember the number off the top of my head. I think the benchmark number is approximately 3 per cent. If we maintain our current asset allocation, that would be the target number. If we change the asset allocation then things would be—what you call it—the projected number will change. Thank you.

Joint Select Committee

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

2.00 p.m.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
(Electronic Transactions Bill)
(Appointment)**

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you. Mr. President, you would recall that on the last sitting, I had undertaken to consult with my colleagues with respect to the matter sent to us by the House of Representatives. I now beg to move the following Motion:

Be it resolved that the Senate appoint the following six Senators to serve with an equal number from the House of Representatives on the Joint Select Committee established to consider and report on the Data Protection Bill, 2009:

Mr. Arnold Piggott

Mr. Linus Rogers

Ms. Laurel Lezama

Mr. Wade Mark

Dr. Adesh Nanan

Ms. Diana Seetahal SC

And be it further resolved, that the committee be also empowered to consider and report on the Electronic Transactions Bill, 2009.

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ELECTION CAMPAIGNS
[Second Day]**

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [February 03, 2009]:

Be it resolved that Parliament appoint a Joint Select Committee to consider establishing a legislative framework to govern the financing of election campaigns and to submit its report with recommendations to both Houses of Parliament within six months of its appointment.

Question again proposed.

Mr. President: Following is a list of those who spoke, Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran (Mover of the Motion), Sen. Laurel Lezama, Sen. Wade Mark, Sen. Corinne Baptiste-McKnight, Sen. Dr. Carson Charles. Senators may speak now. Sen. Rahman?

Sen. Rahman: I would allow the Minister to speak.

Mr. President: Very well. Minister?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment (Sen. The Hon. Tina Gronlund-Nunez): Thank you, Mr. President. I would first like to thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this Motion put forth by Sen. Prof. Deosaran and in looking over the wordage of this Motion, I must say I was struck by the first sentence in this Motion. I believe it states:

"Whereas financial support for election campaigns is necessary for a healthy multi-party democracy;"

This indicates to me that the proponent of this Motion is well aware that we cannot have a healthy functioning democracy without financing. It also suggests that we know as a fact, that he knows exactly what the practice of democracy entails.

Mr. President, with your permission, I would like to quote from the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and it states:

"Whereas the People of Trinidad and Tobago—

- (c) *have asserted their belief in a democratic society in which all persons may, to the extent of their capacity, play some part in the institutions of the national life and thus develop and maintain due respect for lawfully constituted authority;"*

Mr. President, I decided to quote that statement from our Constitution, based on the mere fact that this preamble allows individual citizens of this country to play whatever part in the democratic elections of this very said country we are associated with, and this also includes financial contribution to the person, to the party that they may wish to choose freely to support and at the end of the day determine their national future, what they would like to see in the future.

This Motion is in one line acknowledging that the ordinary citizens have a very important part to play in the running of our campaigns. But yet, this Motion is also asking us, we the protectors of this very democracy, to move away from this activity and that we consider to actually legislate a framework to govern the financing of election campaigns. In other words, this Motion is actually asking us to move away from that free ability, to financially support who we as citizens would like to support by legislating it. Knowing the gentleman as I do, the hon. Senator, I could never, and would never even consider that this gentleman would be attempting to take away the democratic right of the man on the street, to

actively take part in the democratic activities of this very nation. The right to support via involvement in campaign activities or by even dipping in his pocket to support the candidate he or she so would like to support.

In fact, this is the system that we have at present in this country and it is a system that has been utilized by this nation for many years and by many other nations throughout the world. It is a structure simple in its format; it is a system that works. However, it was suggested during the last sitting that local conglomerates—big businesses—have a tradition of giving significant campaign contributions, which when given, also is given with untold and undemocratic powers, whereas their expectation is to decide the bidding of parties that they so support.

Mr. President, in my experience, I would put this down at least as a perception. Factual, I cannot stand here and say that is what happens, not with the party that I am associated with. [*Desk thumping*] The facts as I know it, are that financial support from big business if it does exist, is in the minority. The party that I am associated with depends in the majority on the everyday man or woman who walks our streets, to the extent of their pockets. And if it is that big business is in agreement, in approval of the business plans of the party that I am associated with, well then my expectation is that they would support just like the man on the street.

These citizens and even the businesses, would from time to time during a campaign, listen to the candidates and even read the manifesto as put forth by that party, and if they in deciding so decide to support, then the expectation is that they may financially support that party or that candidate, as they so do today, and still have that free choice to do. This is how a democracy functions. Each side puts forth their position and the people support and select the best one.

Further, Trinidad and Tobago is a small country and we all have to recognize that. Even if you go about doing your work quietly and without fanfare, some friend will usually pass the news on to one another as we go through our day-to-day activity. It is the same way good news and bad news about possible candidates have transferred in this country. And when a potential candidate goes to a potential supporter, who very well knows that individual has a history that is very blemished, trust me, Mr. President, I am sure everyone will acknowledge that that support would be poor, for information will go the same way from mouth to mouth, through our neighbourhoods, our streets and our homes.

Therefore, if an individual such as that does not get the sort of financial support and financial backing that he may desire, one should not look at fairness, but look at maybe one's own personal integrity before coming forth as a potential

Financial Support (Election Campaign)
[SEN. THE HON. T. GRONLUND-NUNEZ]

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candidate. Mr. President, to even look or consider to legislate how much finances an individual who is looking to be a candidate should get, would be taking away the powers of the man on the street.

Recently, the United States President, Barack Obama, became popularly known for raising millions of dollars in finance from individuals, the grassroots supporters who each in their own way donated an average of \$5 to his campaign. This is a prime example of how the system works, the same said system similar to ours in this country. President Obama, so moved voters by his words and actions, that they felt compelled to support his candidacy.

Mr. President, the issue of campaign finance reform has been ongoing in the United States and in the United Kingdom for decades, as has even been touted quite a bit in this very country also with no resolution, because all have recognized the potential that legislation may infringe on individual rights and freedoms to participate in the democratic process.

A 2005 publication by the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government titled, "Party and Election Finance in Britain and America: A Comparative Analysis" states that and I would like to read this:

Both countries have struggled to finance a legal framework which balances the need on the one hand, to ensure that elections are seen to be fair and free from corruption and the undue influence of particular interest, which on the other hand, allow for free expression and participation including the right to contribute financially to help the party or candidate of one's choice.

This debate continues unabated with no real resolution, except to institute rules and regulations. In some cases actually at the end of the day, negative to and also caused a consequence which discourages people from going forth to so represent individuals in our society. We too, are guided by some rules and perhaps we do need to examine them.

2.15 p.m.

Sen. Baptiste-McKnight stated in her contribution, that currently candidates are restricted to spending a maximum of \$50,000 per campaign. This was established so many years ago, that in many ways at today's conditions even this amount may be considered outdated. Therefore, I may possibly agree with the arguments that were put forward by Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight on this limit of \$50,000. In fact, with the unrealistic demands put on candidates in this new

economy as we know it today, where the actual value of money has diminished over the years, we have to recognize that this \$50,000 may be considered insufficient for a candidate to get his word, his message out to the people.

In fact, taking off from that, I would like to share a little piece of history with this Senate, because history tends to speak volumes. For those who may or may not have been involved in the campaigns of yesteryear, campaigning of long ago used to be a door-to-door activity, where one went from house to house or stood on a box to spread one's word as far as possible, to as many homes as possible, to say what one believed in, what the party believed in and what the party or themselves saw for the future of this nation tomorrow.

However, in 1986 or thereabout, with the coming of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) movement, a whole new way of campaigning came to the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, as we knew it. In fact, during that time, we saw an entirely new way of public relations, campaigning and marketing of a party that this country never saw before. We saw banners everywhere you looked; we saw fliers everywhere you looked. Marketing went from a door-to-door activity, to marketing on our television and radio stations. There was no way possible for us to go about our day-to-day activity without realizing a general election was taking place.

Since this time to the present, the campaign put forward by the NAR government, the potential government at the time, set a new standard in campaigning in this country. It is a campaign that many of us, including the Opposition, utilize today as a base standard in order to spread the word of our parties.

It must be noted, and this is something which knocks at the base of this Motion of Sen. Prof. Deosaran, that in this small society, as I stated earlier, regardless of how much financing is thrown after a potential candidate, if that candidate himself or herself does not have any form of integrity, or even if his party does not carry with it some form of integrity, irregardless—sorry, that is not a word—[*Laughter*] regardless of the amount of financing, without integrity on that day that we all come out to vote, that vote would speak volumes.

For those who cry, Mr. President, that the system utilized today in this country is unfair, maybe they should not look towards legislation, but look within, [*Desk thumping*] and look to reviewing who they may be fielding as potential leaders of this twin island Republic, because in a small society, nothing stays quiet for too long.

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[SEN. THE HON. T. GRONLUND-NUNEZ]

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If you would allow me, teaching is not my background, but I always like to share a piece of advice; this is for the young people of our nation. Even in this Motion, there is a little message one can always pass to the young of our society. Just as a potential candidate going up for a political party, because he wants to serve, to better his country, et cetera, one is usually going to be before the eyes of the people; and trust me, the eyes of people have already judged him before that election day.

My message to the young, taking off of that line, is that in life as one grows, trust me, there are more individuals looking at you and how you behave, et cetera, than you realize. Even though your career may not be in politics, it could be a career in business, some sort of technical career or a skill in some trade or otherwise, people usually look at you more than you think: How you dress; how you carry yourself or even how you walk. The support one gets in the future is usually based on what you have done in the past. The same applies to our young and the same applies to our future politicians, and those who sit in this very said Senate or in the Lower House. So be wary of those words: The support you get tomorrow, whether it is in the form of voluntary support or in the form of financial support, it is determined on your activities of yesterday.

Mr. President, at this point in time, we do not support this Motion in the frame it has been put before us today; however, there is also some justification for it coming forth to this Senate. Therefore, in general, we do agree with this Motion, but not in the way it has been presented. There is a need to examine the issue of campaign financing in this country, as it exists today, maybe in other aspects than what were presented; therefore, I have to come to the conclusion that it is an important Motion, but maybe not for a joint select committee, but a committee in some other aspects.

I commend the Senator for bringing it forth, at this point in time, because I think it requires discussion that should take place in a public forum, so we can ensure that we preserve our democracy. As we enjoyed it today, we must ensure it will continue to be enjoyed tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Mohammed Faisal Rahman: Mr. President, the Motion before us states:

"Be it resolved that Parliament appoint a Joint Select Committee to consider establishing a legislative framework to govern the financing of election campaigns and to submit its report with recommendations to both Houses of Parliament within six months of its appointment."

I have great pleasure in rising, Sir, to support the spirit and intent of this Motion, if not in its complete letter.

Before going on to that part of it, I am extremely relieved to have heard the ending of the last contributor to this debate. For a moment at the beginning of it, I was beginning to wonder whether the Government had a closed door policy on this matter and it was not about to entertain the validity of this extremely important Motion being brought to us by our good colleague, Sen. Prof. Deosaran.

My only issue with the Motion is that it does not go quite far enough. I entirely agree that we need a legislative framework to govern the financing of election campaigns, but I feel equally strongly, Sir, that we need to broaden that to cover finances of all political parties. It is not beyond reason to understand and realize, that were the political parties to find themselves possessed of finances well in advance of the election period, quite a lot of mischief could take place, and you may circumvent the intent of the legislative framework and the law by raising your party's finances well in advance of the approaching election day.

We know that our good Prime Minister likes to keep the date in his back pocket, so that he has enough time to prepare and raise his finances to escape whatever framework that may be devised for those who do not know the secret that his back pocket contains. The lack of a legislative framework to govern political parties and, particularly, campaign financing, has led to a level of corruption in the affairs of this nation that may not strike us very immediately, without contemplating what obtains right now in this country.

I will just state one instance that is a flagrant violation of law, which will underscore the point I am making and immediately justify the crying need for comprehensive legislation to deal with this matter.

Mr. President, Sir, funding political parties, political campaigns or election campaigns is not tax deductible for corporations. Right now it is an established fact that corporations are in the vanguard of political financing for political parties. What occurs very, very casually is that all this political financing that is taking place is generally charged out on the accounts of the company to advertising. This is a common bit of information that everybody knows, but we pretend that this breach of the law is not taking place, and we have auditors simply accepting the vouchers that are put through the corporations and companies as advertising expenses or entertainment expenses, hidden in different little subheads. The Inland Revenue Department, not expecting this sort of thing, accepts the tax returns of these corporations.

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Until recently corporation tax was 50 per cent of your profit; now it is down to about 35 per cent. [*Interruption*] Corporation tax is now down to 25 per cent? The President said 25 per cent. All right, the criminality has been halved in terms of dollars, but the criminality in terms of the spirit of illegality remains, in that campaign financing done by corporations passes under the rubric of advertising and entertainment expenses.

2.30 p.m.

I cannot see, just as for years and years when the ceiling for political campaigns was \$5,000 until it was raised to \$50,000 as I have learnt. As a matter of course, every candidate would fabricate his accounts for his returns after the election to fall within the limit of what was permitted by law, so what we have had here—by a lack of legislation, and a lack of corrective recourse—was breaking of the law in a most flagrant way and if you extend that, we have had the establishment of governments on the basis of taxation fraud.

Do you know what that means? It means that all the governments that sat and ruled this country have come to office through illegal means literally, and through the support of illegal devices that have taken place. I know that this sounds abhorrent, but that is the stark reality unless you want to tell me that was covered by some special Inland Revenue law.

So when we consider this Motion before us today, we have to come to grips with the reality that this—

Sen. Enill: Mr. President, I thank the Senator for giving way. There is just one clarification I would like to get on a matter that was raised. Are you suggesting in your contribution that outside the election process, as it relates to elections, that parties should come under the parliamentary structure you are suggesting?

Secondly, could you point me to which law you are talking about that these corporations are in fact running against? In other words, you had raised the issue on a number of occasions about illegality. As far as I know for something to be illegal there must be a law governing it, and I am not sure what law that is. Could you please point me to that?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Yes, I am glad to answer both questions. The first was—yes, certainly I had started my contribution by saying that the Motion does not go far enough, and I do not believe it should be confined merely to campaign electioneering.

I believe that a framework should be worked out where all incorporated bodies in this country—we should have proper accounting done by political parties because the area for corruption is total and complete within the national context.

With regard to the second question, the point I made was where a corporation or a liability company is supposed to make proper declarations to the Board of Inland Revenue in its returns, and when it pays out a \$5,000 or \$10,000 here or there—I am using small figures for the time being—it does not say this is an election donation because if it did it would not get tax relief. It is suffering by a further 25 per cent on what it has paid. So when—I am continuing to explain so that those who are listening here and elsewhere will understand the point I am making—you have falsified financial returns submitted to the Board of Inland Revenue that acts upon and receives them as bona fide, then there is the breaking of the law.

So you have improper accounting and illegal practice and this has become endemic in the business practices of this country and it is from there I extrapolated that when governments and political parties gain political power through this means, with full knowledge of the practice that is taking place within the business community, they are themselves aiding and abetting.

Mr. President: Senator, that is where I would draw the line. I do not think you can go that way. I have been listening to you very carefully and I waited to see if you would cross that line.

By your last statement, you are suggesting that Members of Parliament duly elected, are complicitors in breaking the law with these so-called companies that you say, without any evidence presented here, are breaking the law. And you are suggesting, therefore, that duly-elected Members of Parliament, on both sides, are guilty of breaking the law. You cannot say that in the Parliament. You may not say that unless you have very specific proof.

I think it is a huge stretch to suggest that any honourable Member of this Parliament or any others have any knowledge that any businessman is breaking any law in the country. It is a stretch and I instruct you not to go there and to withdraw the statement that you just made.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Certainly Sir, if my statement was indeed that, I withdraw it. However, I would like to say that I have been associated with companies which have made donations and I know—as the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries conceded, he understands the point I was making. I am not under any circumstance trying to asperse against any elected Member of Parliament.

We have had a situation where the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) continued through two elections in circumstances which they were not aware that the law was inadequate, and we had to pass an amendment that permitted them to continue to hold elections in due time. It is entirely possible that what may have occurred in the past—until this Motion had been brought by the hon. Senator—would have gone totally unnoticed and innocently perpetuated in a circumstance which I felt duty bound to bring to the attention of the Senate, to underline and underscore the necessity to support this Motion so we could bring proper legislation to rectify what may have occurred in the past.

I say all this very humbly and circumspectly, and certainly I say this because my party had held governance for a while, and the NAR at one time, and the circumstances I have described do not apply to hon. Members of this current administration, it is a circumstance that pervades the politics of this country and is something which we ought to look at more closely in order to rectify a situation which clearly is open to corrupt perpetuation.

Mr. President: Senator, I am going to ask you to get off this point because you just said there are situations that you know of. If you know of situations where someone has broken the law and have not reported it to the proper authorities, then you are as guilty as they are and I cannot allow you to compromise yourself in that way in this Parliament. Therefore, I strongly suggest that you have said enough on that matter and should move on to something else.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: I shall, Sir. Mr. President, there are a number of other reasons why we need this legislation to be seriously considered and I would like to suggest, once again, that there is a serious need for this matter to go to a joint select committee which, hopefully, will examine some of the outrageous things I may have said without intending, to come to the bottom of this matter and decide the necessity for going the route that Sen. Prof. Deosaran has recommended.

I would like to say that the present system of attaining political power in this country appeals to the lowest denominator of our moral and cultural levels. You know this thing about “rum and roti politics”, a very common term used in this country and when you spread the largesse around and the way in which money is thrown around at that time, there is a situation where people are influenced—not for intelligent reasons, nor reasons of loyalty, but for base and emotive reasons.

I am suggesting that if this were to be brought under a framework where contributions for political parties could well be made into a deductible contribution for corporations and they not be funnelled directly to the political

parties because there is a situation where nobody puts money to a cause except it is charitable, without anticipating returns for himself. It is very unreasonable to expect that, and even when we give to charitable causes we are expecting a return by the grace of the Lord in the hereafter, so we are still looking for a personal reward.

So I suggest if we were to consider legislating in such a way so as to control the present situation which I believe works to the detriment of the society, we will be doing ourselves a greater service. And en passant, I would say that I would like to see laws where, just as the present time, the Government funds the offices of the Opposition Members of Parliament because they have a job to do for the community, recognizing that political parties which have to meet a certain level of organization and performance, and which should be brought under the purview of that particular law, I suggest that all political donations which would then be tax deductible be paid into an authority which would then disburse those funds to the political parties with a certain formula and that will be left for the joint select committee to decide and recommend. I am not here to frame the law today, but to give the ideas I have in my mind that would lead to a more noble selection of our representatives.

We have a situation here today where there are no regulations as to who can give money to a political party whether it is for election or the pursuance of its own agendas and ideals.

In the United States of America it is not permitted for non-citizens to contribute to an election campaign and there is good reason, because you do not want to open the door to a situation where your elected members of government could become beholden to foreign companies and governments. Apart from the real prospect of being recolonized through donations, we have a situation where foreign companies which are about to tender for projects in a small nation as ours could easily—under the cloak of generosity—fund a political party with the expectation that they receive contracts later on.

This is a reality of life where you find people—you know bribery is one of the oldest forms of corruption, and when everybody is doing this sort of thing, it becomes very difficult for somebody to come in on a tender basis and not expect that he will have to pay out something for somebody. We have a situation—and I am not casting aspersions, I am saying these things become very suspect. There is a company called Bouygues Batiment which gained a contract for the Waterfront Project for \$1.6 billion which eventually increased to \$3.6 billion and I had been advised that funded a political party along the way. I am not saying which one. But it expected to get a benefit, you know there is a saying: “He who pays the piper, calls the tune.”

2.45 p.m.

I think it is disingenuous for us to believe that we can perpetuate a situation where people are giving away money for free and not expecting a benefit in return.

Sen. Browne: Could the Senator give way?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Yes.

Sen. Browne: I just wanted to clarify a certain point here. I think you mentioned Bouygues Batiment; you talked about the size of the contract. I know that the original estimated cost of the Waterfront Project was \$1.64 billion and the total cost, inclusive of interest costs, consultancy fees, VAT, as well as fitting out, finally put the contract price at \$3.4 billion. So it is not correct to say that a contract for the construction of a particular item ballooned to \$3.4 billion. I just wanted to make certain I brought that to your attention. Thank you.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: I am much obliged for the comment but the principle of the corrupt possibility remains with foreign companies which are permitted—if there is no law that prohibits a foreign company, or if there is no law that regulates what moneys a particular party or a campaign can receive, anything can happen.

I am going to say something here which may reflect upon us but, you see, we have a situation here where an individual or an organization can fund a party and then demand conformance to his own views. We know what can happen. This is not a cloistered issue, and you want to protect the population. The idea is not to protect the political party; the idea is to protect the population from violence and abuse by single individuals or single corporations that may seek to exercise that muscle after having contributed voluntarily, with no strings attached originally, but that turns out to be a reproach with a sword.

We are looking at a situation where this Motion has a lot more justification than it appears to—for example, our last speaker who believes that the democratic process is more secure with the average citizen making his little donation. I am saying, I would love to agree with her, but make the donation through the central body out of your own desire to do your civic duty—let the donation be through a central body that then disburses the funds according to a specific formula.

I am not against campaign financing; I am not against political financing, but there are people who would make a donation and put it into your account and then call in the chips at the time when it is most convenient for them to do. We are not

at a tea party discussing crumpets; we are seeking to ensure that the practices that prevail right now are prevented from becoming magnified into a situation where the country suffers more than it really has been suffering.

Any little nation that can have—and I am saying this very clearly—a single party dominate the politics of the country for almost half a century, something has to be—

Sen. Manning:—wrong with the Opposition. [*Laughter*]

Sen. M. F. Rahman: I am prepared to entertain what you are saying. You are saying something has to be wrong with the Opposition. Yes, I have heard you. [*Desk thumping*] But do you know something? [*Desk thumping*] I have not conceded that that is the case. [*Laughter*] I am saying that I have heard your words, now let us deal with that.

Advertising, promotion, “rum and roti” politics and a host of other things, with adequate financing, can make the selection of a wrong party the dominant feature of a nation. The reality of the matter is that there are times when a united government better serves the interest of a nation and the divisiveness of the party politics that is based upon specific chasms of separation, does not lend itself to this nation getting the fullest benefit of its resources, its people and of its own future.

Had we been in power for 50 years we would probably make the same remarks that the Government Benches are making today, but the reality is that we have to look at a situation where we have a—it is not a fault line; we have a very clear situation, because surely the divisiveness that is in the ruling party today, is not any less than the divisiveness that is in the Opposition parties. When you have one Member sitting on the other side of the House and criticizing the Government in the way that he does, and being asked “where the money gone”, these are things that are common to both parties. It is not because we have a division and you are free of division. There has been dissent.

Excessive finance can paper over the cracks and maintain the semblance of solidarity that does not lead to proper governance. We have a situation today where the whole nation is writing in the press and calling out and asking for certain changes to be made in the direction of the Government by the biggest supporters of the governing party, publicly writing in the press and criticizing it and the Government is incapable of hearing. Had there been less security in terms of the system of funding and campaign financing and political funding—had there been less of that—they would have been more on their toes because they would have had the reality of losing government had they not been so secure. The more

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secure you are, the more arrogant you become and the whole thing about the democratic process is that the nation must be given the opportunity to make reasoned and intelligent choices.

I am not saying do not have the political rallies; I am not saying that you do not appeal to the public, but what should be the foremost appeal to the public is the integrity of the candidate, which the last Senator mentioned, and the competence of the party, the competence of the individual, his qualifications and his intellect, not because of the facilities you get from him. When you enter into government, you become responsible for the whole nation; for those who voted for you and for those who voted against you, and you are not expected to be partial and favouring those who supported you.

But the inbuilt risk is that the corporations and mega individuals who have supported you can come in and call in their favours and their chips because of the obvious threat to withhold support on the next occasion if you do not conform. You know, we are dealing with fallible human beings, as I have always said. Everything that we do is affected by the human persona and this is a very clear situation where funding has to come under serious scrutiny, proper management and proper legislative framework in order to circumvent the inbuilt deficiencies that have become entrenched in the system that we at present practise.

One of the more alarming practices that have developed in recent times also is that even state enterprises end up supporting political events financially. I had made reference to a particular issue in this Senate, and I do not want to mention it by name again, but the reality is that state enterprises should have no business supporting political parties. This should be a matter for private corporations and private businesses alone, because there is a built-in bias that state enterprises would put their resources, donations and their support in the side of the scale that belongs to the government in power, and whichever government is in power, I think abuses the finances of the citizens when they expect and receive from state enterprises any sort of political funding and financial support.

So we have a situation here where—I would rather say, I am trying to recommend that the Motion by the hon. Senator be amended in such a way as to embrace far more than campaign financing and that a governing set of rules and an authority—you know, it is interesting. In order to make the ambulance service more efficient, we want to establish an authority; in order to make institutions and systems work, we establish authorities, and yet in the matter that is most critical to the development and continuation of the democratic process in this country, we have no regulatory authority.

My impassioned plea is that we work towards establishing a political authority that governs the operation and financing of political parties in every aspect of the operation, even in the instance of personal contributions being allowed. But I would say that even the small personal contributions can still be made through the central authority which I am recommending be established for this particular purpose.

I believe I have made the points I wanted to make and I would simply like to conclude by repeating my endorsement of the Motion with the hope that the good Senator himself would upgrade the recommendation to cover all aspects of political parties from the financial operations as I have suggested.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan: Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to speak on this particular Motion on election campaign financing. First of all, I want to commend my colleague, Sen. Prof. Deosaran, for having had the patience to wait for something like one full year for this Motion to come to the Senate for discussion and debate.

At first, it sounds like a rather, if I must say, tame Motion, because once an election is over, most people forget about, or really appear not to care at all about election campaign financing. But it is important. I think one of the hallmarks of mature societies is the whole question of transparency and disclosure in all areas except those areas which pertain to national security.

3.00 p.m.

This question of election campaign financing, if viewed from the point of transparency and disclosure, we must ask the question: Who are the persons or entities that finance election campaigns and for what purpose? If you drill down you would get to a breakdown of probably several entities, whether they be at the corporate or individual level, or I will take a separate segment which is the international investors and supporters outside the local rubric.

One of the questions that ordinary citizens have asked me in the context of this matter of election campaign finance is whether state corporations, those owned by the Corporation Sole and by extension, the people of Trinidad and Tobago provide campaign financing for any party or all parties. I must say that I am not in a position and those persons I have asked have not been in a position to say whether or not this is so. It is a very elemental question. If state corporations provide funding, why are such contributions not properly disclosed? It is not a

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matter of national security and by extension, the people's money is being used to finance parties. If it were that such funding was directed only to the party that was in government at the time, it would be a sinful act not to have some level of disclosure as to the nature of that financing.

As you know, financing oils the wheels of an election campaign and in some way it would make a material difference to what the outcome of an election can be, depending on the level of financing. It is something that we need to consider in the context of election campaign legislation, if we ever come to that. There must be disclosure as to how the people's money via state corporations is being utilized for the purpose of supporting political parties, either at an election campaign or sometime prior to an election campaign. This has been the concern of a number of ordinary citizens when this matter was brought to me. If that is the case, it should and must be disclosed. If it is not, it suggests that there may be something sinister and some secrecy that is not necessary or required or desirable for a maturing society, in terms of using indirectly state funds for the financing of political parties and in particular, the party that may be in power at that point in time.

The second course of financing is that of privately held corporations. Based on my enquiries, my sense is that when private corporations make contributions they usually share the goods. They would make some contribution to the party in power and to the party that might get into power. In financial terms, essentially, they hedge their bets to ensure that either outcome would work in their best interest. Absolutely nothing is wrong with that. What the quantum is and whether that quantum can impact the decision-making or be of undue influence to the party in power, post election, is of consequence. My sense is that private corporations do not make such significant contributions. I question whether state corporations do.

I believe that when you come to international persons or institutions that are not local and make contributions for election campaigns and political parties, that should be disclosed. I say so because we are a small maturing nation and we do not want to be placed into the category where our political parties could be accused of being manipulative. It is not in our interest or the country or the citizens. Therefore, such contributions should be properly disclosed and there should be a legislative infrastructure to ensure that that is done.

I come to the fourth segment of individuals. Some of the feedback that I have had and I stand to be corrected, is that some individuals in a maturing society still feel that if they make a contribution to a political party and that party is not on the

winning side or does not become the government, they can be victimized. I ask my Senate colleagues to check that. Indeed, that is some of the feedback that we have received. I ask myself: How could—we in a maturing society seeking to have developed nation status by 2020—our citizens perceive that they can be victimized by exercising their right, not privilege, under our Constitution? It is something with which we want to do away.

One suggestion for doing away with that, as has taken place in several other more mature societies, is to allow individuals to make political party contributions and claim them on their tax returns if they so wish. It is done in other countries as in the provinces of Canada. It is about how we take some of these issues and help to make and create a more mature society.

I come back to the question of disclosure. Beyond disclosure is the question of limits of contribution to any political party or any election campaign. I think that if there is legislation or the discussion has to be carried further, the question of limits must be set. We know that the whole question of \$50,000 per candidate is a moot question at this point in time; what should be the limit for contribution to any election campaign or political party made by a person or group of connected persons.

That should be clearly articulated in any discussion. It would take away from the perception of citizens that any one person or grouping or private corporation can unduly influence the political party in power to take decisions that might be in favour of that corporation's interest. I stress the question of limits of support to any political party should be disclosed beyond a certain level, whether the figure is \$5 million or \$1 million, it must be part of the whole framework. There can be the perception that influence can morph into some level of corruption or corruptibility on the part of political parties inviting and seeking to raise financing for elections.

I support my colleague, Sen. Prof. Deosaran in this particular Motion. I believe that this should be a matter for a joint select committee as he has articulated and not one for a special select committee or limited to consideration only by the Senate, but by both Houses, for us to ensure all views are captured before or if we go to a position of trying to craft legislation. Why do it here and then go somewhere else and come back? I think that it should be joint. Those are my thoughts on this particular matter.

Thank you.

Adjournment

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ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. President, I beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, March 17, 2009, at 1.30 p.m. We will discuss the Motion listed on the Order Paper:

Be it resolved that this House approve the decision of the President to acquire the lands described in Appendix II for the public purposes specified.

We do have one Motion on the Adjournment.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.13 p.m.