

Leave of Absence

Tuesday April 10, 2012

SENATE

Tuesday, April 10, 2012

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie who is out of the country.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the Acting President, Timothy Hamel-Smith.:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency TIMOTHY HAMEL-SMITH,
Acting President and Commander-in Chief of
the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/T.Hamel-Smith
Acting President.

TO: ARCHBISHOP BARBARA BURKE

WHEREAS Senator Dr. the Honourable Bhoendradatt Tewarie is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TIMOTHY HAMEL-SMITH, Acting President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, ARCHBISHOP BARBARA BURKE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 10th April, 2012 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Dr. the Honourable Bhoendradatt Tewarie.

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 5th day of
April, 2012.”

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Archbishop Barbara Burke took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

**NEWSPAPER REPORT
(EXPLANATION OF)**

Madam Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the presiding officer's authority and responsibility in the Senate flow in large part from the Constitution, from the Senate Standing Orders, the written rules of the Senate, and parliamentary practice or precedent. The duty and responsibility of the presiding officer is to ensure, as far as possible, that the rights of each Senator are not only protected but exercised to the fullest possible extent at every opportunity.

During last Tuesday's Senate committee session a request was made to the Clerk to call all Senators to participate in the first voting exercise during committee stage of the Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons Bill, 2011. According to Standing Order 5(4), the presiding officer's duty is to regulate the conduct of the Senate and to decide on any matter of procedure that may arise applying first and foremost Standing Orders so prescribed. This duty carries with it wide-ranging authority extending to matters as diverse as the behaviour of Senators, the rules of debate, disruptions and the conduct of proceedings, both during debate and during committee stage.

Standing Order 46(2), which addresses division, both during the Senate debate and in committee, states that subject to Standing Order 8(5) every Senator present shall record his vote for either the ayes or the noes, while Standing Order 46(3) instructs the Clerk to announce the voting results after which the chairman of the committee of the whole Senate, again, subject to Standing Order 8(5), declares the result of the division.

Standing Order 46, in dealing with divisions, specifically cross references Standing Order 8 which deals with quorum and the summoning of Senators considered present on that day. Standing Order 8(5) advises that if during a division or a vote there appears that a quorum is not present, the division shall be invalid. The summoning of Senators which is described in Standing Order 8(2), (3) and (4) is, therefore, to avoid the possibility of any rendering of voting as invalid.

The meaning of Senators present is obtained in Standing Order 8(6) which directs any avoidance of doubt by clear declaration that Senators to be summoned by the Clerk, under the Standing Order, shall be those Senators who are not in the

Chamber of the Senate, but are within the precincts thereof. Every effort, in the opinion of this Chair, must be taken to allow for the exercise of rights of all Senators, and further to avoid any possibility of invalidation of any voting during debate or committee whether there appears to be a quorum or not.

The presiding officer is the servant, neither of any one part of the Senate nor of the majority or even of the minority, but rather of the entire Senate as a whole, and must apply the Standing Orders in all instances in a consistent and reasonable manner as best as possible. Contrary to a report in a daily newspaper, there was no delay in the start of the voting and no biased call only to Government Senators. That newspaper allegation was completely incorrect and misleading, and some effort should have been made to obtain clarification or explanation before publication.

In spite of this particular newspaper article, however, this Chair notes the yeoman service undertaken by many long-standing journalists who dedicate themselves to providing material for publishing in a consistent manner in keeping with the national appetite for newsworthy information. The diligence, patience and determination shown by many journalists in the Parliament, in particular, must be recognized as many do offer commendable reporting in a fair, reasonable and professional manner.

It is hoped that this explanation will clarify public utterances and reports previously published. May we all continue to uphold the dignity and the standards of excellence expected in this honourable Chamber. Thank you.

REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES (AMDT.) BILL, 2011

Bill to amend the Regional Health Authorities Act, Chap. 29:05, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Health*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at the next sitting of the Senate on Tuesday, April 17, 2012. [*Hon. E. George*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual audited financial statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2005. [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George)*]
2. Annual audited financial statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2006. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]

3. Annual audited financial statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2007. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]
4. Annual audited financial statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2008. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]
5. Annual audited financial statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2009. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2011. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]
7. Annual report of the Trinidad and Tobago Heritage and Stabilisation Fund for the year ended 2011. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]
8. Annual report of the Integrity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2011. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]
9. Ninety-sixth report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]
10. Ministerial response to the third report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Group 2), on the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago (SPORTT). [*Sen. The Hon. E. George*]

1.45 p.m.

COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

(SEN. FARIS AL-RAWI)

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Dear, Madam Vice-President,

A Privilege Motion.

In accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 26(2), I seek your leave to raise the following matter as a question of privilege.

This morning between the hours of 7.00—7.30 a.m., Sen. Faris Al-Rawi participated in an interview on television, Channel CNC 3, hosted by Ms. Hema Ramkissoon. During the interview Sen. Al-Rawi:

- (a) publicly criticized the decision of the Chairman of a committee of the whole Senate made on April 03, 2012, during deliberations on the Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons Bill to summon Senators who were within the precincts of the Parliament before seeking a division on a particular clause which had been sought by Sen. Al-Rawi;
- (b) reflected adversely on and criticized the decision of the Vice-President of the Senate to invoke the provisions of Standing Order 43 in the Senate, thereby effectively discontinuing the contribution of Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe during the debate on the second reading of the Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons Bill, 2011; and
- (c) stated that Government Senators were egging on the Vice-President in her conduct of the proceedings of the Senate.

Madam Vice-President, the provisions of Standing Order 35(8) of this Senate, in particular, are very clear.

“The conduct of...Members of the Senate or the House of Representatives...shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion moved for the purpose...”

Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand by David McGee at page 453, states as follows:

“Some of the most serious reflections on members that can be made concern those against the character of the Speaker or any other presiding officer—...accusations that presiding officers have shown partiality in discharging their duties. Reporting on a question of privilege concerning a reflection on the Speaker, the Privileges Committee has said, ‘[The]Speaker is in a special position. Being the embodiment of Parliament, reflections upon [the Speaker’s] character or conduct directly attack the very institution of Parliament itself, and have been dealt with accordingly here and in England’.”

Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, Twenty-first Edition, at page 127 states as follows:

“Written imputations, as affecting a Member of Parliament, may amount to breach of privilege, without, perhaps, being libels at common law, but to constitute a breach of privilege a libel upon a Member must concern the character or conduct of the Member in that capacity.”

Later on in that page May states:

“...reflections of the character of the Speaker or accusations of partiality in the discharge of his duties and similar charges against the Chairman of Ways and Means or Chairman of a standing committee or a select committee have attracted...penal powers of the Commons.”

Madam Vice-President, in light of the foregoing, I submit that there is sufficient grounds to believe that Sen. Al-Rawi, by his unwarranted public attacks on the conduct of the Vice-President of the Senate in her official capacity, has committed a contempt of this Senate, and as such this matter should be referred to the Committee of Privileges of this Senate.

Yours sincerely,

Emmanuel George.

Madam Vice-President, I want to serve notice on this Senate that by next week if not the week thereafter, I shall be presenting another Privileges Motion for your consideration. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Vice-President: Hon.Members, with regard to the Motion raised by the Leader of Government Business, I think it is prudent that the matter be deferred for consideration and reported to the President of the Senate upon his return to the Chair.

CLARIFICATION ON RHA BILL

Sen. Penelope Beckles: Madam Vice-President, you had put a question earlier in relation to the Bill; whilst the question was put that it be adjourned to the 17th, at the ending you said to be taken later in the proceedings. The Bill as read—the RHA Bill?

Sen. Cudjoe: Regional Health Authority.

Sen. P. Beckles: Regional Health Authority? Is it the 17th or is it later?

Sen. George: The 17th.

Sen. P. Beckles: Yes, I know, but in the end it was said that it be taken later in the proceedings.

Sen. George: No. No. No. It was said to be taken at the sitting of the Senate—
[*Interruption*]

Sen. P. Beckles: I am just saying—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Cudjoe: No, the Vice-President [*Inaudible*]

Sen. George: Oh, the Vice-President.

Clarification on RHA Bill

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Madam Vice-President: Yes.

Sen. P. Beckles: I just wanted to get that clarified. Thank you very much.

Madam Vice-President: Thank you very much. It is to be taken on Tuesday, April 17, 2012.

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO POSTAL
CORPORATION (AMDT.) BILL, 2012**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [March 06, 2012]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam Vice-President: The debate on the following Bill which was in progress when the Senate adjourned on Tuesday, March 06, 2012, will be resumed: a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act, Chap. 47:02.

Those who spoke on Tuesday March 06, 2012: Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George, Minister of Public Utilities, the mover of the Motion, Sen. Faris Al-Rawi, Sen. Elton Prescott SC, Sen. The Hon. Embau Moheni. Any Senator wishing to join the debate may do so.

Sen. Terrance Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Vice-President. Thank you for allowing me to catch your eye, so to speak, and to make a contribution to this Bill today; an Act to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act, Chap 47:02.

In preparing for this debate I took a trip down memory lane as to what the old post office used to mean to us in Trinidad and Tobago, and I dug out an old airmail envelope which I wrote to my sister, postmarked November 28, 1968, mailed at the Curepe Post Office. This is how we used to communicate in those days. You can see it is all watermarked and so on and my “crapaud foot” handwriting is most prominent on it, but this is how we used to communicate in those days.

The old post office used to occupy a place of great significance in the communities that they would have served. I do not know if the younger Senators like Sen. Ram, Sen. Cudjoe will actually remember that in post offices—and Sen.

The Hon. K. Ramnarine—you actually had savings accounts. You could have saved money in a post office and they would give you a little book. I remember I had the princely sum of \$5 saved in the Caroni Post Office in those days.

In those days the Post Mistress used to occupy a place of great pride in the local community right next to the Principal, the Registrar of Births and Deaths and so on, but from 1968 from when I got this letter to 2012, a lot has happened to impact on the importance of the post office. We went from communicating by letter—I do not know if people remember Telex, old Textel on Independence Square, you would go there to send your cable and a “fella” on a motorbike would deliver your cable home—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Cable and Wireless.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Cable and Wireless. Then we went to phone, we went to fax, we went to email, and now we have the great four: Skype, Facebook, BBM and WhatsApp—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Even firing by fax.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Firing! [*Laughter*] If you have the correct data package your BBM and WhatsApp applications are free. So the role of a post office has undergone dramatic change, and we are here today to debate a Bill that is basically a Bill on procurement, so I do intend to stay within the four corners of procurement especially as it relates to this Bill and analogous cases of procurement.

Madam Vice-President, before I go on to the substantive part of my contribution, please allow me to once again register our complaint on this side about the continued absence almost two years into the reign of this Government of a legislative agenda—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: “They doh know what that is man.”

Sen. T. Deyalsingh:—and to further say that there is a developing trend in this Senate, a trend which I do not like, to start Bills in the Senate and not in the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives, to me, is the proper place to start Bills. They are the superior House to the Senate. The Senate ideally follows what goes on in the House of Representatives. They are our elected officials whereas we are mere political appointees; and I refer to Bills like the Legal Aid and Advice (Amdt.) Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons Bill, the Bill to increase the water rates in Point Lisas, the Desalcott (Amdt.) Bill, the Postal Corporation (Amdt.) Bill, now.

I would really like us as a Senate and as a Government—because although we are not part of the Government, we are part of the governance—to please recognize the House of Representatives as the superior House to this Senate and to fall back into the habit of starting Bills in the House of Representatives.

Madam Vice-President, when this Bill was first moved on March 06, 2012 and we are now April 10, 2012, many things have happened which impacted on this Bill. I would make the link to it very clearly, but let me just say at the forefront of my argument that we cannot separate what is happening in San Fernando, which is a procurement issue with the waterfront project. We cannot separate the utterances of the Minister of Planning, who is not here on that issue, and his comments were widely published on Friday April 06. We cannot separate the grave omission that I feel that the pilot and mover of this Motion, Sen. the Hon. Emmanuel George, made in his presentation when he moved on Tuesday March, 06—and I will come to what I mean very soon.

As I said, this Bill deals clearly with procurement and the analogous material that I have to procurement is—and I would just make a very brief frolic, Madam Vice-President, if you would allow me, but it is related. This vesting of properties in the postal corporation gives me cause for pause because section 33 of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act, Chap. 47:02, if I may read briefly:

“Trinidad and Tobago Post in pursuance of its functions, is not subject to the Central Tenders Board Act.”

This Act gives the body that we are vesting these properties in—not to comply with the Central Tenders Board Act. We have a recent sorry history where another procurement project, and briefly I mention the Invaders Bay project that this Senate cannot get the opinion as to why the Central Tenders Board does not apply to that project, but in this case it is specifically included in the Act.

Members may be wondering where I was going with the San Fernando Waterfront project and what possible connection there is to this postal Bill, and I would say it clearly; is this postal Bill, is this decision to vest these properties a UNC position or a COP position? I say that because I need clarification because there is public squabbling about the waterfront project in San Fernando being a COP project or a UNC project, and this Senate needs to know whether this postal Bill to vest properties is a UNC plan or a COP plan.

2.00 p.m.

We need to know, because clearly I do not want one of the substantive Ministers in this issue, and I am sorry he is not here, the Minister of Planning and the Economy, Sen. Dr. Tewarie, to divorce himself from it and say, “Doh bring me in dat bacchanal.” We have just come out of Easter, and we are seeing on the national political landscape betrayal, denial and a washing of the hands of responsibility by people who have been elected to govern Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Vice-President, this issue about whether a plan is a UNC plan or a COP plan is what I call the classic definition of political madness, political lunacy. [*Desk thumping*] As you mentioned at the start, this Senate is governed by precedent. The hon. Minister of National Security has set a precedent in this Chamber which I like. He has done little jigs and quoting of songs twice, to lend life to his contributions. If I could borrow that, there is a David Rudder song with lyrics which go:

“We mad, we mad, we mad, we mad.

We more than mad St. Ann’s.

This is not a fete in here this is madness.”

I want to know if this plan is a UNC plan or a COP plan, because this is madness, this is utter and total madness, if we do not know. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: “What plan is dat?”

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: The grave error of omission that I lay on the doorstep of the hon. Minister of Public Utilities—and I have his *Hansard* record of that day, all seven pages—is that in piloting a Bill to do with the vesting of properties in the postal corporation, he did not have the courtesy to tell this House about the introduction of postcodes in Trinidad and Tobago. The national community had to hear about postcodes in a newspaper article, I believe—if you would allow me I will come to it soon—published in the *Newsday* of Thursday, March 29. How is it that two weeks before that you could pilot a Bill to vest properties in a postal corporation and not tell this House, and not tell the public, that you have a plan to introduce postcodes into Trinidad and Tobago?

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Because we did that months ago.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Madam President, in looking at the introduction of post codes, I would have thought that any attempt or plan to reconfigure our postal offices would be predicated on the number of people living in Trinidad and

Tobago and where they are living, in other words, census data. The hon. Minister of Public Administration has not yet published the census data for the census taken a year ago. On what basis is the Government now deciding to vest properties into the postal corporation—to vest some and not others?

Madam President, I went to the Central Statistical Office website to see the updated figures for the population of Trinidad and Tobago. I got the mid-year estimate up until 2010 that our population is 1,317,714, and we have a population density per square kilometre, mid-2010, of 256.96 people. My question is: if we are vesting properties today and not vesting some, on what demographic basis, on what geodemographic basis, are those properties being vested and why not others?

This country knows precious little about postcodes, so it is incumbent upon me to shed some light. You see, this introduction of postcodes has very serious consequences that were not carried in the article of *Newsday* Thursday, March 29, 2012, page 9, and I will come to that very soon. On the issue of postcodes, the Soviet Union in 1932 was one of the first countries to introduce postcodes. They are called postcodes, zip codes or pin codes. They can be numeric or alphanumeric and you can have separate codes for high volume users.

The introduction of postcodes, I think, is an admirable thing to be doing in Trinidad and Tobago. It makes the sorting of mail easier; it makes the delivery of mail much more accurate, so I have no problem with the introduction of postcodes. But what I have a problem with is how it is being done, and I will explain to you now exactly why.

On the issue of the postcodes, we are told via the article that the country is to be divided into 72 postal districts; eight in Tobago and 64 in Trinidad. The eight in Tobago, if you take the population of Tobago, and the eight postal areas, you would get one area for every 6,760 people. In Trinidad you would have a postal code area for every 19,744.22 persons. When you research postcodes and see what their advantages and uses are, beyond postcodes the sorting of mail, beyond the delivery of mail and beyond the automation of postal services, we come across something very interesting.

I read from a document, "Postcodes in the United Kingdom". They are used to calculate insurance premiums on your homes. When you merge demographic data, data related to people, with where they live, you get something called geodemographic data. That tells you basically that people of similar demographic characteristics tend to live in the same area, tend to have similar homes, similar

value of homes. Madam Vice-President, what I want to hear today in this Senate is whether the introduction of postcodes in Trinidad and Tobago is going to be used by this Government to value people's homes, to reintroduce something called the "property tax"?

Hon. Senator: Ahhhhh!

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: You may laugh, you may scoff—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: "You say is for insurance, and yuh reach property tax?"

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Because, Mr. Attorney General, there are now areas in England where you have people with similar postcodes, but different types of housing belonging to those who want to be separated, because their council taxes are too high, because they are associated with a neighbouring area with similar postcodes with more expensive types of homes. That is the fact. That is the fact.

Somebody is going to have to stand here today and comfort me and comfort the population of Trinidad and Tobago, that this is not going to be used as a means of determining the value of our homes and so determine what type of taxes we have to pay.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Rather farfetched, Sir.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: You may say so, but let us not forget that the People's Partnership Government rode into power on the back of "Axe the Tax", and the Minister of Finance has sent out signals recently that he has to reintroduce some form of land and building taxes or property taxes.

If you think I am on a frolic here about the relationship between postcodes and taxes, I will just quote briefly In Depth—a study: "America's 100 Most Expensive ZIP Codes", a clear relationship between zip codes or postcodes and the expense of their homes. I quote from the UK:

"Home Values and Home Prices

What's your home worth? Enter your address to calculate an estimate of your home's value instantly. Type a city..."—et cetera, and you get the value of your home. I quote again:

"Use our house price tools to see how much your house is worth. Just enter..."—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Maharaj: Madam Vice-President, if the Senator would give way, please. Could the Senator share with me: Did the ZIP code come first or did the properties come first?

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Vice-President, if it were a Standing Order or a point of order I would gladly reply.

As I go on undeterred:

“Use our house price tools to see how much your house is worth. Just enter your postcode...” [*Interruption*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: I want someone to tell me clearly that the introduction of these postcodes is not a back-door strategy to value our homes and bring back something that they abolished, the land and building taxes for the property tax. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: “I go tell yuh no. Yuh happy?”

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: No? That was the same Government that said no new taxes. The airport tax doubled from \$100—\$200. [*Desk thumping*] Are we to believe you? WASA rates have gone up. Are we to believe no new taxes? The water taxi might go up. No new taxes? I do not take comfort in the assurance of the hon. Attorney General that the introduction of postcodes is not a back-door strategy for land and building taxes, because this Government has a history over the past two years, and recently there has been a 100 per cent increase in the airport departure tax, from \$100—\$200.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: What were you all using to bring the property tax and to value people’s property? Tell us “dat”.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: When Sen. Al Rawi made his contribution he spoke about the non-existence of a plan for the postal corporation, which has not been articulated. We do not know what the plan is. The only reference I have to a plan is Sen. Moheni’s contribution, when he was lead speaker after the hon. Minister of Public Utilities, where he spoke about profitability and viability.

Most postal services around the world do not make money—fact of life. We have to decide: do we want a postal service as a social good or do we want it as a profit-making enterprise or do we want to fall somewhere in between? As a social good it is the provision of a good and service by a government, either totally subsidized or totally free for the benefit of citizens. For example, the PNM has piloted free health care as a social good. We have pioneered free education as a social good. Is the postal service a social good or do we want to make money off it? Do we want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to bear the full economic cost

or not? When Sen. Moheni talked about profitability and viability, my question was: to achieve profitability and viability, what is going to happen to postal rates? Is the philosophy: if you have a social good on one side of the spectrum and profitmaking on the other side, you want to fall somewhere in the middle at break-even point? What is your philosophy?

The PNM clearly had some provisions of goods and services as a social good, as I have described through the years—clear. Now we are hearing that it is about profitability and viability. Is it that in an effort to attain profitability and viability, people are going to have to pay the full economic cost of posting? What is the business plan sent to Cabinet? We need to know.

Madam Vice-President, what are some of the challenges that postal services around the world face? I spoke about the new reality at the start of my contribution, where I went from the mailing of this postal letter I have from 1967 to now. Do you remember the days where the bulk of the mail you received at home were postcards, letters from family, letters from boyfriends, girlfriends, that type of thing? Now the only thing you receive in the mail is what?—bills; because now you are sending e-cards, for example, e-Christmas cards. Gone are the days at Christmas time when you sat at home with your mother and father with a stack of 50 cards, and you wrote out 50 postcards to send out. That impacts on the revenue of the postal service.

2.15 p.m.

Madam Vice-President, that brings us to the new reality because if we take away all these social reasons for using the post office, as I said, and I think you will agree me, the only thing we use the post office for now is for bills.

There is something in mathematics called the Pareto principle, after an Italian mathematician called Pareto; sometimes called the 80-20 rule, it basically says, a small amount in a business context, a small amount of your customers gives you a disproportionately large amount of your revenue. This is clearly demonstrated in the postal service, because between the public utilities like WASA, T&TEC, cable company, the banks, if you took out those four or five mayor customers, do you realize what happens to the postal service?

Sen. Al-Rawi: It falls flat.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: It collapses. Those four or five customers, if we apply the Pareto principle, a very small number of customers generate a disproportionately large bulk of your revenue. My question is, has the Government in deciding to vest these properties and not vest some, have they

considered the trend worldwide, where utilities are now sending their bills to customers, not via the post, but via email? And if that happens, what is the future of the postal service? What is the rationale, what basis is the Government using to vest some properties and not, in the absence of census data?

Sen. Al-Rawi: None.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: None.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Why?

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Where is the census data? What basis is the Government using? Because there are whispers, and I am sorry that the Attorney General has left, again. There is a whisper, and the Attorney General can correct me if I am wrong, that not he personally, but his office has its eyes on a couple of those properties. Is that true or not? Tell us. Tell us.

What we are hearing is that the office of the Attorney General, not the Attorney General, wants to get their hands on a couple of those properties. If that is the case, tell us. No problem, no problem. Because there is a related issue on procurement as I said, and that has to do with the whispers we are hearing about the movement of the Government Printery from Port of Spain to Caroni, and the payment of exorbitant rents, to a friend of the Government in Caroni, for the Government Printery.

When I look at this vesting and non-vesting of these post offices, when I juxtapose that to the talk I hear that the office of Attorney General wants a couple of those properties, when I marry that to the proposed move of the Government Printery to Caroni, to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars of rent, I begin to question the motives. They said no new taxes; I do not believe it. Tell us, why are some properties not being vested, and why some are being vested in the absence of census data; on what basis is the Ministry of Planning and the Economy working with the Ministry of Public Utilities to decide which properties to vest?

The reason that gives me cause for concern is the issue over the valuation of those properties. We have not yet seen a proper valuation, an up-to-date valuation of the properties to be vested, and the properties not to be vested, and that leaves the door open for shenanigans.

Sen. Al-Rawi: And why is TTPost going into rental?

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Exactly! And as my colleague says, why is TTPost going into rental of properties? It goes back to one of my opening statements about this thing. Is this a UNC plan or is this a COP plan to vest? And the Minister of Planning and the

Economy cannot do like Pontius Pilate and wash his hands, and say keep me out of the UNC/COP bacchanal. They are the Government; they have the reins of power. What this country does not want is paralysis in planning, because we already have economic paralysis, and now we have paralysis in planning, where your factions are taking ownership of different plans, and the mediator, the Minister of Planning and the Economy is saying, and I quote from Friday, April 06, 2012, *Trinidad Guardian*:

“Keep me out of waterfront squabble.”

How can a Minister of Government, who wrote this Government’s manifesto, who is in the Ministry of Planning and the Economy, who should be involved in planning, whether it is the postal service or whether it is the waterfront project, put his hands up like Pontius Pilate and say, “Keep me out of waterfront squabble. Keep me out of the postal squabble now”?

Sen. Al-Rawi: The post office is on the waterfront in San Fernando.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Exactly! And as my colleague reminds me here, there is a post office on the waterfront in San Fernando. I am linking it to the Bill, Madam Vice-President, as you can clearly see. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

This issue raises more questions than it answers, and before I can give my support, and I think before my colleagues here can give their support, I need to summarize some issues for our satisfaction. We need to get the up-to-date valuations. We need to know what the business plan is. We need to know on what basis they are vesting these properties. What will be the fate of the non-vested properties? And I want, again, a clear unambiguous statement from somebody here, that the introduction of postal codes will not be used to value properties to reintroduce or introduce a new version of that tax. I want to know that, because I have clearly demonstrated it can be so used, and has been so used in other jurisdictions.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to make a short intervention, and I throw some questions out, which I hope Members on the opposite side will answer. With those few words, I thank you.

Sen. Helen Drayton: Thank you, Madam Vice-President. Now this Bill seeks to amend section 61 of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act to remove the stipulation of 12 months for the vesting of the property. Now, this in itself is a very simple matter, and I really take no issue with that in principle, it was a requirement under the law that was not done within the stipulated 12-month period. So my issue is really one of accountability, transparency and corporate governance of an important national service.

Certain questions were raised by previous speakers with respect to viability, and whether there would be a need to continue renting after vesting. I commend the Government for its prompt response to those questions, I went through the responses, and let me say that in most cases the responses could only make sense within the framework of a strategic business plan, which we have not seen, and I do not expect that we would see. [*Desk thumping*] It is always difficult to have confidence in statements of viability, when the last audited report for TTPost was laid in Parliament in the House of Representatives for 2005 in 2009. So no audited reports have been submitted to Parliament since 2005. That alone tells me that there is a failing in basic corporate responsibility, for which there could be no plausible excuse, and if recent audited reports are not available, then TTPost has been flagrantly breaching the law, which in section 23 states specifically, that annual reports in accordance with international standards should be submitted, shall be submitted to the Auditor General annually, and of course it also breaches section 8, which specifically states that it shall operate in accordance with sound business principles.

So on one hand what do we have? We are being asked to vest millions of dollars in TTPost, and it is operating outside of the law, and it has been operating that way for the past 7 years. So that companies operating within sound business principles would have up-to-date audited accounts. They would submit them, at least three to five months after the end of their last fiscal year. I am not generally taken in by the argument that such accounts have been submitted to the Auditor General, unless I know exactly when the accounts were submitted, and for what years they were submitted.

Let me say that on the other hand, generally speaking, my personal experience with TTPost, in terms of service delivery, has been fairly good, and that speaks to a couple of things, is that operations management is making an effort to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago in an excellent way. On the other hand, it is a shame that the board lets down the company with respect to the governance of its affairs.

The company has been losing millions of dollars, annually, and that is no different from national post offices worldwide, and we know why that has been so, the Minister has expressed the reasons. It has to do with the advancement of information technology; it has to do with a number of transactions that are taking place electronically, and of course, the use of door-to-door couriers to facilitate Internet shoppers. So that what post offices have been doing is creating 21st Century services, and to that end, it is not a question of brick and mortar, they are becoming smaller, leaner, more competitive, given the increase in electronic transactions, and of course as I said, the private courier services.

I note that TTPack service is offering a courier service, and that, of course, was in response to developments, which is a good step which is showing that it wants to keep current, and that there is forward-thinking. But that service is by no means competitive, since a client has to go to a TTPost outlet in order to pay for delivery before it can be received.

On the other hand, in terms of the private service, there is door-to-door delivery, with debit and credit card payment at your delivery point, which is a very convenient service, albeit it is probably a bit more expensive. But if I have to pay a little more, and I do not have to go down to a post office to pay a bill, then certainly I am prepared to pay a little more. So the service is not competitive. This is why some of the answers to the questions previously raised beg more questions than answers, and strategically more concrete as I said, and mortar. Infrastructure cannot be the answer to greater viability in an era that calls for greater efficiency in delivery, getting mail from strategically located centres and hubs, door to door, in response to the market developments.

2.30 p.m.

Now I appreciate that the vesting of properties will not end the need to rent, and that is because there are still many people who are not computer literate, who are not using computers and they need to go to the post office to service their basic needs. But, while there must be some infrastructure, given what has been said with respect to the properties to be vested and the list of properties, and what has been said with respect to viability, it must be noted that higher rentals will be at the urban and larger city area locations, and these properties, I understand, are not properties that will be vested.

Although the property market is somewhat depressed now, the reality is that TTPost will face higher rental increases in the future in the very urban areas like Port of Spain, San Fernando and Maraval. The Government answers also made reference to the need for rentals in new residential areas in order to service the needs of the communities. These new residential areas are likely to attract far higher rentals than most of the properties on this list here for vesting.

So, in the Government's response to the situation with respect to viability, it also said that properties which are vested and the properties which it will not be using, it will rent out those properties; and I would ask the question, does that really make sense? Maintenance, insurance and other overheads are very high. Why would TTPost, when it is struggling to get its core business on a very competitive and profitable footing, want to go into real estate market? The document goes on to say that the rental income, that the estimate would be about

\$5.3 million by 2014/2015. Correct me if my figures are wrong. What TTPost is saying is that in the next two to three years it would develop a number of properties and rent out by 2015 for a total gross income of \$5.3 million, because that is a cost before maintenance, insurance and many other expenses.

Of course, since the valuations of the properties were last done in 2007, it is assumed that today it would get a higher rental for properties. I do not know, it is just an assumption.

Now, curiously, in another section under the viability of retail business it speaks about the opportunity to explore new business initiatives such as a document printing centre. Frankly, I do not want to be critical with respect to enterprise, but the estimated benefits would be an average of \$20,000 per month, and it said, “on average of \$20,000 per month”, which is approximately \$240,000 a year. The estimated cost to develop the properties identified for vesting is \$106 million. So, something is not making sense at the moment and I have to assume that there is a well-thought-out business plan somewhere, that these creative initiatives could be justified. So, I will be frank; while most of the answers to the questions do not make sense and while none of the figures with respect to viability make sense, let me say that there could be valid reasons for vesting of the properties.

Before I do that I would turn quickly and quote some sections of the Act, so bear with me for a moment. The Act under section 19(3) says that “The Board shall prepare a corporate plan”—would the Minister advise in his summation whether such a plan exists? Now, it says “shall prepare a corporate plan”. Under section 20(1)(b) it states that the plan must include the following—

“(b) the nature and scope of activities to be undertaken in order to achieve the stated objectives;”

I do not know what the objectives are:

“(c) “...financial and operational strategies, performance indicators and targets as the Board considers appropriate;

(d) a forecast of revenue and expenditure;”

Under section 21(1)—and I am sure that the public would be interested in learning whether TTPost is in compliance with section 21—the section of the law states that:

“In conjunction with the submission of a corporate plan and before the end of each financial year, the Board shall submit to the Minister, a financial plan for the next financial year”—and it—“shall include—

- (a) a profit and loss account forecast;
 - (b) a capital account forecast; and
 - (c) a projection of—
 - (i) funds to be retained for investment;...
- (2) The capital account forecast shall provide a separate listing of the capital requirements and the capital to be raised.”

Among other requirements the Board shall have:

- “(a) the need to earn a reasonable rate of return on capital assets;
- (b) the need to maintain financial viability;
- (c) the need to maintain a reasonable level of reserves to meet—
 - (i) the estimated future demand for postal services; and
 - (ii) the improvement of the accessibility and performance of the reserved services.”

So, the question is this, assuming it has submitted such plans to the Minister for this in the previous years, what are the forecasted capital requirements for the next 5—10 years?

From a business person’s point of view and from my limited knowledge of the market, I see an opportunity for TTPost to become a 21st Century national postal service. I cannot be definitive about the properties that are to be vested and whether such event would in fact improve the balance sheet. That is in the absence of greater transparency. However, I see the need for a lean, efficient organization, delivering a convenient service for traditional as well as online customers. I see the need to streamline the service to meet current business and residential needs. I see the need to reduce rental expenditure while at the same time increasing revenues and the vested properties may very well satisfy part of that requirement. Now, I would not be surprised if an enhanced balance sheet as a result of vesting attracts privatization, and that may very well be on the cards and the Minister may wish to state that that is not an option.

The Bill asks the Senate to remove the reference to 12 months in the law so that the properties can be vested in TTPost. There may be a need to do so, but I ask, how could a Senate responsibly do so when TTPost has not provided audited accounts in accordance with the law for the past seven years? [*Desk thumping*] I acknowledge that there is a new board. How can it responsibly do so in a loose

and open-ended way? The legislation originally placed the limit of 12 months during which the vesting of all properties had to be done. If there is some great urgency to vest the properties now after a period of more than 12 years has lapsed, why does the Government want an open-ended situation with no time limit, given the past performance of what looks like procrastination? Why not amend the Act to effect that the vesting must be done within a specific time period after valuations of the property? I repeat, I note that section 23 of the Act indicates that the Auditor General or an auditor authorized by the Auditor General shall audit the books of the company annually. Have the accounts for the most recent year been sent to the Auditor General? If so, when were the accounts sent? Has a comprehensive audit of the operations of TTPost been done as mentioned in the Act? If so, when? If not, why not?

In closing, I would prefer to see a deadline for evaluating the properties and vesting the properties after a given period of time, maybe two years, maybe 18 months. I would like to hear in the Minister's wrap-up good reason why this cannot be done. By that I mean, a reason that would satisfy my need to support this legislation.

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

The Minister of Transport (Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj): Thank you very much, Madam Vice-President, for allowing me to join in this debate. Before I begin let me first congratulate our former colleague, temporary Senator, Rabindra Moonan, who has now assumed the position of Chairman of Caribbean Airlines. We look forward to great things from Sen. Moonan if we are to measure his potential in the Senate. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Hinds: You got your man.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I would like to use this occasion also to commend Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George for bringing this piece of legislation which is long overdue. [*Desk thumping*] As mentioned by Sen. Helen Drayton, this was first part of the original legislation way back in 1999, well over 12 years. It took over 12 years to bring an amendment of one line to this honourable Senate, and I would speak more about the importance of that one line which was debated here in part on another occasion. But there was a reason for this amendment to vest these properties in TTPost. It was hinted by Sen. Al-Rawi and Sen. Deyalsingh about the historical context in which this one-line amendment needed to be debated. And to have a proper appreciation of that context, if we look at the World Bank Report on The Postal Sector in Developing and Transition Countries;

Chap. 1, page 1; it states very clearly that:

“...in many developing countries the postal sector is far from healthy. The sector, and in particular the incumbent post office, is characterized by low volumes, poor quality of service, and weak financial performance. In the majority of developing countries both the postal sector and the post office urgently require reform—from the level of policy, through regulation, and...corporate restructuring.”

That is the World Bank Report of 2004 that gives some sort of global perspective of developing countries and post offices that operate in those countries; Trinidad and Tobago was no different in that respect.

That World Bank Report of September 2004—Global Information and Communication Technologies Department Policy Division—further highlighted Trinidad and Tobago and went into detailed analysis of the historical context of that piece of legislation of 1999. It said, and I quote on the Market and Regulatory Environment:

“Prior to reform in 1999, the public postal operator in Trinidad and Tobago was caught in a ‘vicious circle’ of poor financial performance, low investment, poor customer service, and decreasing mail volumes.”

In the area on Public Operator Status and Performance it stated:

“Financial performance was dismal; the post had lost money for years and revenues typically covered only two-thirds of costs.”

In the area of Reform Environment it further developed those points.

So, clearly the environment in which this legislation was placed was an industry, albeit a public sector industry requiring some sort of rejuvenation, and you had the then UNC Government bringing this piece of legislation which included vesting of the properties, and it is linked to a World Bank loan, which I would get to in a bit.

2.45 p.m.

The demand for vesting of the properties is to facilitate properties that formerly fell under the Post Master General of Trinidad and Tobago into the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation. We have heard about many of the properties, but I do not think we have singled them out. The TTPost in providing information to I think all Senators, gave us a fair appreciation of all the properties that are to be vested, those properties that are not to be vested and the approximate valuation at the point in time.

We have post offices in Belmont, Laventille, Santa Cruz, Debe, Tacarigua, Curepe, among those to be vested. This vesting demand was highlighted by a contribution by the Solicitor General in a letter dated March 16, 2005, where she stated very clearly that in order for the property to be properly vested there needs to be an amendment. So again in 2005, I think the Minister of Public Utilities at the time, would have been the then MP, Penelope Beckles, if I am not incorrect.

Given this long delay of over a decade and more, we are in dire need, in order to get the post office back on track, to get this vesting order passed. While we have been waiting for the last years, the postal workers have been suffering. In an article dated November 18, 2011, I believe the in *T n T Mirror*, it says:

“TTPost seeing red

Financial problems have forced TTPost to embark on some cost-cutting measures, which has resulted in...closure of its post office centre at Trincity Mall.

Customers of T&TEC, WASA, TSTT, B Mobile, Flow, Direct TV and Digicel were advised that as of October 31st 2010, payments will no longer be accepted”— for these services...

This was in November 2011.

Interestingly enough, on March 26, 2008, the Government of the day spent US \$4.7 million to upgrade its service because of the unsatisfactory working conditions that the workers found themselves in. So while there has been this delay of vesting the properties in TTPost and thereby giving them an avenue to raise funds to generate some sort of financing to operate and ensure their survivability in a very competitive world in terms of postal world, we see the delay happening.

In an article dated Thursday, July 27 by Asha Javeed, we have a record here in an interview with Colin Lucas the then General Manager, of the losses that TTPost suffered:

“2000—\$14.8 million loss,
2001—\$14 million loss,”

And it goes on and on. The Auditor General’s report, the most current one, fully details these losses, clearly pointing out that we need to address these issues.

The challenges facing the postal community globally are not unique to Trinidad and Tobago—pointed out here by so many Senators. However, I disagree with them in one regard, in that we cannot only lay the blame for the postal challenge at the feet of the Internet, BBM and email. While they have made a significant impact in dealing with what some would consider a death blow to the postal

service, as people use these alternatives more and more, research has also shown that in rural areas, rural US, and I think we would see the same thing in rural Trinidad and Tobago, where they may have limited Internet access or if any at all, that the postal service was also declining there. It speaks really to something that the anthropologists are looking at, the art of communication via handwriting and how we communicate with each other generally, is declining.

So while the Internet, email and technology may be a significant factor in the reduction of the traditional mail that we are accustomed to over the years, it is not the only reason. We have been traditionally moving away from that form of communication, even though I see some people are still holding on steadfastly to the art of letter writing and so on. We saw most recently the Mayor of Port of Spain, Louis Lee Sing writing the Leader of the Opposition speaking about his lack of confidence in him in a no confidence Motion in the House. I do not think he posted that. I think even in that area he did not post the letter, I think it was hand delivered.

Interestingly enough, the company that set up and established the postal system in Trinidad and Tobago—TTPost New Zealand—they recorded a profit in 2012 which is very, very interesting given the fact that post offices all over the world are dropping. New Zealand Post which established TTPost here recorded profits. That bit of research caught my eye. Why did our New Zealand establishers of the TTPost record a profit and TTPost recorded a lost? Upon examination it was not their core business, it was not the postal services that resulted in profitability from the New Zealand post, but instead the ancillary services. So you had their banking functions which are attached to the post office reaping their profits which redound to the benefit of the whole postal community there in New Zealand with that thrust.

Perhaps we may need to revisit the post bank which was delinked from TTPost.

But the area of vesting—coming back with this main point, was something which has been on the books for some time and has been argued for. If I quote from the *Hansard* of March 9, 2004, a contribution by the then Sen. Wade Mark and I quote from him, and he is talking particularly about vesting of properties in accordance with the Act, section 61(1). He says here:

“This is not the fault of TTPost. The Minister must tell us why the Minister did not, within 12 months of the commencement of this section, vest in Trinidad and Tobago Post such property which was under the direction and management of the Post Master General.

Madam President, the Auditor General is saying that evidence of the vesting of property in TTPost was not seen. So, was property vested and the records— [Interruption] I am talking about 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and we are now in 2004. The PNM has been in office for...27 months. So, we want you to tell us...”

He basically wanted to find out why the property had not been vested after 27 months. Well it took longer than the 27 months. It took 12 years and it took Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George, Minister of Public Utilities, to bring this order. [Desk thumping]

I would like to probably know what was in the mind of the then Minister of Public Utilities that delayed this very important amendment, because her contribution in that debate indicated otherwise. I am hearing a different position now from the Opposition Bench. I do not know if the representatives here are different from the representatives then. I quote from the contribution of the Minister of Public Utilities, in 2004, that was the Hon. Pernelle Beckles. It says in this debate:

“The other issue will deal with some of the concerns raised, as they relate to not being able to meet their income, has to do with the vesting of properties. We know that, under section 61 of the Act, those properties under the management of the Postmaster General were to be vested in TTPost in a 12-month period. In other words, that should have been completed in February 2000. An inter-ministerial committee was set up first under the UNC, but none of the vesting consistent with the 1999 Act had taken place up to that time and therefore TTPost did not have the opportunity to gain revenue, such as rental income, from the property sources. I am simply saying that this was part of an agreement made between TTPost and the government at that time.

Under this administration”—their administration—“the inter-ministerial committee on vesting was reconstituted in April 2003 and the committee has made significant progress. As of March 18, 2004, 38 properties have been surveyed and verified, 10 valuations have been completed and the committee has now an action plan. One of the terms of the agreement with the Delegated Management Authority was that, with those properties being vested in TTPost, TTPost would have been allowed to have revenue, I think we all know those are substantial properties that I am talking about.”

Those are the words of the then Minister of Public Utilities, the hon. Pernelle Beckles. I am very interested to hear if she would come to this Senate today and argue against an argument which she was advancing in 2004. She goes on to say:

“The agreement was that, under the government, all the post offices throughout the country would have been vested in TTPost and they could have upgraded them and

rented them. There are several prime properties, for example, on Wrightson Road, in Tunapuna and in Arima...”

And so on.

So it is hypocritical at best for the Opposition when they were in Government to take one position, and when they are in the Opposition take a different position. [Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: So what about the Independent Bench?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: And when there is the allegation of the lack of a business plan, I have heard this repeated by the two contributors on the Opposition Bench, there was a business plan. It was tied to a World Bank loan and I am sure the Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George will speak about that. In that it speaks about several things including the vesting, and I draw reference to the World Bank document.

“IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETION AND RESULTS REPORT.

June 22, 2007

Trinidad and Tobago has an up to date main facility with modern sorting equipment and management process. Service compares favorably with best world practice as shown in Table 2 below. It has higher levels of home delivery than the USA, and a dense network of post offices that compares favorably to European countries. The major concern is that the volume of mail does not compare favorably, with people receiving only 5 percent of the volume received in Switzerland. Thus the country established a postal organization with world access levels but with much lower mail volume, affecting its financial...”—viability.

As it speaks to the loan and why we were not successful in getting the TTPost off, and it points directly to the vesting of properties as their main reason, it goes on:

“TTPost did not achieve a positive NPV, using discounted net income (loss) figures from 1999 to 2006 based on available financial information. As discussed...this is the main shortcoming of the project, caused by (i) unrealistic expectations regarding mail volume growth and costs of universal access, and (ii) Government’s lack of action regarding tariff increase and vesting of properties, as well as higher wages granted to civil servants”

So the World Bank recognizes one of the reasons for the shortcomings; the failures of TTPost to turn around itself was the vesting of the properties.

There was a business plan, but after a decade of neglect of a lack of vesting, one would have to expect that that business plan would need a certain degree of review and reformulation at a point in time. I find it very disingenuous from some of those on the other side to speak of business plan. I want to know where was the business plan for

World GTL Project? We have to now look at the scrapping of a plan valued at \$2.8 billion. Waste of money. Where was the business plan under the PNM for that? Where was the business plan for the water taxi that we are still burdened with, incurring an expenditure of \$50 million per year, and incurring a continuous monthly maintenance fee and so on? Those entities did not have a business plan, but we have a business plan for this. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Produce it.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I am sure in the fullness of his presentation, Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: In his wrap-up of the debate?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—would give you a clear presentation of where TTPost is right now and where we hope to be.

With those few words, I would like to thank you, Madam Vice-President.

3.00 p.m.

Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe: Madam Vice-President, it is always a pleasure to deliver in this Senate. I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this Bill. I wanted to just throw in my two cents in this debate. I am going to be very short. I have listened to the debate on both sides of the Senate and it seems as though we are having some kind of difficulty because we do not have—or should I say, the Government does not have a plan. Like for all the other things, they do not have a plan for what they intend to do with these properties.

At one point in time I am hearing us talking about the postal service as a social service and at another time I am hearing us making the point that we are trying to make this investment for making a profit and generating revenue and so forth. I think it is really important for the Government to state its policy and its plan for the postal service so that we can know exactly what you want us to support; what you want to do; identify the different properties that you want to vest in; what is the current value and so forth. Right now we are working with 2007 valuations.

Now, on the first day of the debate Sen. Al-Rawi and Sen. Moheni would have raised some issues and I want to thank the Minister and his team for providing the document. They provided a document to try to answer some of the questions raised in the debate on the first day. And I hold the same view as Sen. Drayton, because this document makes no sense without a business plan.

The document speaks to saving money and making the distribution of mail more effective and more efficient and so forth, but later on we are talking about spending money on refurbishing and upgrading these properties and employing more people to operate in these properties. Then another part of the document speaks about renting the properties. So I think the Government really needs to make up its mind as to which properties it wants to use and for what; what we are going to rent; what we are going to use for strengthening the distribution network and so forth.

I think it is page 8 of the document that speaks to investing \$106 million to refurbish and upgrade about 41 properties. That does not sound so realistic to me. One hundred and six million dollars to outfit and upgrade these properties, I do not know, for most of the supporting document that was sent by the Minister and his staff, it seems as if they were guessing and just estimating off the top of their heads. There was not any strategy, any statistic or any strong information or details or particulars behind these figures.

So if we are supposed to come here to make a decision and to try to lend some support to the Government, we have to have all the information so that we make an informed decision as to what is to take place. Do not get us wrong, Sen. Maharaj. It is not that the PNM said back in the day that, yes, we should vest these properties, and today we are saying no. I have no problem in vesting the properties, but we want to know what you want to do. What is your plan? And does it make good business sense?

When Sen. George would have piloted this Bill, he spoke to different countries and different states in the US and around the world shutting down post offices due to new technology and so forth, so I really want to know why we are trying to do the opposite. In one part of the document, we are saying we are expanding postal services by vesting these properties; we still have not made a decision as to what is supposed to happen. That is why there is some difficulty in supporting, because you are asking yourself, support what?

We have heard at least three Speakers from the Government side and we still have not heard the plan or what we are expected to support. So I am hoping in the debate that we can have some more information and some more clarity and some more precision and accuracy as to what is intended, because the Minister and the Members of the Government side would have said one thing and the person who created this document is saying something else.

For instance, if you look at the heading of the document—I read it a couple of weeks ago and I brought it again this week. If you look at the headings of the document and then read the description and the different objectives, some of them do not even relate to what the heading says. So I hope that we can review this and come up with some kind of plan.

I am concerned about the business plan for this initiative. We spoke about \$160 million to upgrade and refurbish 40 properties, and then I heard Sen. Deyalsingh introduce the point of eight business codes for Tobago. That is roughly one postal code for 7,000 people, while in Trinidad you have one postal post for 20,000 people, and that is a huge difference. So I am trying to understand the information that would have gone into creating this plan, and the same for post offices. What kind of information went into coming up with the decision as to where to have post offices in Trinidad, and I want to know particularly for Tobago.

Now, as I raise Tobago—any time I speak in this House I must raise Tobago—I want to point to the *Hansard* record when the Minister would have piloted the Bill. This is page 38—before I am called for being irrelevant I want to link it one time so that there would be no trouble—the second paragraph. This is March 06, 2012, when Sen. Emmanuel George would have piloted the Bill. I am reading from page 38, the second paragraph. I quote:

“It is important to mention, Mr. President, four properties were also required to be vested after consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly. However, the THA served notice to the corporation to quit the properties in three locations: Scarborough, Roxborough and Moriah. So TTPost currently operates out of the Speyside location and has rented properties in Scarborough, Bon Accord and Castara to fulfil its responsibilities. In that regard, no properties can be vested from Tobago at this time, as TTPost awaits notification of alternative sites from the Tobago House of Assembly.”

But if you look at the document that was sent to us by the staff of the Ministry of Public Utilities and you look at the list, it mentions some Tobago properties under the list of properties to be vested. I do not know if they were properties to be vested in 2007 or properties to be vested in 2012, but I hope the Minister can clarify later.

Anyway, that second paragraph of page 38 that was delivered by Sen. George, gives the impression that the Government, or the Ministry and the Minister, wants to strengthen the distribution network by vesting these properties in Tobago but the Tobago House of Assembly would not allow them to, therefore Tobago cannot enjoy the services. That is the impression I got in listening to the debate. So I really wanted to just respond to that little piece right there.

The Tobago House of Assembly and the postal corporation has always had a very, very cordial relationship, so I found the statement—or should I say the way the statement was delivered—to be somewhat disingenuous. Now, when TTPost adopted its new business plan it decided to vacate and desert several of their

properties in Tobago, so many of those properties were left there just deteriorating over the years. I can speak specifically for Plymouth, which is down in my area. Plymouth was just sitting there and the Assembly came up with an agreement with TTPost to use Plymouth as a community facility. So now it is used like a community centre, or something of that sort, which members of the community and stakeholders of the community can use.

That has happened to several other properties in Tobago where the House of Assembly came to an agreement or some arrangement with TTPost to utilize those buildings and TTPost would have stated that the existing properties that were in their name at that time, the general postal service, were not feasible or not suitable to conduct their business under this new plan.

TTPost had its eyes on some other property in Tobago and sought the assistance and cooperation of the Tobago House of Assembly to acquire and to get these pieces of land. Now, I can say specifically, there is one in Speyside, Moriah; there is interest in a parcel of land in Scarborough behind Scotia Bank, and in the land use plan for Friendship Estate, there are plans for TTPost to be situated there. I think that is where TTPost wants to have its headquarters. These are parcels of land that were requested by TTPost.

So to speak now as if the Tobago House of Assembly—like we do not have a cordial relationship, that is not so. We are in consultation and collaboration and working cordially with TTPost to acquire the lands that it requested. Of course, there are some hiccups in the process, and those hiccups are not because of malice or because of a discordial relationship. Those hiccups are due to the normal challenges that Tobagonians face in doing land issues; in doing business as it relates to land each and every day: land registration; getting your land titles; your land deeds and so forth, and this is what is holding up the process. It has to do with doing the land titles and deeds and the separation, the cutting up of the land so that TTPost can have its documents to say, “Okay, this is ours and this is what we will use the land for.”

But you do not hear about those challenges unless they relate to some big business person or the Government, but these are challenges that we face every day, and I think sometime next week or later on in the month or next month, when we speak about the amendment to the two land Bills that were laid, we would get into the nitty-gritty of some of those problems. For instance, I remember the lawyer, Debra Moore-Miggins, complaining about a stamp duty machine that is preventing people from getting their deeds and so forth. So these are the kinds of problems that we would face now in getting these lands ready for the normal “Joe” on the street and for giving the postal corporation its necessary documents to proceed with its new buildings for post offices.

As I touch on Friendship Estate—because in the land use plan for Friendship Estate there is consideration to have TTPost stationed there, and the Government likes to make announcements day in, day out, about “we have this plan for Friendship Estate”, or they are always interested in doing something on Friendship Estate. But Friendship Estate is not paid for in total.

As you may know, most of the lands in Tobago are owned privately, so whenever these estates or these lands came on the market, the House of Assembly at that time, under the People’s National Movement and in collaboration with the central government of the People’s National Movement, made efforts to try to acquire these lands for public use for Tobagonians so that we can have something to call our own.

Now, Friendship Estate happens to be one of those estates that when it got on the market, we jumped at it; we grabbed at it and the land is already acquired and all the administrative work is already done. What is needed now is the payment. We had a payment plan. We started paying and this Government has not made payments for Friendship Estate.

So while we talk about doing all these wonderful things with Friendship Estate and TTPost at Friendship Estate and so forth, we have to finish paying for that land. So I urge the People’s Partnership Government to, as they say, in local parlance, put your money where your mouth is, and really get down to the nitty-gritty of it. *[Interruption]* Yes, and that is the work of the People’s National Movement and the People’s Partnership, so say something.

3.15 p.m.

Madam Vice-President, we laid all the foundations and set things up; all they do is cut ribbons and smile for the cameras. “I ain’t worrying with dem”

Sen. Karim: “You lookin beautiful, love that hairstyle.” *[Laughter]*

Sen. S. Cudjoe: So, Madam Vice-President—he made me lose my page—but, at the end of the day my concern is really, what is the business plan?

Now, I want to look at some of the challenges that we have right now that do not even relate to having new buildings or vesting the properties. There are some little glitches in the system that we can fill the gaps and get the postal service in our country running the way it is supposed to.

I will give you an example, for instance, next day mail. I came to Parliament today, and this is my document that should have been sent to my home. Many times the Parliament sends these documents on next day mail and I do not get the document

until I go home the day after or later on in the week after the sitting has passed. So, I do not get to see some of the documents that are necessary to prepare—now, thank God that the Parliament tries to do business electronically and send these emails. But, next day mail in our country is not operating as it is supposed to.

Also, when the delivery guys or the people responsible for delivering the mail come to the house, if you are not at home they should leave a note. I know when I lived in the US, when the mailman comes to your house and you are not there he leaves a note in your mailbox, so they do not have to come back to me tomorrow. I would then go to the headquarters and get my mail. I think that they should do that. So that if the excuse is, okay, when they came to my house I was not at home, at least let me see a little note in my box so that I would know that they came and I can go and pick up my document. Now, next day mail regionally, because, TTPost speaks glowingly about having this regional next day service or Quickpak service, I find it interesting to learn that some of our Quickpak mail goes up to the US and then comes back down to the Caribbean.

I remember when I was applying to do my masters at UWI the document that was sent to Barbados made its way to Miami and came back down to Barbados. I think there is some need for technical cooperation and some regional cooperation in operating our postal services. I would be happy to see the day when I could get on my computer and pay for stamps on the computer, print my stamp or my envelope and put my mail in a drop box and the mail lady would come and just take it out the drop box rather than having to go to the post office.

I remember paying bills at the post office in the US and ordering goods and services online and paying through, I think, a postal note, but it is as good as money where the person on the other end collects that money.

Sen. Karim: Well, they could have a Caribbean single market stamp too.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: I do not know about that. Maybe we can talk about that. Anyway, so there are a lot of little things that we can do to make the current system more effective. I remember looking at the news a couple weeks ago and there was a lady complaining; her name is Miss John, if I am not mistaken it is Kathleen John. She was a worker at one of the TTPost franchises in Tobago, and she was complaining that since December to date—which would have been in March— she had not received payment for her services.

Now, these little mail women or mail ladies and mailmen in your community, they play an integral role in the postal service so you can go to the corner store at somebody's house. In my years growing up our postal service was in the gallery,

the porch of somebody's house. These units or these little mini post offices are very critical to serving rural communities. So, if you want to speak glowingly about serving, providing postal service to the rural communities, we have to ensure that these key stakeholders are well taken care of, that they have the necessary equipment and the tools, and they are well compensated and feel happy doing their work. Because, when they are upset sometimes you receive your mail, already open and read—could just be for being curious. But, Madam Vice-President, we want to make sure they have all their facilities and they are comfortable doing their work.

So in closing, I do support vesting the properties, the whole idea and the principle in it. But, it is difficult to give my full support, my wholehearted support and say yes, I am down with this plan, I am fired up and I am ready to go without knowing the details of the business plan, without knowing what this Government intends to do with these properties, which ones they are going to use for business purposes, which ones they are going to use to provide that universal postal service; what is the value for the prime real estate in certain areas. I want to know some more details, so I can say yes. And, when I place my vote at the end of the day, and I say yes, I support this Bill or no, I have the reasons and the necessary information to back my decision. With those few words, Madam Vice-President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. James Armstrong: Thank you, Madam Vice-President. Madam Vice-President, I would be brief. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this Bill. Where I would like to start is for us to consider really what it is we want in terms of a postal service in this country.

I have lived in a number of countries where there was no postal delivery service to your door. And, that has not been a very good experience, particularly coming from a country where I am accustomed to receiving mail each day at my residence. I am sure that we would not want to go the route of scaling back the service that we have now, and therefore, I think that everyone would agree that what we would prefer is an efficient service, where we receive our mail at our residence.

In order to do this, it means that there would be a cost. I was trying to do some research to determine really, what is the cost of operating the service that we have now. I was not actually able to find as much information as I would have liked. However, I contacted TTPost and I must say, I was quite pleased that someone facilitated me and gave me a fair amount of information in terms of what I wanted.

Also, on their website I was looking at developments and things that they had posted there. The first thing that I saw was the whole business of the postal code, and, I was pleased to see that. But, I would also like to mention that this is something that started a very long time ago. If I am not mistaken, I think it might have started somewhere around 2005/2006, because it was something that I was following while lecturing at the university, in that some students, I gave them some assignments to look at that, and I was aware of the fact that Prof. Deo Padaye, had some interest in this and had actually raised it, and I am aware that that was in fact on the table.

My understanding of it, a postal code, is that it would save time and operating cost, which is one of the reasons, why I certainly would like to see it accelerated; reduction in the return of mail; automation of sorting—which I thought actually existed already—postal code products; data bases; ecommerce; Internet purchasing; marketing agencies benefits and so on. So that the postal code business is something that I strongly support and I think that TTPost should really proceed with. [*Desk thumping*] I hope that this would come on stream soon.

The other thing that jumped out at me, Madam Vice-President, had to do really with the volume of the service being provided, and I was quite surprised with the information that I got and it is not on the website. As I said, I called TTPost and I was provided with some information by one of the officers there. I was quite surprised that in the year 2008/2009, the volume of items or mail or whatever you want to call it, was actually \$68 million-plus, in 2008. In 2009/2010, it actually went up to \$72 million. I was quite curious as to why that happened and I was advised that in that year there were actually two elections, and maybe if we could contrive in some way to have an election each year. [*Desk thumping and Laughter*] TTPost would do very well. Then it went back down in 2010/2011 to what it was actually in 2008/2009, which would be about \$66 million—a little less than 2008, \$66 million.

Sen. Beckles: Election in 2010.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Exactly, yes, that is what I pointed out, yes in 2010.

Sen. Karim: Yes, thanks for calling it.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: So that it went down a bit. However, the point is that it seems to me as if the service that is being provided the volume and so on it is not going down. What I would like to see, however, if it is at the same level that it was let us say in 2008/2009, the question therefore, really is, if you are maintaining the volumes why is it you are losing so much money? That is something I am rather curious about.

I then made some enquiries as to—is it that the cost went up? And, it seems to me as if the cost went up because when I discovered that in fact there has not been an increase in wages and so on since 2003—I do not know if that is correct. [Interruption]

Sen. George: Not wages, not wages.

Hon. Senator: In tariffs.

Hon. Senator: In tariffs.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Sorry, in tariffs. Sorry, in tariffs not wages—

Sen. George: Wages have been going up all the time.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong:—since 2003, and therefore, if it is we need an efficient service it means we have to look at the cost of really delivering that service, and maybe that is something we need to look at as well.

I agree with Sen. Deyalsingh that perhaps we can also consider the fact that the delivery of mail to some extent really, particularly in rural areas, there should be some consideration of the social responsibilities of the State and that certainly it is not an operation in which one seeks to make exorbitant profits, but at least that it should as had been indicated in the mission statement of TTPost, that it should be self-sustaining and should be sustainable. So that is something that we need to look at.

I want to go back to the introduction of the Bill by the Minister, Madam Vice-President, and if I can look briefly at the *Hansard* report, it says that:

“Upon vesting of the properties, it is estimated that TTPost’s asset... will increase by some \$56million. Consequently, the corporation would be better able to access financing and reduce its dependence on subventions from the Government.”

3.30 p.m.

I am a little concerned about that. I do not know whether the Minister can perhaps address what is meant by that in his wrap-up, because to me it is saying that by vesting these properties in the company, in TTPost, it is going to increase your holdings by \$56 million and that in turn will then allow you to decrease your subventions or your requests for subventions, what would be done with the properties that are vested in the company in order to decrease your dependences? Is it that TTPost is then going to say, “Oh—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Well, if you can explain that to me because they might very well go and say, “All right, let us maybe mortgage some of these companies, maybe in turn divest—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: And they have the power within the Act.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Exactly! So that is a concern I have, as to exactly what they are going to do with these properties that would allow them to decrease the call or the requirement for subventions. That also points to something that had been raised, today, by a number of presenters here, the need really for some type of business plan that explains all of that, [*Desk thumping*] because I could not understand, really, how vesting these properties would enhance the situation.

The other thing that I am curious about, Madam Vice-President, has to do with why some of these properties and not others, which is something that has been raised here as well today. I am very grateful to the Minister for providing the additional information with respect to the valuations, however, I did not see any date on the valuation and I do not know whether he could perhaps speak to that in his wrapping up. I have noticed a significant difference between—I imagine where it says—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: 2003 and 2007.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: 2003—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: It is two valuations, 2003 and 2007.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Well, the one that I have does not have a date on it.

Sen. Al-Rawi: First page, top right-hand corner.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Okay. It does not even have a—so maybe there is another document. All right, I must have missed that somewhere. So if that can be clarified—thank you very much, Sen. Al-Rawi, I just found it.

The difference is \$42,000; \$85,000. I found those differences quite significant, however, in terms of the two valuations, one done by—is it the Ministry of Finance valuation (MOF) and the private valuation amount? If that could be also addressed.

Madam Vice-President, the one other thing that I would like to conclude on has to do with, again, the point that was raised about procurement. What we are really dealing with here, whether we like it or not, is a procurement issue and I want to emphasize ongoing concerns that I have about the way in which we go

about procuring on behalf of the State. It is something that I have said on a number of occasions that I am very concerned about and, I do hope that we would be able to return to the need for procurement legislation and that we try to finalize that issue as soon as possible.

Having said that, I see no difficulty really in supporting the amendments to the Bill, providing that, as I said, the Minister can clarify the points that I have raised.

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

Sen. Terance Baynes: Thank you, Madam Vice-President. I am always dripping with gratitude [*Laughter*] whenever an opportunity presents itself for me to contribute. [*Desk thumping*] I must hasten to say, though, when I looked at this one-line amendment I thought to myself, where can one go in terms of having some kind of sensible contribution in a debate like this. I must confess that listening to Sen. Deyalsingh, today, I said to myself perhaps he is moonlighting as a Senator. He did a kind of Houdini. I have never seen something so magical in trying to tie in the waterfront project and—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Section 33 of the Act, public procurement.

Sen. T. Baynes:—some other things about internal politics with COP and UNC. I was amazed at that ability. [*Crosstalk*] This happens in the Senate and I have seen that. I am learning all these interesting things that happen, but every debate seems to have a particular tone and I find that this debate seems to be kind a very placid. For me, there are not many rooms that one can enter, and I just want to say I am thankful for the Minister of Public Utilities bringing this particular amendment at this particular time. As a person who lives in Tobago, I have seen the improvement in the service—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Karim: You get your bill?

Sen. T. Baynes:—that TTPost provides, unlike my colleague, Sen. Cudjoe. Actually, I spend a lot of time here so I do not have that problem. My stuff arrives at my house within a decent time frame in comparison to what it was before as far as I know. So, I do not necessarily have that particular problem, but I can say that TTPost has been providing very good service to the people of Tobago. It is not a perfect service, but it is improved service. I think as this Government has come into the corridors of power it has been doing its best to improve capacity and efficiency, and so on, trying to treat with some of the societal woes that we are facing and trying to improve the living conditions of all our people. Of course, while we are doing this, we are treating with a very anxious population and also quite an engaging Opposition—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Coalition.

Sen. T. Baynes: Madam Vice-President, trying to fix all the problems in society can be a daunting task, but this Government is well up to the task and that must be said. Despite all the criticisms that we face from time to time, we are now walking the corridors of power, doing everything that we can to improve governance and to improve services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President—I am sorry, Madam Vice-President—how could I make such a mistake—the issue of communication in all of its forms is critical to all developing jurisdictions—and we have heard so much about Internet, BBM and all the different things, but post still remains very, very integral in our communication.

In the context of Tobago, Sen. Cudjoe made the point about the properties that have been vacated by the postal service hence the reason this is an important amendment, because when it comes to properties and so on in Tobago, that is a very, very expensive commodity, so one can reasonably conclude that it is quite expensive for TTPost to carry on its business in Tobago.

3.40 p.m.

I am hoping that with the collaboration—I remember at the opening, the first commissioning of the hospital last week, the Chief Secretary spoke a lot about working together and about collaboration, and I am really hoping that we can engage the THA to see how we can get some support as we try to get these properties—[*Interruption*] Well, the truth of the matter is, there is a fable that, you know, if you fall in a ditch, the person that pushed you in or why you fell in is not always important, it is always the man who takes you out that gets the credit. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] I am an adult; I could take basket if I want. [*Laughter*] It is true; we cannot escape that.

We are going to take a minute and digress and talk about the hospital. Several governments and different—everybody was given credit; former Ministers and all thatstuff, for the work over there at the hospital and so on. But, the truth of the matter is, under the watch of this Government and the Prime Minister who was very, very committed to the process, we have seen that the hospital is now open and Tobagonians are happy about that [*Desk thumping*] and you cannot argue with that and we are thankful.

Madam Vice-President, this matter has been ventilated extensively, and I think there is a view that when the Government brings Bills and stuff to the

Senate and amendments that it must somehow be perfect. I get the sense that it must be perfect. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: It must be rational.

Sen. T. Baynes: But I think that when there is a collaboration—hold on, Sen. Al-Rawi, “you go like this” [*Laughter*]—I think that when there is collaborative work on the part of all Senators that it adds an amazing splendour to the architecture of legislation in this country. [*Desk thumping*] “I tell yuh yuh go like this.”

So, I mean the legislation that we have passed in this Senate has the mark, has the stamp of Government Senators, the stamp of when we get to the committee stage, we have to listen. We must hear Sen. Elton Prescott SC, we must hear Sen. Drayton and we must hear Sen. Al-Rawi; though ad nauseam at times, but we must hear Sen. Al-Rawi. We must! So, I am saying, to me, there is such beauty when we work together to bring to pass what we want to bring to pass in this honourable Senate, so I am glad. I do not think that any of us here can say that we have superior knowledge about anything.

Sometimes the impression is given when an amendment is to be made and when a Bill comes, and there are some issues that there are questions about, the impression is made as, if it were the PNM, we would have never have this problem or we would have never had flaws. That impression is given and you get the sense that there is this superior knowledge about governance in Trinidad and Tobago and nothing could be further from the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

We have to get away from that and I am thankful that we on this side are not intoxicated by this superior knowledge as if we know everything and we are the kings of the hill of governance and so on. [*Desk thumping*] We are prepared to make changes.

Sen. Al-Rawi: You never read Wade Mark when he was in Opposition.

Sen. T. Baynes: Madam Vice-President, this matter of vesting these properties is a good thing so that TTPost can improve its efficiency; improve its asset base and so on. And all the concerns—we do not waste time in this Senate. The reason there are concerns coming from the Independent Bench and the Opposition is that we are trying to get the ideal piece of legislation passed. Simple as that!

Sen. Karim: Within the architecture. [*Laughter*]

Sen. T. Baynes: So, Madam Vice-President, I am encouraged; in fact, I am glad that I am on this side and I am a part of this; I am very glad. [*Desk thumping*] I am glad that I am here. I believe that the People's Partnership Government has come to the corridors of power for such a time as this; I believe that. I am of the view and my point of reference—it may not be for everybody—for the most part is always biblical and it is because I believe that when it comes to governance, that God rules in the affairs of men, and He raised up men and put down men. At this particular season in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, governance rests on the shoulders of the People's Partnership.

I know that every time there is some issue, there is a salivating on the opposite side as if, you know, the Partnership would collapse and they would just be ushered into the court. I heard Sen. Hinds on the television, about a week and a half ago, saying that the PNM is waiting to provide the best governance for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] But, you listen to that rhetoric and you find that there is a kind of underpinning, a kind of pride which worries me; it is worrisome. I am saying, Madam Vice-President, we must understand— [*Interruption*]

Sen. Beckles: What section of the Bill is that?

Sen. T. Baynes: Ask Sen. Deyalsingh that when he gets back. Madam Vice-President, the point I am making is simply that this piece of legislation is part of the governance structure of this People's Partnership Government and we are continually bringing legislation week after week. We do not boast of being perfect; we are not *prima donnas*; we are human beings who are trying to fix some of the mess that we met in this country when we came into power. That is all we are trying to do. [*Desk thumping*] I am saying that somebody must say that we are not responsible for all the problems in the country, as much as that is the impression that is given a lot of times. We are trying to fix the thing.

So, I support this amendment and I am thankful that the hon. Minister brought it to this honourable Senate. We have talked about all the different things, the flaws of it, and I am sure in his wrapping up, we are going to have a much more colourful version of what this is supposed to be. I thank you, Madam Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Fitzgerald Hinds: Madam Vice-President, I have had the benefit of hearing the Senator in this Parliament before. I even recall complimenting him on his maiden contribution, and I know that he has the capacity to talk, but I never knew that he could sing so well. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Cudjoe: Oh my!

Sen. F. Hinds: Sing pastor, sing! He has opened the debate to such an extent that, I mean, I saw him and listened to him saying certain things about the Partnership, and I observed a very stern and serious disapproving look upon your countenance as he spoke, because Madam Vice-President, his experience is different to all of ours including yours. [*Desk thumping*] So you could not have agreed with the goodness of the Partnership as he has been saying and I saw that stern look but he did not take heed, he continued. Anyway, he will learn like all of us including you, Madam Vice-President.

The first thing that I want to say is that I have been looking on at our country from the day I earned consciousness, and I recall seeing various stamps through the years. I remember seeing stamps with the picture—well, the representation of the Queen of England, Queen Elizabeth, the Duke of Edinburgh and many others. Sometime last year, this Government attempted to create ridiculous history in this country. They contemplated and made public their intention to issue a stamp with the image of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to begin by saying that I hope that any savings in revenue are not to display that kind of misguided vanity and hubris that this Government has demonstrated it is very capable of. As I use the term “misguided vanity”, I remember and I must give credit to learned Senior Counsel Karl Hudson Phillips who entered a national debate recently and described the conduct of some persons as misguided vanity.

Madam Vice-President, we are here today, as has been said by many of my colleagues in this Senate, to deal with an amendment to the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act, 47:02. A simple amendment to extend the period under the Act to facilitate the vesting of certain properties. The Minister of Transport spoke a while ago and he, too, opened up the debate and made reference to some letter that someone wrote to the political leader of the PNM. I thought that he was going to speak as well, about the letter written by one leader of a part of the “collision” Government, and my pronunciation is accurate, which went unheeded for such a long time. I am talking about the leader of the COP who has gone abroad to cool his head a little bit to deal with the rigours of trying to deal with the deceptive—as part of that “collision”.

But that Minister of Transport failed to understand a point that was made by Sen. Al-Rawi when he spoke; Sen. Deyalsingh, when he spoke; Sen. Prescott SC when he spoke; and Sen. Drayton, when she spoke, and a point that I would reinforce in a short while, that this Bill—one-liner as it is, innocuous as it is—can

create and present Trinidad and Tobago with grave dangers in the months and years ahead because it is inextricably bound to the issues of transparency and the whole procurement regime. It is! [*Desk thumping*] Forgive us, Madam Vice-President, for being overly skeptical. Even those who draft these measures, even those who read them, innocent unwary; you see a one-liner, it appears innocuous, but when you are dealing with that Government, everything takes a completely different proportion. Everything! [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister, when he spoke, that is the Minister of Transport, Sen. “Devant” or “Deviant”—what is it? Sen. Karim said “Devant”, okay. Some people mispronounce it and say “Deviant” but that is all right. The Senator did not tell us as he touched on the question of transparency and procurement, and I have in my own possession—I got it in my mailbox so I am keeping it relevant to the debate—a letter which demonstrates that he issued a contract to four farmers in Penal for \$2.1 million to cut grass in the airport. He did not tell us that.

Sen. Beckles: Was that by way of post or email?

Sen. F. Hinds: I do not know if he posted the contract or what, and whether there was any transparent tendering process for \$2.1 million to cut grass in the airport of Trinidad and Tobago while he doubles the airport tax to make the lives of the citizens of this country more burdensome. [*Desk thumping*]

3.55 p.m.

Usually, when I speak and mention his name he jumps up like an inanimate wooden object to respond and I am prepared to give him space to do that, to tell us that there was a proper tendering procedure and he did not give a contract to four farmers from Penal to cut grass in the airport for \$2.1 million, but he would not get up because he knows it is the truth.

The original legislation, in section 33, exempts the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation from the regime of the Central Tenders Board. So, with that in mind, Madam Vice-President—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Maharaj: A point of clarification.

Sen. F. Hinds: I am on my legs. I gave you an opportunity and you did not take it. You speak later. Speak to Inshan Ishmael first and Reuben Cato.

Madam Vice-President, before I was disturbed, I was making the point that section 33 of the parent legislation exempts this corporation from the rigours of the Central Tenders Board, but it does not mean that there ought not to be proper procedures in respect of procurement and the management of its financial affairs.

When Sen. Maharaj, the Minister of Transport, got up, he congratulated the former temporary Sen. Moonan for his ascendancy to the high office of chairmanship of Caribbean Airlines. I would like to let him know, quite frankly, I am not as sanguine about that as he might be, because these state enterprises form part of the governance structure of Trinidad and Tobago and when they are properly managed, it is to our credit and when they are not it is otherwise. It does not bring us any benefit.

I almost saw the newly appointed chairman saying to the national community: “Look, I have no experience really in anything to do with airlines. I have no real experience to show in terms of any kind of serious organizational management and, therefore, I will do my best.” So I wondered to myself, of the 1.4 million of us, perhaps about half of that adult, qualified working, if the only person the Minister could congratulate here today for chairmanship of the CAL Board is our former friend who came here as a temporary Senator. The last thing I knew is that he was a CECEP contractor in San Fernando and now he has been given the responsibility to manage the national and Caribbean Airlines; so we wish them well.

He also took the opportunity to congratulate Sen. George for bringing the legislation. I thought he would have taken the opportunity to congratulate him for finally responding to public sentiment that the chairman of the T&TEC Board, Omar Khan, should have been removed from office a long time ago because there were issues regarding his qualification. I stood in this Parliament and spoke about it at length. I told this Parliament—when the issue broke in the national community about the questionable qualification under the law for chairmanship of T&TEC—that the Minister became aware of it at the time it had happened and told this country nothing. In fact, the report is that he told them: “We have to keep that quiet. I cannot take another Reshmi.” That was at the time of the whole fiasco with Reshmi Ramnarine. [*Sen. George stands*]

Sen. F. Hinds: What is your point of order?

Sen. George: I want to correct what he just said

Sen. F. Hinds: What is your point of order?

Sen. George: What he said is untrue.

Sen. F. Hinds: What is the point of order?

Sen. George: Standing Order 35(8).

Sen. F. Hinds: 35(8)? Let Madam Vice-President—

Sen. George: I never said anything like that on any occasion. He is incorrect and he is attempting to confuse the population.

Sen. F. Hinds: May I proceed, Madam Vice-President?

Madam Vice-President: I do not see it as Standing Order 35(8), so proceed.

Sen. F. Hinds: I thank you very warmly. [*Desk thumping*] I am only responding to Sen. Baynes and Sen. Maharaj who told us, and I quote: “This is governance PP style.” I am just giving another example of governance PP style.

Sen. Beckles: Excellent governance. Good governance.

Sen. F. Hinds: But I notice that within the last few days, the goodly gentleman was allowed to resign.

Sen. Maharaj: Standing Order 35(1), relevance.

Sen. Beckles: Relevance? Governance? Relevance? “You is Baynes or what? All yuh was outside de Parliament.”

Madam Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the debate was opened to some extent and so I allow, because he is responding to comments made in earlier contributions.

Sen. F. Hinds: I thank you very warmly.

Sen. Cudjoe: “Do so no like so.”

Sen. F. Hinds: We have a schedule of the properties—and I will continue to be very relevant, based on submissions previously made—to be vested, all,—I think 47 of them. We would learn from the official record that the 2003 valuation on those 47 properties amounted to \$20.7 million. When they were revalued in 2007, the value almost trebled altogether, 47 of them at that time, to \$58.7 million, a substantial increase indeed. So, we are not talking about two cents. We are talking about substantial properties and values and one can only wonder what the current values are.

The Government did not come to this debate with any indication as to what the current values are and this is extremely relevant. I think every previous speaker might have articulated this deep concern, given particularly that transparency and openness are concepts often mooted and mouthed by the Government, but when it comes to practice, we see little of it.

As I spoke those words, I could not help but recall the contribution today of Sen. Terance Baynes as he sang so wonderfully. He was a perfect example of the use of soft and beautiful inspiring words to describe what is otherwise the reality of

hideousness, brutality, poor government and poor governance. They have mastered the art of using fine words and imposing on us the so-called feel-good factor. It is like somebody ripping “yuh teeth out yuh jaw with ah pliers, blood running down yuh face all on yuh nice clothes, but dey have given you sufficient Novocaine tuh numb yuh jaw as they break it up and when that wears off, trouble take we.” That is what this Government represents.

When you all are finished with Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago would be in—I listened to them condemn the previous Government and previous Governments, but the people of this country must be told, and as long as I have breath I would tell them, what you all are doing to the Treasury of this country. I will tell them. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Beckles: Under the disguise of governance; good governance.

Sen. F. Hinds: A man was given \$1.5 million to paint a small building. We are talking about the postal corporation, right opposite the San Juan Post Office in the so-called Croisee, \$1.5 million to paint the Priority Mall. “Job incomplete. Man get pay already and he gone”, and the Minister of Transport who is here today did not tell us a word about that. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Cudjoe: Good governance PP style.

Sen. F. Hinds: We spoke recently, at great length. We are talking about transparency because I will demonstrate very clearly to you in a very short while where this so-called one-liner that is in front of us today has serious financial and fiscal implications. It is very, very serious and we have to be ever watchful and vigilant like the public servants who are gathered outside this building today with placards. We have to be vigilant because this Government is not like an incoming tide, it is like a tsunami. The water goes out and you see open land and you say you have had accretion of the land, increase, and then suddenly it comes in 35 feet—40 feet high to kill everybody. When Sen. Al-Rawi, with an “r”—I heard a Motion moved today and I think I would advise Sen. Al-Rawi that he may have to assist the Government in finding out whom they filed this Motion against, but we will see—Sen. Prescott SC and others spoke in the early stages of this debate, the Government ran and it produced a document with a number of responses to the issues that were raised by the earlier speakers when this debate began a couple of months ago.

Sen. Al-Rawi: A month ago two of us spoke, but we came prepared.

Sen. F. Hinds: They circulated a document for us all, and at page—it is not numbered. This document entitled “Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (Amdt.) Bill” with a side note: “Responses to matters raised in the debate at the

Senate on March 06, 2012”, at about page 4 into that document under the rubric: “How is vesting going to add to the viability/revenue generation?”, at item 6 it reads, and I quote:

Vesting of the 47 properties is viewed as a critical success factor as it is the aim of the corporation to use these properties—my emphasis—as part of its growth strategy to achieve financial viability and become more competitive in the marketplace.

Use these properties...

When I look at the context, when I follow the contribution of Sen. George who piloted this amendment and I look at the compilation of the notes I have just quoted from, it is quite clear to me that they intend to use these properties, not by sale, because they have told us that they intend to rent some and expand some, so they can rent the expansion beyond the needs of the corporation, so it says. They would save rent. In cases where they are now renting, they would occupy these refurbished newly vested properties, so we are sure, based on all of that, it will not be by sale. They do not intend to sell them, but they intend to borrow!

This brings me to the question of public debt; a matter that must be of grave concern to every one of us and every right-thinking citizen in Trinidad and Tobago, public debt. Do you know why that is particularly critical? It is because this Government has found, since it came to office in this country, over 1,001 ways to increase expenditure and very little has been demonstrated so far in terms of increasing revenue.

4.10 p.m.

We are at the moment running a third year of fiscal deficit, and I know I am speaking at the right time, Sen. Vasant Bharath is sitting here and looking at me, the word is that he will be the new Minister of Finance, because a reshuffle is in the atmosphere.

Sen. Bharath: I am very happy and I look out for that.

Sen. F. Hinds: Madam Vice-President, you see I got that in my mailbox.
[Laughter]

Sen. Cudjoe: Thanks to TTPost!

Sen. F. Hinds: Thanks to TTPost. Madam Vice-President, I saw that brought a smile, it is the first time you smiled for the evening rather; it was good to see.

Sen. Vasant Bharath knows full well he acted as Minister of Finance before, it is a position he craves, and I understand that, but revenues short on expenditure leave us with a deficit and it is quite a serious thing. We are running, as we speak, a \$7

billion deficit, and the implications for what is happening here, if you look at it very closely, you would see it has implications for public debt, because TTPost will be led to borrow in the months and years ahead. In addition to that—and let me show you promptly what I mean—the Minister told us, when he presented this Bill for our consideration, the company has been a loss maker.

Sen. Deyalsingh was correct and quite proper to identify to us whether we as a nation, from a conceptual standpoint, see the service or services offered by the likes of TTPost to be a public good or service, a public service, or rather we must view it strictly as a commercial activity or enterprise. This is a very serious situation and a decision will have to be made, but Trinidad and Tobago has been, in this sense in flux or practised some measure of vacillation on these issues, because on the one hand we threaten to be a very healthy, welfare State, where we try to meet the needs of all in the society, we have done it in education. We do not have health insurance here, so it is largely a public sector health programme at taxpayers' expense and a number of other things. Basic economics tells us that a public good is one which brings benefit to the entire community, and for which it is more convenient for the State to provide, and for which left to market forces, many individuals in our society would be unable to access that important public service or service.

So Sen. Deyalsingh was quite right to bring our minds to cause us to focus on what we are doing, because legislation, Madam Vice-President, is usually, and I say “usually” supported by policy, what is the Government's policy and depending on the policy, the legislation is designed to bring about the objectives adumbrated in the policy as outlined.

The Minister told us interesting things; let me quote him when he presented here, and I quote from the Minister of Public Utilities:

“However, it continues to be a challenge for TTPost to meet its goal of financial viability. The figures indicate that since 1999, TTPost has posted revenues of between \$60 million and \$80 million. However, losses before taxes for the period 2000—2004 range from between \$4 million and \$15 million, but for 2007—2011, they range between \$45 million and \$8 million, and these figures are provided cautiously since the corporation has yet to have the later figures for the period 2007—2011 audited.”

Well, Sen. Drayton also raised the very important question of coming to this honourable place, to discuss this important matter that has as I hope I have demonstrated, grave financial implications for Trinidad and Tobago, without up-

to-date financials presented for our consideration, without an updated business plan and certainly without a valuation on all the properties. I mean this Government has come to this Senate totally unready and unprepared for serious debate. Totally unprepared for a serious debate! [*Desk thumping*]

But that is what the Minister told us and what he did not tell us, but the Government's own figures can tell you in this honourable Senate, that in 2010, actual subvention by the Government to TTPost was \$46.8 million. And the estimate for 2011 was \$43.9 million and suddenly for 2012, the Government's estimate in terms of its proposed subvention for TTPost has gone down to \$34 million. So the Government as it budgeted for 2012 took the decision that it will reduce the subvention to TTPost by, I would say, about \$11—\$14 million and, therefore, Madam Vice-President, I am saying it is expected that the consumers, those who use the service and that includes all of us, to a greater or a lesser extent, would incur as the months roll on, greater demands for that service from TTPost.

What is really happening as a matter of policy as I discern it, is the Government is now starting to pull back and TTPost, well, to go and to become viable, and they began with an \$11—\$14 million slash in the subvention, and I know though they have not said it, the Government's position is, you have some properties there—47 of them—they have great value, although we will not tell the Senate, and if they did not ask, they would never find out what is the value of those. And as I said earlier, we know that in 2003 it was about \$20 million and by 2007 it went to \$58 million, and God knows what it is today! And you TTPost should use these properties to raise revenue and that is where the danger lies.

Then they tell us that the public debt is under control, but if you do not keep an eye on them, in all these state enterprises they increased their borrowings and before you know it, we have a much bigger hole and a bigger deficit to contend with by the next budget than they revealed to us recently, and that is my fear in relation to the paucity of information this Government has rolled out in this very important debate.

They told us boastfully, this vesting would increase the asset holding of TTPost by \$56 million and they would be better able to access financing and reduce dependence on subvention; well, that was very, very clear. So, Madam Vice-President, this is where it is at with this Government in relation to this, and this is the big source of our concerns.

The economy of Trinidad and Tobago is already in a state of virtual stagnation. Last year the Minister of Finance promised that we would have growth to the extent of 5 per cent, that did not happen. It could not happen, I submit, because the engines of growth which they met when they came to office, they switched them all down.

The Central Bank Governor told us in an independent offering that when the economy in 2011 began to show some green shoots of recovery, an ill-timed, ill-fated, badly advised and vicious state of emergency was imposed, and that too shut down any semblance or possibility of growth and the economy remained stagnant. All the engines of growth they met, they have taken action to shut them down and they have not offered one scintilla of evidence or information to satisfy a very discerning citizenry that we are in safe hands.

We are in trouble, Minister Bharath knows that! Yes, political trouble, economic trouble, social trouble, even the partnership is in trouble. Madam Vice-President, we are talking essentially—when you remove the corporate veil that they presented here today, we are really talking about economic issues as I have demonstrated. [*Desk thumping*] We are now listening to a Government that has no ideas, no plan, and can offer no prospects to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to come out of the morass that we are in, even as they begin to panic and slash subsidies to many of these and increase taxes. They told us: “No new taxes, read my lips”, according to some former politician in United States, and inch by inch they are digging the dagger—not Makandal Daaga, the leader of the NJAC—they are digging the dagger, and screwing it more deeply into the backs of the poor and the unwary souls of Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is airport tax, and as Sen. Beckles pointed out during the last budget debate, “no new taxes,” but for God’s sake, there are a whole host of substantial new charges by WASA on the poor consumer in this country. We are talking about massive waste, we are talking about corruption, wanton corruption, and I not speaking glibly and without foundation—[*Interruption*]

Sen. George: You are!

Sen. F. Hinds: I am? The Minister of Education admitted in a debate on a Motion of no confidence in the other place, that he has launched an investigation into the Education Facilities Company Limited, when issues of serious mismanagement and corrupt dealings were highlighted in that debate in the other place—some scandalous situations and that is one state company, and I know about it, millions of dollars. So my suggestion is not unfounded, Sen. George. [*Interruption*]

Sen. George: Yes it is.

Sen. F. Hinds: Meanwhile the Government and its members continue to joyride and have fun; they are having fun, a permanent state of euphoria. I must remind myself I told you this in metaphor, Madam Vice-President, a friend of mine told me: “When the PNM was batting, the UNC had a number of fielders in close positions, waiting to catch somebody out, and when they catch the ball, rather than go and start to play their innings and bat better for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they grabbed the ball from the gully and take off through the cane; they run with it. Gone!” I think it is a perfect metaphor. They promised us good government, they condemned everything that appeared wrong, and even the things that were, in fact, wrong and you would have thought they would have brought something better, but it led to Makandal Daaga, the leader of one of their coalition entities to say that: he is seeing more corruption now than anytime else. And I am sure, Madam Vice-President, that principled as I know the NJAC to be, it must be having some serious internal convulsions on its presence in that partnership, because the partnership does not represent that which, NJAC spoke so much about!

That is about national good, national interest. And NJAC must be troubled, more troubled than the COP.

4.25 p.m.

Sen. Dyer-Griffith you smile. I understand your position.

Sen. Dyer-Griffith: I am smiling with Sen. Drayton.

Sen. F. Hinds: Yes. I am smiling with you because there is such easy transition from COP to UNC; kind fluidity; it is amazing you know.

Sen. Cudjoe: Really?

Sen. F. Hinds: What? Dangerously amazing, causing trouble too.

Sen. Dyer-Griffith: I will drink some water for that.

Sen. F. Hinds: Have some water. Madam Vice-President, after all of that Trinidad and Tobago is the great loser in all of this. And as I indicated and I have demonstrated the measure before us today comes down to a question of economics; fiscal management. We see this Government embark upon the construction of—the deficit in the budget figures is \$7 billion. This Government has embarked upon a \$7 billion project to build a highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin without any major, so far, loan facility to support it; they have

already extracted \$1.5 billion from our savings in order to begin the project. They are having some trouble with some of their friends in the environmental lobby, and I know they will work it out. They have budgeted substantial figures and increased the allocation to pay persons whose land will be affected by the highway, along its path to Point Fortin.

Sen. Beckles: Some people buying up property.

Sen. F. Hinds: When we asked how did you increase that land acquisition figure so substantially, no answer. And talking about no answer I do not want to dwell on it, but a citizen of this country was taken into an institution recently and part of the reason offered is that she was not answering questions. Well this Government “doh” answer questions at all. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. George: That is not true. We answer every single question you put in this Parliament, every one; always trying to mislead the public.

Sen. F. Hinds: You talk when we ask a question, “yuh doh answer”; you say something, but you do not answer. [*Desk thumping*] And this Government, as I said earlier—Madam Vice-President, I am being challenged by the—is also manifesting another sign, permanent euphoria, they laughing, they always having fun. The psychiatrists must have a view on that.

A citizen was accused of speaking loudly and as a result met with a certain fate. Well, the loudest talker is the Minister of Sport in that Government. And the Minister of Public Utilities too, Sen. George, he is the loudest talker. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. George: Look in a mirror!

Sen. F. Hinds: Somebody will come with an ambulance for him too. Madam Vice-President, I do not want to be distracted by Sen. George, I am proceeding, I am dealing with the Bill. As I was saying earlier, the Government in its figures has indicated that they intend to spend \$106 million—TTPost should spend \$106 million in order to improve these properties.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Beyond the needs of people.

Sen. F. Hinds: I took a look at one. I passed through the Croisee next to the building that the Minister of Transport gave a man a \$1.5-million contract to paint and he has not finished it, and he has moved on.

Madam Vice-President: Hon. Senators, it is 4.30; I proposed that we take the tea break and resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m. *Sitting resumed*

Madam Vice-President: Hon. Senators, before we went for the tea break, Sen.Hinds was on his legs, and according to my calculation Senator you have three minutes of your original time. Continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Vice-President.

Sen. George: Your colleagues do not want to hear you.

Sen. F. Hinds: I do not propose to be too long. I had intended, and I should keep my own practice, to say just a few words. Madam Vice-President, before I conclude, it must be said that part of the savings as the Government sees it by way of these developments that might come from the—and I only say might “eh”, because I was making the point before we took the break that the Government—
[*Interruption*]

Sen. George: And he cannot be the teacher, anything could happen.

Sen. F. Hinds: Yes, anything could happen; Minister George is right, anything could happen. The fact that you are in Government demonstrates that anything could happen. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] It is sad, but anything can happen.

Recently, in response to my friend, 12 citizens of this country were asked by the *Express* newspaper—a journalist—who they would choose for the position of police commissioner in Trinidad and Tobago. I was astounded, every one of the 12 said, the indomitable Ian Alleyne.

Sen. George: They said Hinds.

Sen. F. Hinds: You would have thought, Madam Vice-President, that they would have looked inside of the police service or even inside of the defence force for someone trained and skilled in that business. But the fact that he is on television.—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: 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. T. Deyalsingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. George: That middle name speaks volumes. That very name speaks volumes.

Sen. F. Hinds: Madam Vice-President, indeed my middle name is Ethelbert and I am proud of that.

Hon. Senator: I am proud of it too.

Sen. George: It is a nice name. “Nothing wrong with it.” My name is Emmanuel.

Sen. F. Hinds: They have a name PP. [*Laughter*] Moist as it might sound they have the name PP. It is not registered anywhere. There is nothing registered in elections and boundaries called PP. It is a farce. So the name Ethelbert stands tall. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: PP—Pure Pressure.

Sen. F. Hinds: As I was saying before I was disturbed to talk about water and PP by the Minister of Public Utilities, I was saying that it surprised me that citizens of this country and very seriously, you know, offered Mr. Ian Alleyne for commissioner. That tells us a number of things, it tells us a whole lot of things about our society. One of the things my father told me is that it is easy to become a hero in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is true. Sometimes you just need to talk hard, talk loud, shout, bawl out, “whattt!” on a radio programme and you could end up in a PP Cabinet, you know, or ring a bell and you could end up in a PP Cabinet—[*Desk thumping*]—or be known in this country as “Mr. Divider”, and you could end up in a PP Cabinet.

So that, according to Minister George everything is possible in Trinidad and Tobago. It also tells you of the impact of the television on the psyche of our people. We are talking about postal arrangements today, which is a form of communication.

Sen. Deyalsingh, told us today and produced interestingly enough a 1968 love letter, he produced it today.

Sen. George: The letter broke his heart, you see. [*Laughter*]

Sen. F. Hinds: So, that was the way people communicated. That was largely the way people communicated years ago. Today it is more about information technology platforms and different electronic communications, so that the postal services are, as has been agreed by some of our colleagues, losing some of its vogue, because of these technological developments.

I want to conclude by saying in this respect—and the Government is here listening, and I hope that they would take note. Part of the savings that they are saying would come—and I was making the point that we are not too sure that there will be any savings because they would have to expend, based on their figures, \$106 million. And they should be raising how much a month, saving how much a month?

Sen. Al-Rawi: Three point four.

Sen. F. Hinds: Three point four millions a month. Now that figure is doubtful and dubious as far as I am concerned, because that figure was predicated on an assessment done by four surveyors and valuers, Charles Lawrence, and a couple others. The names are here in the documents: Farrell and Associates; A. Nealco or something like that, very reputed professionals in this jurisdiction. But that was predicated on their study of, I think, 41 properties.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That was in respect to four, government valuation did the rest.

Sen. F. Hinds: And the Government valuator did the balance, yes. But the Government is telling us in their figures today that they intend to use 22 of these locations for occupation by TTPost, in order to save the rents that are now being incurred as a consequence of them renting elsewhere.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Three point four per annum.

Sen. F. Hinds: So that the figure of 3.4 was predicated on all the properties that is how I understand it. We are being told that 22 of them will not generate rent. Well one can say it will save rent. But the Government is telling us about revenue “eh”, earnings. I doubt that figure anyway, but if per chance they are saving—and in Trinidad, I told you anything is possible people say things, and people believe it with no attachment to reality!

Let me give you an example. This Government is using taxpayers money to fund a so-called laptop programme for the last few years, providing Form I students on entry into secondary level education with a laptop. And this Government speaks on every platform and recently in the no confidence Motion in other place they told the country, from Prime Minister down to the last speaker, that a “we have done so much” and they included the laptop programme. You know something, these laptops are—and you have a teaching background and I respect that, Madam Vice-President, and I understand you did a marvelous job as a teacher; from the reports that I have had. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Do not let them distract you.

Sen. F. Hinds: I will not be distracted.

5.10 p.m.

Madam Vice-President, I can say this and you will understand. Some of them behave like they have never sat before a teacher. Now, that is not to say that they were not taught. I am saying they behave as though they never interfaced with a teacher, which is quite different.

Lord Scarman in a judgment said—and I was fascinated to hear an Englishman say it—“To think you have a ‘buss toe’ is quite different to actually having one.” I know why I am making this point. They told the country we have a laptop programme and they spent so much money and they did this. They upgraded the computer and put the national flag on its face for easy identification. They put in a system in case it is stolen or lost so it can be retrieved; all of that.

Madam Vice-President, I crave your indulgence and your experience as a former teacher and put to you that the laptops in the hands of those youngsters is as disconnected from the teaching or the delivery of the school curriculum as you could ever have it. No contact whatsoever! The teachers have not been trained and it is an almost valueless programme. Sufficient teachers have not been trained.

The teachers are not using the computers except in a few exceptional circumstances, largely in schools where they had an information technology platform before the introduction of the Government’s programme. That is the truth. The children spend inordinate amounts of time on those computers. But I understand from some of the students whom I surveyed it is Facebook, games and some very awkward things that are adversely affecting the minds of our children and corrupting them.

So, I am calling on this Government in this debate—and I got some of that information in my mailbox. This is not a joke, it is a serious situation. The children in the nation’s school who now have laptops are not using them for the benefit of the curriculum development. They are being distracted by them. It is causing more trouble than it is bringing good. The point I am making is that it is easy to get here and make lofty pronouncements and to talk and talk, but the reality out there is different.

Similarly, they told us about great oil finds recently with great fanfare. An Ernie Ross, their campaign publicist, ran some ads—I am talking about the economy here and how they are using money that they plan to save from these measures that they tell us that they would save at any rate—and told the nation this in 48 hours, and now the ads have gone, as though they lost the oil now, when the experts in the industry came and told us, it is old, thick and heavy oil that has been there for the longest while, they have now tapped into it, and it is very difficult to produce to make it economically viable. All of that! [*Crosstalk*] So, this Government is known for telling the nation things to make us feel good and the ugly reality is ahead of us.

So, I am calling on the Government, as I conclude in this debate, especially the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, my good friend—the modicum of respect I have for this Government almost largely rests on him. [*Laughter*] Madam Vice-President, I am calling on him and I am calling on the Government to really revisit this situation. It is causing mayhem.

The police are now investigating a situation at a school in Belmont where the children spent their entire afternoon, perhaps, unsupervised—I cannot imagine a teacher would have been present—inside of those laptops and not anything to do with English or Biology—well not Biology in the formal sense—but they were looking at awkward things and it led to the assault of a student in the classroom. I do not want to say much more, because it is under investigation, but it is real. Whenever next you speak about your laptop programme remember what Sen. Hinds said here today [*Desk thumping*] and drink your porridge cool, temper it and sip it with the reality of your lofty pronouncements at great public expense. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Vice-President, for all you know, that laptop programme could have been inspired in the absence of goodwill and well-meaning for the citizens of this country. It may simply have been to give one of their friends a contract. [*Desk thumping*] When you think they are doing things for the good of this country it is not that. It is to create an opportunity for one of their financiers. So it is born in sin and sharpen in iniquity, and like the fruits of a poisoned tree, all that falls from it. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon Members: “Ogooooood!” [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. F. Hinds: So, Madam Vice-President, with those few words—

Sen. Burke: Praise God; praise God.

Sen. Baynes: Praise God.

Sen. F. Hinds: You see, the Pastor, Sen. Terance Baynes saying, “Praise God”, like he wants me to take my seat. Those words alone have just inspired me to speak for another 15 minutes. [*Crosstalk*] I do not want to speak about the school and so on. I pray that everything would be all right.

Madam Vice-President, let me keep my word. With those few words, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to have made a short contribution in this important debate, and hope that the Minister who piloted this would not let the words from the Independent Bench and from the Opposition Front Bench go in here and pass out there.

Madam Vice-President, you know the old anecdote: a lawyer was making submissions to a judge in the High Court in England, and he was repeating the same submissions sometimes in different words ad nauseam, and the judge became petulant and irascible at his behaviour, and the judge started to show discomfort, and then the judge looked at counsel and said, “Counsel, you know by

now that what you are saying is going in here and coming out here?” and learned counsel looked at the judge said, “It doesn’t surprise me, My Lord, since I suspect there is nothing inbetween to stop it.”

Madam Vice-President, with those few words, I wish to thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin: Thank you, Madam Vice-President. As I reflect on the content of this Bill, short as it may be, I throw my mind back to when TTPost was organized, and when we invited the New Zealanders from New Zealand Post to come into Trinidad and Tobago. I always thought that was a sad day. I always felt that notwithstanding whatever successes they had garnered, that we should have been able to figure out how to take an envelope from one place and put it in another.

Fast-forward a few years and here we are, while the rest of the world’s postal systems appear in parts to be in turmoil, we have talked about that in this debate, but I do not know that anyone has mentioned just how bad it is; even in developed countries, when you look at the US Postal Service and, most recently, the United Kingdom’s Royal Mail which almost shut down just a few weeks ago because of financial difficulties. So there is no question in my mind that there are significant challenges for TTPost. We have heard about some of the ones in the past but, certainly, it is not going to be a smooth road in the future for this organization.

I thought that I would use the short time allotted to me to clarify some aspects of the debate that I felt may benefit from a clearer view, from a different or, perhaps, a sharper perspective. I should begin by saying that vesting of property in state enterprises is really a very standard thing. It is neither new nor unusual. So it being a standard logic, TTPost, I suppose, will find itself in the company of other big state enterprises that have their own property that had been given to them by the State several years ago in most instances.

What is happening with TTPost is, we are dealing with an issue of recently, or to put it more appropriately, currency—it is a current issue, but they all have—I mean if you think about the likes of Petrotrin, NGC, NEC, Plipdeco, NFM and TSTT, all of these state enterprises received not just capital injections from the State by way of funds, but they also received property, lands, buildings and so on.

So, in the context of what obtains in state enterprise sector, I did not think that this really represented something that would be unusual or a cause for concern. Why would they want to have these properties? Of course, it is being raised here,

it is supposed to allow them to borrow. Perhaps, for the benefit of the public, it is important for us to clarify what that means. What it means is that if you give TTPost these properties, you strengthen what would be the asset side of their balance sheet. As long as the asset side is strengthened and there is no corresponding rise in liabilities that are associated with these assets, TTPost can then borrow. It can borrow to finance its operations; it can borrow to support capital expenditure and so on.

It further enjoys the possibility of marking the value of its properties to market using the international audit standard, IAS 40, which allows basically the company to periodically review and revalue its properties held for investment and, thus, take better account of the value of those properties with the passage of time, and that becomes important.

We saw even in the helpful document provided to us by the Minister on responses to matters raised in the Senate on March 06, 2012 that, in fact, a significant change in value has occurred, and really on an island you would expect nothing less. There is a finite amount of land; you have properties and the property stock is not going up by any sort of rate that would preclude the increase in value of properties, particularly lands and buildings that are located where these are.

So it provides some measure of future proofing if a company has a strong land and building or property portfolio to bank on in its asset register. What that allows it to do is, presumably, raise debt when debt is required, and that is important because most people do not understand that equity, that is investor funds, is a far more expensive thing than debt to a company. So you would like to have companies like TTPost that are able to sustain their operations using debt financing and, of course, intelligent and entrepreneurial leadership to take it forward. So I am very much in support of the measure.

5.25 p.m.

Now on to the sums where I had a slightly different view to what was presented, on page 8 of the document presented to us, the administrative costs are projected on the table at about 15 per cent and the retail cost at about 28 per cent per annum, and, really, both of those are extremely hopeful. Those are really quite optimistic because the reality right now is it is over 100 per cent, because you are pumping a lot of money into it by way of subvention. I do not think that this would really withstand rigorous scrutiny; what it does is it tells us where the management is presumably trying to take the company and these are the kinds of target ratios that they are looking at, but to be certain they are no way near that now.

In addition, when you are dealing with a property portfolio the cost of depreciation becomes very important. That does not appear to have been included here and I am not sure if in terms of administrative costs maintenance was included; maintenance is also a very significant factor when you are treating with a bank of properties that you have to take care of. They are projecting, on this table, about a \$10 million swing in financial viability. That does not wipe out, of course, the \$30-plus million that the Government would have had to put into that company this year, but it does move us in the right direction and we should take account of that.

My own calculations are more conservative. My rationalization is it is going to cost \$106 million to prepare these companies to be vested. You are saving about three and a half million dollars a year in rent, \$3.4 million, but I grandfathered \$100,000, and you are projecting income of about \$5.3 million a year. So my swing looked more like \$8.7million. Worked on that calculation, the payback period to justify the spend of \$106 million would be about 13 years, so it would not fit the criteria for borrowing, say from a bank. If you paid 8 per cent interest on \$106 million the interest alone is going to wipe out the benefit of the manoeuvre. So it does not pass a business plan test because you would probably barely be able to cover the interest costs.

We must take into account that perhaps not everything that TTPost has to do should correspond precisely to a business plan. They do in fact have to do a lot of things that involve delivery of service to areas that a for-profit company would view as not being economic. It is in this matter, somewhat unfortunate, that we do not yet have an updated census—[Desk thumping]—because it is difficult for me to correlate the vesting of properties with centres of population that need to be served.

If I direct your attention to page 4 of the document, under section 7, when we talk about the viability benefit and so on, the first bullet says:

- The corporation is obligated to ensure quality of service to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

That therefore begs the question, how do we know where to put these services? Because the second bullet says:

- You must be serviced within a day plus one, and that you must achieve 96 per cent coverage.

So that implies an understanding of where our population might be. I am hoping that the census results can support the work of TTPost because we are actually seeking to grant it properties in places, and it may be that some of these centres are depopulating. Therefore, there may arise, at some point, the question of relevance although from the list of properties, it seems there is a low risk of that, but that would be me making a judgement by “vaps” and without data.

Coming back to the question of a business plan, perhaps we should not judge this purely in financial terms if it also has a social imperative, but having said that I would also say that this is a contestable logic. There is no reason for TTPost to lose money and in looking at the operations of TTPost, as I have had the opportunity to do over the few weeks since this Bill had been introduced, I have come to the conclusion that perhaps the issue is we are not short of property, we may be short of ideas—[*Desk thumping*—inside of TTPost about how do we actually turn this thing around.

Much value, in my opinion, has been left on the table—a significant amount of value in fact. I will give you an example. The cable television penetration rate in Trinidad and Tobago is high, so is the Internet penetration rate and you are seeing a rise in Internet buying, and there are two, three, four, five, six or more companies in this country that offer skybox services now that are bringing in packages, charging people exorbitant sums of money. Around Christmas time as an example, these companies actually have to set up tents outside of their offices to deal with the massive influx, meanwhile TTPost is delivering Christmas cards—you lick a stamp, put it on the envelope, and that is what TTPost gets out of this rush.

If one looked hard enough and entrepreneurially enough, there are probably several opportunities which we can embrace to leverage these properties. I do not wish to be demoralized by being told that we get 43 properties and our retail revenue is going to increase by \$5 million. It is better you sell all 43 and put the money in a bank. [*Desk thumping*] I think that they are being conservative and I am sure that their growth rate will exceed that, or at least, I am sure that, I hope, their growth rate exceeds that.

Madam Vice-President, the blind cannot audit the blind. I recently was at the Hyatt for a meeting, and the person I was meeting with introduced me to his dinner companion, who happened to be the Postmaster General of Guyana, and I said, “Why are you here?”, and his answer, actually, was quite interesting, he said he was here to audit TTPost. So I said, “What did you find?”, and he said, “Well, some of the processes are not operating the way they should.” Then he spent the

next half an hour asking me what I considered to be questions that were entirely fundamental to the operation of a “tambran ball” stall. And so it occurred to me that I had seen this particular jargon before.

I had seen it in a regional body called CROSQ where people from the Caribbean in these Bureau of Standards fly up and down and meet and audit each other, and still standards are very low, still you could import something substandard here, still a consumer is at risk. So if we are going to give these properties to them, and I support it, we ought to require them to come out from these cozy existences that they have created for themselves and face the market head-on instead of coming to the Government every year and saying, “Please, please, can I have some more?”

You know, they know they have the Government over a barrel. Many of these organizations do, because you can squeeze them and say, “No \$44million for you. I giving you \$34 or \$32 or \$30, and they would weep and gnash they teeth and they would take their \$30, but you can bet your last dollar by March, another request coming”. What is the Minister to do then?

And, you know, there is a curious thing about many of these organizations—I hope it is not true in TTPost—they take the allocation and the first thing they do is allocate it to wages and salaries, so they pay themselves. Nothing about the citizens, nothing about service, nothing about advancing competitiveness or productivity, they fix themselves first. Perhaps rightly so; if you are on a sinking ship, I suppose you would not want to release your clutch on a lifeboat, except that this thing takes about 40 or 50 years to sink by our records.

I would like to encourage the Minister—and I am sure he is going to deal with that in his customary businesslike way—to encourage TTPost to stop leaving all of this value for other people to take. One of my students told me once, a few months ago, that the bottled water industry was an idea that first came to WASA, and when it was floated the proponents were almost fired. Look at it today. I would like to hope that a zealous focus on process can be balanced in TTPost by some attention to content, by looking at what we do and not just how well and how efficiently we work within antiquated process-driven cultures.

That having been said, Madam Vice-President, it is my humble view that we need to get closer to the economic cost for the provision of the services that TTPost provides. We need to breathe more entrepreneurial life into TTPost—and we heard it earlier. I thought Sen. Devant Maharaj was excellent in his contribution, very thoughtful and well researched and we heard him say—you

know, New Zealand Post has declared a profit but not from delivering the mail. It is the ancillary services that make the money. It is the services that you can wrap around the provision of mail services.

In the same way TSTT loses money hand over fist providing a landline service, they make money on mobile telephone and these other things, Broadband Internet, and so on. This concept of value and value creation is something that is still too alien to the state enterprise culture and needs to be urgently addressed if we are going to do more than hand people money so that they can dig themselves into a deeper hole.

5.40p.m.

I fully support the idea that we have to remedy this mischief of 12 months for the vesting of property, but the mischief that I would propose to replace that mischief would be to set a timeline for the vesting, simply because, if you leave it alone, it seems not to happen. It ought not to be left to the whim of anybody to decide how and when and if that happens, because that really stymies the will of the Parliament. If it comes here there is no higher voice, so we ought not to allow anybody or anything to stop it, if we say it must happen. So in the absence of a commitment and a timeline, I would be very grateful if the Minister could give me a commitment and a timeline that need not manifest itself as an amendment, but could manifest itself as an oral commitment.

Madam Vice-President, it is source of great concern to me that we are talking here about giving \$58.7 million of citizens' property to a company that has not delivered its annual financial statements in a timely fashion. I cannot imagine why TTPost would have failed to do this, but it certainly would represent a very large stumbling block in my mind. If you are asking me to support giving you \$60 million of citizens' property, I would at least like the satisfaction of knowing that your house is in order.

This company therefore is in breach of good practice, not just best practice—not even best practice—good practice. It is in breach. That is something I would like to encourage the Chief Executive and his management team—is it a he?—yes—to address with as much vim as they can muster.

I think that in this regard parliamentary oversight is almost a—I do not know what that means. I would give you an example. Right here in my package I got the National School's Dietary Services Limited financial statements for 2005; 2005. That was two elections ago, was it not? That was 2005, and you have spent 157—we spent what? We spent \$150-something million—yes, \$157,440 million of citizens' money, and it is 2012, seven years ago. I do not know what a parliamentary committee would do with that.

I would like to say that I make these comments in the full view of the recognition that the realities TTPost has to face are occurring in the context of economic stagnation; so we need these state enterprises to stand on their own. My maxim is—because you know many people in state enterprise sector say, “Well, we are providing a service to the public.” And I say, “Okay, that is fine.” You are not for profit, if that is how you want to cast yourself, that is fine, but you must operate as a not-for-loss. You should break exactly even, if that is what you want to do, but do not keep asking the citizens of this country to subsidize your inefficiency. [*Desk thumping*] That is not fair. And I will tell you the citizens who suffer—it is the poor. The rich do not pay enough taxes in this country. The poor subsidize the lifestyle of the rich in this country, and some of the spending we are seeing now is obscene. [*Desk thumping*] No, I am not talking about state expenditure; I am talking about private citizens who are not paying enough taxes.

There is a run on luxury vehicles in this country—[*Laughter*] including Porsche Cayennes, Range Rovers, Mercedes-Benzes, BMWs. We see these things—and it just occurred to me that all of Trinidad and Tobago now looks like the wealthiest part of central London. Someone got in an accident the other day, and when I looked at the car it was a Lamborghini. Someone passed me on the road the other day, and it was a Hummer, this big wartime vehicle. [*Crosstalk and Laughter*] No, he passed me going the opposite direction, so I got a good view.

Sen. Hinds: Did you see Minister George in it?

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: We cannot have an inefficient state enterprise sector that is demanding subventions which come from the pockets of poor people who can barely afford to pay their rent, who can barely afford to feed themselves, while we witness the very lavish expenditure of the wealthy. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Hinds: Sen. George. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: It is my view that this is timely, that the Government cannot continue to just hand money to TTPost. I gathered from what was presented that that was the intention, to reduce the dependency of TTPost on the State, and we should encourage that, because we do not have many years of borrowing left; we do not. I am hopeful that in the months or years ahead that we will more and more bring legislation that deal with the economy and not just with crime. We have dealt comprehensively with crime in the last two years. I am hoping that we can pay some attention to where we go as an economy, because that is going to decide where we go as a society.

Therefore, Madam Vice-President, I support fully this action. I do not think there is anything in it that does not merit support, except to say that some of the sums need redoing, that TTPost needs to wean itself from the Government's teat and I am expecting to see updated financial statements for this company in my mailbox soon.

Thank you, Madam Vice-President.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim): Madam Vice-President, I thank you for the opportunity to join in the debate this afternoon on the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (Amdt.) Bill, which effectively deals with section 61(1) of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act. It is amended by deleting the words "within twelve months of the commencement of this section".

As I begin, I want to take off from where Sen. Dr. Balgobin ended by indicating that this piece of legislation was very timely. But it is our view on this side that too much time has been expended before this legislation came to this House. [*Desk thumping*]

I want, as I begin as well, to commend our hon. Minister of Public Utilities for bringing this legislation to the Senate, and to say like my colleague on my right, Sen. Devant Maharaj, that this was 12 years in coming; [*Desk thumping*] 12 years which some of us on this side would refer to as a lost decade.

To comfort those opposite, the hon. Minister of Public Utilities has provided some details on the caveats involved in this matter, some of which you would have heard.

Madam Vice-President, the hon. Minister of Public Utilities indicated in his presentation that in the past the postal service underperformed by international standards, in terms of collection, in terms of processing and in terms of delivery. He advised us that in 1999 the Government embarked on a postal reform programme with the assistance of the World Bank, and that the first phase included the establishment of the new postal operator which focused on the following areas: improving customer confidence, increasing volumes and revenues—as Sen. Dr. Balgobin explained to us just now and indicated that he would like to see more of the arithmetic—increasing overall quality of service and ultimately increasing financial performance.

Sen. Dr. Balgobin indicated as well that it was a sad day when TTPost came to us through New Zealand. He recalled, as my other colleague on the Opposition Bench, Sen. Deyalsingh, who brought one of those historic documents from his

archives. I think they used to call those “aerograms”, letter forms. Some of us would have used the airmail envelope, Par Avion. I remember too, in fact, that where I lived the post office was not too far away. So when Sen. Dr. Balgobin spoke about it being a sad day, it was a sad day for many people who lived close to post offices.

I recall that many of the post offices in our country really became institutions and physical entities, around and supported by the Trinidad Government Railway. If you examine where the post offices are located—Sen. Deyalsingh spoke about Caroni, and I will talk about some of them, when we look at the evaluation of some of these postal services and post offices. The Caroni Post Office, from which he posted or received that letter, was very close, or next to, the Caroni Railway Station. If you went down the road to Jerningham Junction, which was the TGR intersection, you would have crossed there from the north/south or the south bound train to go to Rio Claro. As well, if you went to Rio Claro, you would have seen where that post office was located, not too far from the train station.

In Chaguanas it was very close too, within walking distance from the train station. In Carapichaima similarly; it was actually at the train station itself. As you walked out the train station in Carapichaima—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Hinds: What happened in Laventille?

Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim: I will come to that just now. [*Laughter*] I know the seagull is on your mind, you know.

Sen. Hinds made reference to a number of post offices on the East-West Corridor, and they too were influenced by the pathway of the rail system. Madam Vice-President, when I listened to Sen. Dr. Balgobin and he said it was a sad day, it was a sad day for me too and it still remains a sad day, and for many of us I would imagine. We are talking about the vesting of these properties to TTPost. It is so unfortunate that the previous administration allowed all these properties to become eyesores, a lot of these properties, not every one.

5.55 p.m.

And I can tell you in some cases, particularly in the one close to where I live, it was burnt, and as matter of fact, Sen. Deyalsingh, I was looking at the one at Caroni too, and they said that that one was also burnt; many of them, and you know what, when they were destroyed, they were left idle. These valuable assets were simply closed down, and TTPost has opened at St. Mary’s Junction, in the case of Carapichaima, rented property, and you had a physical place there which continued to be left to decay.

So, we are talking about the vesting of these properties in the hands of TTPost, and the question is, and I think that Sen. Al-Rawi asked the question, and has been answered many times here this evening, what are the benefits of vesting these properties? We have heard, and I just want to remind us again.

In the context of what I am saying, that we had allowed these assets to be wasted, to be destroyed, to be derelict, an eye sore amount the benefits, we have been advised, are to increase the corporation's asset base—and much of that has been spoken about, in terms of its ability to borrow, that is to use these properties as collateral when seeking financing; and by extension, to reduce the dependence for subventions from the Government; and to improve and strengthen the distribution network.

The vesting of these properties we have been advised as well, will increase the asset base by \$56 million. We were also advised in the presentation by the hon. Minister, that TTPost can refurbish and reoccupy properties to reduce rental expenses, currently in the vicinity of \$250,000 or \$260,000 per month.

Some people are asking, for example, why is it necessary for us to vest these properties once again to TTPost? We have been told that in most cases while they may not necessarily bring high volumes and profits, they will present where they are located now, the response to many of the citizens for an adequate supply through the mail system.

Sen. Deyalsingh would have told us of the buying of stamps, and the posting of our letters, but in those days as well many of the other uses of the post office, I remember, would have through Rapid Results College, what we are talking about now in terms of distance education. I remember those days, people used to get their books—Rapid Results College. They have come through the postal system, and you would respond through the postal system, and in some cases, I recall as well—Sen. Prescott SC, I see you are remembering that as well—I remember that people would buy their sample suitings in small packets from England, and you would order your cloth for your pants or your suit, via the postal system.

Sen. Maharaj: That is real long time ago.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I remember when the train stopped in 1965. I am not so old, you are probably judging from my hair, or lack thereof. [*Laughter*] That is why I was telling Sen. Cudjoe that I admire her hairstyle today. [*Laughter*]

So, given the passage of time, the corporation has recommended that six properties, which were originally earmarked for vesting by Cabinet in 2001, are no longer required, based on the following—and I think that Sen. Al-Rawi was

asking what are the reasons we are not vesting some of these. And the reasons were provided by the hon. Minister of Public Utilities, and I want to repeat them. They were based on catchment; on dimensions; on topography; proximity; the cost of operation; revenue potential; and plans for future development in each of those areas.

As matter of fact, I managed to pick up from the *Trinidad Guardian* on page A11, Monday March 19, where some residents were calling for the renewal of the postal services; and I will read from that, with your permission, Madam Vice-President:

“Thousands of residents in central Trinidad are being affected by inadequate service from TTPost. Among the affected areas, ... Caparo, Momaral, Mamoral Crossing, Chickland Road, Flangin Town, Braso Venado, Todds Road, Palmiste and Carlsen Field.”

And I think there will be a number of like areas or centres like these in other parts of the country, maybe in the north-east, in the Toco area or in the south-west or in the south-east, wherever you are, I am sure people would want to have access to these facilities. In fact, they were saying that they preferred to return to the villages, that these post offices be returned to them:

“...as everyone had easy access to collect their mails, buy stamps, register mails and also to post their mails.”

I said that in the context of what Sen. Dr. Balgobin had alluded to, in terms of the maintenance cost factor. Had we maintained these buildings, at minimal cost, and maybe used them for other purposes by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we would not have arrived at this stage today, where we have to vest these properties, many of which are totally dilapidated, and if you had to renew their services, you would have to spend exorbitant sums of money. Of course, yes, we are talking about the depreciation cost.

Madam Vice-President, Sen. Hinds, my friend, I need to correct him at this stage but he is not here, I will still do so, maybe he is looking at the cricket and looking at me as well—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Deyalsingh: “Cricket finish.”

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: “Cricket finish, already?” Oh, Lord! [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Beckles: Last score 64 for four.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Oh my Lord!

Sen. Deyalsingh: For five!

Hon. Senator: You serious?

Sen. Beckles: They will probably finish this evening.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: In the years gone, by, we probably would have had to get a mail from someone telling us about the score—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Beckles: That is right.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—through the postal service.

Hon. Senator: Nice link, nice link.

Sen. Beckles: Long after the game finish. *[Laughter]*

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Long after the game finish.

Sen. Deyalsingh: I like it, I like it.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: But he indicated that while—the laptops, he said, are not being utilized properly, and he also mentioned that teachers were not trained, I want to remind him, that I had the opportunity to be acting for the Minister of Education, and there was a question on the Order Paper in terms of the use of laptops and the training of teachers, and through the National Energy Skills Centre, thousands of teachers in this country have been trained in the use of ICT, and as we bring more teachers in the system, there is continuous training.

You know, one of the things I noted here that he had said, is that people “does get up” and say anything without attachment, and others believe what you say. That happens in his case as well, my very good friend, he gets up here, and he makes these statements without any substantiation, without any evidence, and he continues to say them and expect people to believe them. Well, we on this side know him well, we do not ever believe anything he says. *[Desk thumping]* In fact, I will remind Sen. Hinds, my friend, that if he continues this way, he would become like one of those properties I have described in TTPost now, and we might have to vest him with some new nuances, so that he will improve his delivery in this very august body, this Senate.

He talked about transparency and procurement, and I think one of the things that our friends on the other side will go down in history as being remembered for, was that they were part of the great procurement walkout in this House. *[Desk thumping]* At a time when you come and you talk regularly about procurement, and you pretend to fight, and you run away, but you will always live to fight another day.

Madam Vice-President, my good friend also spoke about this Government having 1,001 ways in which we increase expenditure. I wish I had the list before me, because if I had that list, I think we would go late into the night with me reading about the expenditures, the waste and the mismanagement of the previous administration, and you know what, we do not have to get it in the mail. No one has to send it for us in our postboxes, we just have to drive around this country and see it. Everywhere you drive you see evidence of that profligation, of wastage, wanton waste, mismanagement, neglect and in some cases, as we have described in various places too, corruption.

One of my colleagues on the other side, for whom I have a lot of respect and regard, we go back many years in the UWI School of Continuing Studies at the time—I just picked up an article from the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Thursday July 27, you could imagine that day, 2006 though; “Local management team set to transform TTPost”, and my colleague on the other side, Sen. Beckles—and in fact when I said it earlier on, she said, “That was a good idea”—was speaking about this whole aspect of transforming TTPost under her watch. She said, and I quote:

“When you provide an essential service, which is mandated by the Government, you have to carry out that duty to provide mail. But you have to look for more innovative ways to make money which is representative in the amount of services we now offer.”

I think Sen. Dr. Balgobin and Sen. Maharaj alluded to some of those things, and I see my very distinguished colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities, is nodding in agreement.

So it is not simply a matter of the vesting of the properties, but what is important is that, rather than not do it, what would be the consequences of not vesting them. [*Desk thumping*]

A point which Sen. Beckles at the time, Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment noted, at a launch of a Caribbean Single Market Stamp at the Central Bank, and it was coming as an innovative idea, but somebody else thought that you were too bright. [*Desk thumping*] Now, I know you are bright “eh”, but I would not get in there because somebody else would send “a next” letter in TTPost to your leader, so I would not want to jeopardize you.

What Sen. Beckles at that time time noted, was that the TTPost now serves 95 per cent of the households and businesses, and therefore, what we are saying is that, we can increase that, and the Government, of which I have the honour to be a part, we intend to increase that, and to reduce the burden as you say, by vesting these properties in TTPost.

Madam Vice-President, some of the other things that we considered in this Bill—and it is really under a question which I am asking—will vesting bring about an end to the rental of properties? That is a question we have to ask, and it is almost a rhetorical question. It will not, because in some cases you have properties within—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: No choice.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—and that is it, you have no choice. As a matter of fact, Sen. Al-Rawi, I wish he were here; when Sen. Deyalsingh was making reference to the waterfront project in San Fernando, he said that the post office was right there. I think he meant that it was behind PTSC's terminal—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Deyalsingh: He was linking it to the Bill.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: That was to link it to the building and the Bill. So you are linking the building to the Bill, and TTPost is charged with the responsibility, as the country's designated postal operator, to deliver the mandate of the Government for post being, and I quote:

To attain world class quality of service standards in letter mail, parcel, local courier and international express service.

6.10 p.m.

But very importantly, Madam Vice-President, TTPost is charged, therefore, with the provision of the Universal Service Obligation (USO), which is the provision of a range of postal services accessible through the length and breadth of the country—we mean here, Trinidad and Tobago. TTPost will therefore, for example, always have need to seek rental accommodation, particularly in the very built up areas.

What we are indicating as well through this vesting Bill is that with the creation of new residential areas, many of which you have seen around, and new housing developments, areas, villages and towns, the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago is constantly changing, and therefore, TTPost must be prepared to set up offices in those areas where there is need for accessible postal services. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: That is why we want the census—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I am indicating to you as well that we have visible evidence of development taking place under the People's Partnership Government, and even in terms of not only new development in housing, but we have had to engage in a lot of recovery expenditure, that is, to spend money to make these houses habitable, which we are faced with from the last regime.

Madam Vice-President, one of the things that I wish to bring to the attention of the Senate is a report from the World Bank, which is on a loan in the amount of US \$11.45 million to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for a Postal Services Reform Project. This is dated June 22, 2007. *[Interruption]* My colleague said that he also quoted from that report. I will quote—I hope I am not repeating what he had said. But the section under which I want to make reference to is on page 18 of the 28-page document, and it is headlined “(A) Government Performance—the rating of the Government performance in this World Bank Report is moderately unsatisfactory.”

As a matter of fact, Sen. Dr. Balgobin asked about the accounts and he said that that is one of the things that he is saddened by. I asked our Minister of Public Utilities to give us an idea as to when these accounts—and I think Sen. Drayton raised that matter as well—and the Minister sent back a reply to me saying that we are now at 2005 and getting ready to do the rest, 2007 accounts. That is not only with regard to TTPost. When you look at some of the other accounts that you even quoted they are way behind; not that we are saying that we want to make an excuse, but that is what we are faced with and that is what we have to correct.

So, in this document where it rates the Government performance as moderately unsatisfactory, I wish to read section 106:

“At the same time, however, certain Government action and inactions undermined the above achievements:”

In terms of the postal sector:

- “The restructuring of the ministries and the shuffling of the project PIU from one to the other and then back again delayed the project and demoralized project staff. A significant portion of the project delay can be attributed to these actions.”

It then speaks about the:

- “Lack of action to authorize TTPost tariff increases since 2000, despite inflation averaging 7 percent, hindered TTPost from reaching financial viability.
- Delays to vest”—and this is the one that relates directly to us why it is being categorized as unsatisfactory—“Government postal properties to TTPost (as agreed in the”—Delegated Management Authority—“DMA) denied TTPost additional revenues from commercial exploitation of these properties.”

That is the point I was making as well.

Could you imagine having moved or closed down one of your facilities, which at that time would have been useable, functional, to move to another location, a rented location? Were you able to utilize that commercial property for rental or for other purposes, you would have either been able to save on Government expenditure or to increase Government revenue. None of which they attempted to do.

- Under the DMA, government was responsible for funding TTPost operating losses”—and, as a matter of fact, we have an idea as to what was some of those operating losses—“In many instances, however, delays in complying with this responsibility contributed to TTPost cash flow problems and resultant operational difficulties.”

What were some of these challenges and what were some of these losses which TTPost faced? I will go back to 2001, \$14 million—loss; 2002, \$13.5 million—loss; 2003, \$2.2 million—loss; 2004, \$5.9 million—loss, and at the time if you took the last four years it amounted to \$21.6 million—loss. At the time of this publication they were saying that the 2005 report has not been presented to the Parliament, and that underscores the point that Sen. Dr. Balgobin was making.

I think Sen. Armstrong made reference, as well, to the whole aspect of equating service and profitability, and we are told in that very article that I quoted from in this paper, and in the case of TTPost “providing an essential service for Trinidad and Tobago citizens, does not necessarily equate profitability.” That gives you a sense as to some of the key components or some of the arguments that were being advanced in support of our contribution here today, to vest the properties to TTPost.

A couple of my friends on the other side were talking about the absence of a business plan. I think I should respond to that. But, before I do so, I am reading from a document entitled “Public Utilities Subcommittee Members”, and there was a subcommittee on postal services sector, in a document which we have come to know as Vision 2020.

On page 87 of that document, “Strategies for achieving the objectives”, and I am talking about many years ago, what was written in this document on this page is that, among the strategies were to complete all outstanding matters in respect of the Postal Sector Reform project, for example: vesting and capitalization of the balance sheet as well as all outstanding capital investment.

So, my friends on the other side were saying that we have no business plan, but I will tell you, what they had was nothing close to anything like a business plan. This document is really as described and is written, elements of an action plan, and I

will read one or two of the things that they had in this document to prove the point. It is easy as Sen. Hinds said, to come and say what you want without evidence and if you say it often enough people might believe you.

On page 100 of the document the TTPost Action Plan—as a matter of fact let me make a comment one time here in terms of this plan and lack of plan. One of the early mandates of our hon. Prime Minister was to insist that every Minister and Ministry engage in a strategic plan, which we have complied with. [*Desk thumping*] I understand the difference between a strategic plan and a business plan. I am saying that we have responded to that call, unlike in the case of a stated objective of an action plan. I am sure when the former Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment responds, he may want to respond to some of the things I am talking about here in this document.

It was saying that among the baseline measures and targets for TTPost was to introduce technology. To what extent that has been infused in the system, well, that is left for us to scan the environment and see, but it said here that the prioritized strategy—[*Interruption*]

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Madam Vice-President, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that this Senate continue to sit until the conclusion of the debate on a Bill to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act.

Question put and agreed to.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO POSTAL CORPORATION (AMDT.) BILL, 2012

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Vice-President. I would not be very long again in terms of just responding to some of the matters that were raised by the other speakers.

I was at the point of saying that one of the things that this action plan spoke to was that it should introduce technology, how and in what ways. In terms of the prioritized strategy it said, to aggressively market new services and expand existing elements and introduce parcels scanning technology new services. New services: e-commerce activities; bill pay expansion: selling of tickets for third parties; financial services: banking—I suspect that is where Sen. Drayton was also talking about in terms of the expansion of services, to not only vest the properties.

It is one thing to say you have a property; what are you going to do with it? What are the increased services and opportunities you are going to provide in expanding markets? Facilities; rental management and to establish a technology best practices unit and a monitoring committee in this regard. This is just one area in which mention was made in terms of how do we move from the action to really the business plan.

Madam Vice-President, Sen. Armstrong also mentioned the fact that it is not only so much the scaling down of services but the cost of operating these services. He also mentioned the fact that in terms of TTPost, what we would be looking at is not only the profitability from operations and operational deficiencies, but how do we really improve the services.

I want to report to this honourable Senate, in the data provided by us, and I may read from some of the excerpts of the hon. Minister of Public Utilities, that in 2011 TTPost improved its domestic delivery performance rating of 87 per cent for day plus-one delivery and 94 per cent for day plus-two deliveries. And in a poll conducted between May 25, 2011 and July 15, 2011, there was an 86 per cent rating of public satisfaction. In this regard, we want to compliment the hon. Minister of Public Utilities [*Desk thumping*] and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mention was also made about the financial viability of TTPost and what would have affected or what are affecting those things and we would have heard some of those here today in terms of the Internet usage, social networking, email, instant communication technology and so on, many of which Prof. Ramkissoon speaks about in his contributions in terms of the impact of technology, not only on the way in which we live and do business, but in terms of the profitability.

It is my view that we on this side concur with the presentation of the hon. Minister of Public Utilities, that the vesting of properties to TTPost would redound to the benefit of TTPost, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to all those who depend on the various services which are provided through this facility. I could go on to make a few comments on the other speakers but I think, suffice to say, that all who would have spoken so far would have agreed that the time has come and long gone now, that these properties should have been vested.

I support this Bill as I indicated with the rest of my colleagues, and I am sure the other Senators of this honourable Senate, and we look forward to the utilization of these services through the TTPost centres which are going to be vested and, hopefully, which are going to be refurbished for use for the benefit of all of us.

I thank you, Madam Vice-President.

6.25 p.m.

Sen. Penelope Beckles: Thank you very much, Madam Vice-President. I too would like to join this debate on “An Act to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporations Act, Chap. 47:02.”

Madam Vice-President, I would like to start by saying that it is very easy to talk about the fact that it has taken 12 years to have this amendment come before the Senate. Those who put it in such a simple question really, either misunderstand what has transpired, either deliberately, accidentally or otherwise. I think I need to—and I listened very carefully to Sen. Karim, and I agree with most of what he has said, not all—and we talked about it being a tragedy when a lot of the post offices were closed down and the challenges faced by TTPost today. One gets the distinct impression that if we approve this amendment that all the problems would be solved. We need to remind ourselves that it was the last Government that took the decision to close down the post offices—well, the UNC Government. The decision would have been taken for a very good reason, but to give the impression now that they have totally forgotten that that decision was taken, which clearly would have caused a number of things that are taking place today.

Now, Sen. Karim read from the World Bank, and the World Bank in 2010 talked about not being satisfied with the Government’s performance. One of the issues had to do with the vesting. It referred to several other things. But you know I think the real question we need to ask ourselves is, why is it that in that initial debate and that legislation, the time frame of one year was put into the legislation, because that is really the issue as we debate this piece of legislation today.

Madam Vice-President, I am sure that many of my colleagues here, whether it be the Minister of Public Utilities, yourself—maybe everybody here—has gone to the bank to do a simple thing. Well it may not be that simple, but you are going to purchase a property and you have to mortgage that property, and you require several things: valuation, last WASA receipt, land tax receipt, a search and many other things. If we were to do a survey in the Senate today and we ask several persons here who have purchased properties and they gave us an idea as to the time frame—how long that took for the process to actually happen from the time that they signed the agreement—normally when you sign the agreement it would say 90 days. Very often you would have to go for an extension.

If we were to be truthful, a number of us, sometimes years have passed and you have not been able to comply. Some people have lost their deposits for a number of reasons: the search is not completed, you cannot find the root of title—all sorts of

things and I mean I do not want to go back to the time that Sen. Deyalsingh spoke about, and Sen. Karim remembering exactly when we started the post office. We are talking about a long, long time ago. Therefore in some instances, and I am sure Sen. George who would have—the baton would have been passed to him and he would have had within his knowledge the information and the challenges faced about finding the deeds and going back to do the searches—it is not a simple exercise.

Now, I do not think any of us is happy that it took 12 years. But those of us who understand the whole issue of land registration in Trinidad and Tobago—this is not the British system where you can go on the Internet and type in and get your information as I know Sen. Ramnarine and Sen. Karim know, and Sen. George as well, we do not have that kind of system. Some of us know that you go to get a certificate, a title in the Red House and it is missing. I do not want to spend all the time talking about that today, but I am pretty sure—and Madam Vice-President, I just want to share with you the number of Ministers this particular process has passed through.

It first started off with Minister Ganga Singh, then it went to Minister Martin Joseph, Minister Renee Dumas, myself, Minister Abdul Hamid and now Sen. George. If we look at the time frame, Sen. George is going to be there two years. I was there three years plus; Minister Dumas, two years; Minister Martin Joseph, 10 months; Minister Ganga Singh, probably about—I am not sure he might have been 1995—2000. I do not know the exact time. If people would take the time and do some research they would understand that it is very easy, as we do sometimes in the Parliament, to get up and blow our trumpet and beat our chest and give ourselves an A grade as though we did all the work.

So you come today—and some of his colleagues, because I have not heard Sen. George say that in his presentation—to say as though, yes you congratulate him. The point about it, yes, you are to be congratulated for bringing the amendment, but the truth is that let us not get too carried away with the extent to which some of us always want to give ourselves and our government an A grade without understanding that everything is not simple. At this point in time, as far as I am aware, the properties are ready to be vested and they have been valued. So that there ought not to be any difficulty, but all the Ministers coming from Ganga Singh would have had some role to play to get it to where it is, but this amendment is not the be-all and end-all of TTPost as though nothing else was happening.

As a matter of fact, I am sure Sen. Karim is aware that what is interesting when we take World Bank loans and IDB loans—I know you have been there a very long time in terms of those types of experiences, and Sen. Dr. Balgobin and Sen. Ramkhelawan would be aware. I mean as governments you are doing

transformation in many areas, whether it be administration, the energy sector, the water sector, and yes, you sign the loans and they put all these conditionalities and say yes you have to do this in a year, you have to do this in two years, and they put all these pressures and you sign on the dotted line. Very often if we are honest with ourselves, we would know we cannot—there is no way it is going to be possible. And there was absolutely no way as I stand here today, that it was possible for any government, be it the UNC, the PNM, the NAR, to have done that vesting in a year and the valuation, it just was not possible.

So when we talk today, 12 years passed, I mean nobody has really given the explanation as to the complexities in this particular matter that brought us to where we are today. And as I said, not one of us could be happy that it took 12 years. But we must understand that there are certain procedures and sometimes even as we pass legislation, as we agree to things as countries, especially as Third World countries, they pressure us and they make you write a plan. Sometimes they write the plan for you and say you have to do this; they give you the targets, and over and over, and they would mark you and they would fail you, knowing very well that what they are asking you do is not possible, whether it be the agriculture, the energy, the education it does not matter. Countries like Haiti and other countries that have had to go through this process for years, they can talk a lot more about it than we can in Trinidad and Tobago. So I just want us to be careful as we talk today and make it look like a very simple exercise; that is not the case.

Madam Vice-President, you know the irony of it is, whilst the World Bank would have given us this fail grade, the people in TTPost and Sen. George would tell you that Trinidad and Tobago is a success story in the postal transformation sector in the world. That is the irony when they are talking about “fail” grade because you have not met their stipulated requirements, but at the same time, every time they talk postal sector reform the World Bank refers to Trinidad and Tobago. It is because of the same DMA and some of the successes that the Government—that that 1999 project was started under Mr. Singh. We might not agree with everything. I am sure Sen. George would tell you that almost every country in the Caribbean comes to Trinidad and Tobago for training—Jamaica, Grenada, Barbados, St. Vincent.

I remember going to Brazil and they were speaking about their use Trinidad and Tobago’s postal transformation as a starting point for even their changes. The United States—I went to Bucharest in the last convention and Trinidad and Tobago was lauded. Sometimes we just want to be negative about every single thing and do not understand that yes, we had problems, but we also had successes.

The other one he spoke about, that the World Bank was not happy about, was the issue of the tariff increase. Well the reality is that I cannot remember the last time TTPost got a tariff increase. I do not know, Minister, if you—but I am sure it is probably anyway maybe 10—15 years. The point is that TTPost, unlike WASA and T&TEC, is not regulated, so they cannot easily make a justification for the tariff increase.

Now, I may be wrong, but I am advised that the Minister took a Note to Cabinet for a tariff increase and that was rejected. So the bottom line is that you have a situation where we must not simply say that the fact that you are going to have this amendment, vest all the properties, that TTPost would become profitable. As Sen. Karim said rightly, it is a question of innovation and creativity. We all know that it means you have to put the right people in place, your right management, your right board, and people need to remove from the syndrome that you spoke about, the dependency on the Government, where they feel that once the organization does not perform they are going to be guaranteed that the Minister is going to go to Cabinet and he is going to say, okay, we do not have enough money and every year you get your \$30 million and you get your \$40 million.

So at some point in time somebody has to say, well okay, we are going to give you all your resources and you have to perform. And that is where the challenge has been and that is not only for the postal sector, Madam Vice-President, that has been for WASA and it has been for many other sectors in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Vice-President, if we go to the United States for example, this is September 15, 2011:

“Last week, the Postmaster General told Congress that the United States Postal Service (USPS) could lose up to \$10billion due to declining mail volume and rising pension costs. To compensate, he wants to cut delivery services, sell over 200 post offices and receive billions from a taxpayer bailout. Congress seems willing, but the experience of other countries suggests there are much cheaper ways to get even better service.

Over the last ten years USPS’s mail volume has dropped 20 percent since 2006 due to the rise of email and Internet transactions.”

That was said by Sen. Dr. Balgobin and others.

“The legacy costs of USPS’s unionized workforce result in an annual funding deficit of *billions* as pension payments outpace revenues.”

I am sure that is an area Sen. Abdulah could well expound on. I mean, those are the challenges where you are talking about the labour force and everybody seems to think, well okay, the first thing is just to send home the workers. When you listen to how the United States is attempting to deal with this issue, that is one of the first things that they have spoken about.

6.40 p.m.

Madam Vice-President, the Caribbean Postal Union met in Guyana quite recently and some of the things that Sen. Karim spoke about—and, Sen. Karim, based on what you said, I will just share with you, and I will send you a copy—was that there is actually a Caricom Regional Symposium on the services, and there is actually a Caricom perspective on the matter and this, actually, was more or less decided a couple of years ago.

This is the document, and these are the future steps for the Caribbean Postal Service, and this is what was decided in 2008. And if I may just read; it is the Concept Paper prepared by Loretta Charlemagne, UPU Regional Adviser for Caricom Regional Symposium on Services.

“The viability and sustainability of the Caribbean postal service will depend on its ability to meet customers’ growing expectations by transiting to a commercialized postal business; adaptation to the explosive growth in the communications market; and coordination and harmonization efforts to facilitate a progressive, coherent integration of the region into the world’s postal sector.

The concept of the CSME implies *inter alia* the pooling of forces and the harmonization of legislation and operations, etc., while the diversity of development stages among Caribbean nations calls for the development of synergies.

CARICOM has the authority and the bonding capacity to include the postal sector in the development agenda of the region and assist its members in reforming the postal sector which should bring about the commercialization of the postal services.

CARICOM should also ensure that its members focus on implementing the 2009-2012 Nairobi Postal Strategy which identifies four programme-driven objectives to respond to the following global challenges:

- improving the interoperability, quality and efficiency of the three-dimensional postal network in order to keep the sector relevant to market and customer needs;

- stimulating a universal postal service adapted to the social, economic and technological environment;
- promoting the sustainable development of the postal sector and its economy;
- fostering the growth of the postal market(s) and services.”

So I just want to say that there is a document that speaks to the direction of the regional postal service.

Madam Vice-President, I just wanted to make the point that there are some who are of the view that, of course, the postal services are under threat, and I know a number of persons talked about that. But, you know, it came home to me a couple of years ago about the importance of the postal service. There is a document written by the International Labour Organization and it is called: “The new postal sector: Why ‘snail mail’ still matters.” It says:

“Changes in today’s postal sector are literally snail-like when compared to the lightning-fast developments buffeting its old twin, telecommunications. But though slow, the more earthbound mail has itself seen a period of unprecedented change:”

The document closed by saying:

“Controversy remains over postal reform programmes in developing countries. A 1996 World Bank report argued that the postal service was ‘one of the last bastions of the old order’, and the Bank subsequently helped initiate market liberalization activities in more than 30 countries worldwide...”

And, of course, Trinidad was one of those 30 countries:

“But the World Bank/UPU report warns against a simplistic approach. ‘There is no single path to postal reform,’—‘Specific economic conditions, traditions of corporate governance, and evolving market needs all require unique strategies and customized solutions.’”

You know, when the hurricane hit Grenada and other countries in 2004—Hurricane Ivan, to be exact—it came home to a number of persons about the importance of the postal sector. As a matter of fact, not just in Trinidad, I know they had a similar problem in Jamaica, either before or after, in relation to natural disasters and then, you know, Sen. Karim, the whole issue of modern communication and technology hit home, because you had no Twitter; you had no Facebook; you had no Internet; you had no YouTube; you had no Skype, and, I mean, people were longing to see a postman.

That is the reality. Because there it was in Grenada, that everything was down. I am sure you remember that we had to send T&TEC there, and they were known as the “Sunshine Boys”, because they were the ones who actually restored electricity to Grenada. Some of them stayed longer than a year. You had the WASA workers there who went in terms of restoration of water. And you had the exchange, again, with the postal sector, because that then was the only thing to work, literally. So let us understand that as we very often talk about communications and modern technology when everything, as we see in many parts of the world that, you know, your electricity goes and everything goes, we always have to be mindful of certain things like that.

Many persons have talked about this reduction in terms of the dependency syndrome, but part of the challenge, I think, for me, is getting an idea as to what it is really costing us now to run TTPost. I think I would be happy if the Minister would say, in his winding up, where we have really reached. Can he give us a good sense, in his winding up, as to the completion of the valuations; the completing of the vesting? Can he indicate to us that the fact that you have 2007 valuations in 2012, whether or not that is going to meet the requirements of the World Bank contract; the stipulations?

If it is you can get from the Commissioner of Valuations, for example, some sort of documentation that would confirm that between that period, 2007—2012 they do not anticipate substantial increases, or even decreases in the valuations, so that you do not have to go through what some of us may have had to go through, because having gotten to the stage of vesting and valuation, it means that all the challenges in terms of the searching and everything, that that would have been completed.

So the likelihood is that we ought to be in a better position now than we were in 1999 when we passed the legislation that spoke about a year. Therefore, I anticipate that we ought to be in a position where the vesting and valuation, if there are any changes, that ought not to take us very long. Therefore, I think the issue of putting a time frame in place, I think now we are in a much better position to put a time frame, being a year or two years or three years, than we were in 1999 when we made that decision which, clearly, was not possible.

In the contribution of the hon. Minister, the hon. Minister clearly indicated—he referred to the fact that the matter of the vesting of the properties is important because it will assist the corporation in bolstering its asset base and could also be used as collateral when seeking financing for its programmes; improve and strengthen its distribution network. He gave us the whole issue of the estimated cost and the issue of the losses made by TTPost.

Several of the speakers referred to the issues of the failure to file the audited statements and even the reports, and I join with all my colleagues who have expressed concerns about that particular issue. It is something I had to face when I went in as a Minister in 2003. I remember that we were doing audited statements for WASA way back in 1995-1996. Can you imagine if you are years behind, when you go into a Ministry how long it takes to actually become current?

There were similar things in terms of the reports for TTPost, and now I know they are way behind. I am not sure what the reason is for that. Sometimes it has to do with the fact that, again, the focus is on the whole issue of your subvention and doing whatever necessary documentation to justify to the Minister that you are operating at a loss, and those things seem to be given greater priority than actually doing sometimes the report and doing the audited statements.

Madam Vice-President, I know you have sat on several joint select committees and you are aware that section 66D of the Constitution stipulates that:

“A Body listed at (A) to (D) in 66A(1)...”

And section 66A(1) lists all the various ministries and organizations. It says:

“(a) shall submit to the President before 1st July, in each year a report on the exercise of its function and powers in the previous year, describing the procedures followed and any criteria adopted by it in connection therewith and the President shall cause the report to be laid within sixty days thereafter in each House.”

There are ministries that have never complied with this section—never complied, and I mean, it says “shall submit”.

Madam Vice-President, I remember you sat on a joint select committee and you would recall that there were a number of permanent secretaries who were not aware of that section, and there were a number of ministries that could not understand why I was making a fuss about their failing to comply with what is a mandatory section in the Constitution and not a discretionary section.

Therefore, when we are supposed to do reports and they are part of legislation but they are not mandatory—sometimes it is discretionary—they just do not bother. And there it was that many—and I would not want to call any of the Ministries—when I sent to them, based on the decision of the joint select committee, that when they are coming before the committee that they should bring the last date that they had filed this report and the dates—and we actually agreed, Madam Vice-President, if you could remember, that we decided to have a cut-off point of 2000, and come forward, a 10-year period, and the majority of them had never filed.

Of course, at the end of the day, the first thing you do is blame the Minister and blame the former Government, as is customary, until some of us get into office and find ourselves in those positions. I mean, you are having meeting after meeting after meeting, and you just cannot get it done. The boards change; the CEOs change; so many people change; the Ministries, of course are restructured; all sorts of things, and you find it becoming more and more difficult for you to comply. So sometimes we need to understand that it is very easy to blame, and sometimes it is so easy to take credit. Some of us ignore the failures and we only look at the successes when we do not understand that. I think we all have a duty and responsibility to get it right, as people of Trinidad and Tobago—to get it right.

That is what we ought to be all about, and as we talk to our boards and we talk to our CEOs, and as we come to the Parliament to debate legislation, we only hope that they really listen to some of the things that we talk about, and that people understand that. I mean, when a Minister has to come before the Parliament and he has to pilot legislation, sometimes he may come after a particular time has expired; he cannot necessarily account for what took place before his time. But even whilst he is there and he is trying his best to get things done, you have to defend sometimes the indefensible, and it is not necessarily because you have not tried your best, and it is not because you have deliberately caused certain things not to be done or to be done.

We can only hope that as we continue to debate legislation and as we continue to look at some of the shortcomings in the public service and in so many of the institutions we expect to do better, so many of the institutions, as we say, that we give taxpayers' dollars to by the millions and sometimes billions of dollars over the years, that they understand that accountability does not only lie with the Minister and does not only lie with the Government, but lies with all of those who have accepted responsibilities to manage organizations, to be on boards; that they also have a responsibility to do their work and we must not be afraid, as we stand and speak in the Parliament, to let them know that. [*Desk thumping*]

6.55 p.m.

You know, Madam Vice-President, as I close, I just want to say that Sen. Fazal Karim spoke about the post offices that he has seen closed as he drove around Trinidad and Tobago. And Sen. Maharaj talked about the closure, I think, of the Trincity Post Office, right?—[*Crosstalk*]—right, and the challenges that were faced. Sen. Maharaj, through you, Madam Vice-President, I still believe that

that has to do with the contractual arrangements. At the end of the day when you give out all these franchises and they do not work it means to say that we need to revisit the contracts. It is not simply that people come and say to you it is no longer profitable. I think it is a little more than that.

None of us are happy, especially people who live in the rural communities, the distance you have to travel to collect your mails. Some of us who have lived in rural communities will know that the post master or the post mistress long after 4.00 p.m., you could just go and blow your horn eight o'clock, nine o'clock, and they run out and give you your mails or on a Saturday or a Sunday. That was something we all benefited from, we probably long for, but it just does not happen anymore. For all kinds of reasons it does not happen. But, the reality is that one made the shift and sometimes we say that when we end that particular culture we have actually become more professional. The issue is not necessarily professional you know. The issue is delivering a service to your customers. That is what took place then and that is what people want to take place now.

He talked about "drive by" and seeing wastage. I want to say that we must also acknowledge and admit that when we drive by we see progress and we see improvements. [*Desk thumping*] We do not only see wastage. We must admit that when we drive by we see the same NAPA that was condemned that is being utilized now; we drive by and we see the University of the West Indies; we see UTT; we see the interchange; we go to many rural communities that have not had water and that have not had electricity and have that now. That is because of a continuation of programmes by all Governments, not just one Government. [*Desk thumping*] So we must not talk just about wastage.

We come into Port of Spain and we see— those of us who have families that have lived abroad for 30 years, and land in the airport, and when they come to Port of Spain or go to San Fernando they cannot recognize that they are in Trinidad and Tobago. They cannot recognize that they left a country many years ago and they have seen considerable changes. And, no one, as Sen. Baynes said, nobody is perfect. We cannot say that people have not made mistakes. But, when people stand and say that nothing has happened in the country over the last 50 years, it has to be because they have been asleep—totally asleep. [*Desk thumping*]

I say this Government now has the mantle and they have been given the responsibility to govern the country. And therefore, it is up to them to do so in the best way possible. But, at all times as you give yourselves credit, never forget that there are some people who have worked very hard, some people who have been very honest. There are many of us who continue, and strive for, and work for, and long for, a Trinidad and Tobago about which we can all be proud. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Albert Sydney: Madam Vice-President, thank you for allowing me to contribute to this Bill entitled, “An Act to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act, Chap. 47:02.”

As a nation, Trinidad and Tobago has had a long history of the postal service. We have had many achievements since it was first established and we have set many records in terms of being involved in the industry. This country is recorded as having produced the first ever postal stamp in the world after the United Kingdom in 1847, which was the Lady McLeod stamp.

In fact, after the British conquest of the island in 1797, mail coming into the country landed at Macqueripe Bay and was taken to Port of Spain by horse carriage at the time, and so forth, hence the reason, for the name in use in that area, up to today, known as the Macqueripe Mail Road.

The first post office and inland postal service in this country was established in 1851—a very long time ago. And, the postal service has evolved since then over the years from the 19th Century to the 20th Century, and now we are debating this Bill in the 21st Century.

The first airmail coming to Trinidad was in 1929 by the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh who landed just behind Bayside Towers down in the Cocorite area. We must remember that the Piarco International Airport was not opened until 1931. So, Madam Vice-President, before this time the postal service was the main means of inland communication for the country. So at that time it was absolutely necessary, and integral, to have established postal offices throughout the country for effective communication.

Many of these post offices today have been historical landmarks in their own right, but, I shall come to that later on in my contribution.

In fact, the Mounted Branch section of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service was established purely and solely to deal with the carriage and delivery of mail on the outskirts of Port of Spain and further afield. I do not know how many of us would have known of that fact, that that is what the Mounted Branch of the police service was established for.

As the postal services advanced and progressed to GPO or General Post Office, such was its importance that it was located as part of the current Treasury Building in Port of Spain. In those days postage and revenue were in addition to the other industries that we had. I think, well, the sugar cane industry was around, the oil industry was around, but the significant contributor of revenue generation

was from the postal services. Of course, all the deeds everything that had to be official documents were taxed. There was a tariff, if you want to call it that, and you had to go and get the official revenue. In fact, I think in those days when you were sending out mail there was a portion, apart from the postage rates, that a revenue tariff was included, so all postal stamps in those days said postage and revenue.

From 1957 the General Post Office moved into a new building on Wrightson Road—not very far from here as you would remember—which became the central nervous system, because of voluminous amount of mail arriving by sea, which is commonly known as surface mail.

After the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation was established in 1999, the National Mail Centre in Piarco was constructed at that location to handle the greater volumes of mail arriving from the airport. But, while this was a good idea, we should not have abandoned the old GPO building on Wrightson Road. I am very concerned that as an institution of the State, you gave up this building to go to a small and inadequate location lower down Wrightson Road and now pay a rent.

After Transend, which was a company that was formed by the New Zealand Post, began operations here in Trinidad and Tobago, I recall at that time, TTPost was a recipient of the Prime Minister's Innovating for Excellence Award. They made significant progress, because the old postal service had become run down, I do not think there was a great injection of capital at the time; you had a lot of old vehicles so mail was slow and then there were a lot of strikes and so forth during that time. Of course, the economy in those days during the '80s and so forth, we went through a recession and things were not as easy.

At that time Transend, a division of New Zealand Post, was established to deal with international consultancy and it made formidable inroads into several countries throughout the world. The first that I recall as a case study for them was in Malta. And when they came here to compete, to present the bid to deal with the Delegated Management Arrangement for the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Malta was one of the cases that they used as a success story. It should be of interest to note by Members of this honourable House that Transend, in spite of all their efforts at being a global postal services achiever, was officially terminated as a company in June of 2011.

Trinidad and Tobago has been an official member of the Universal Postal Union since 1963. Madam Vice-President, I am very concerned that this vesting of properties to the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation has taken so long. I

refer to the contribution by Sen. Prescott in which he made note that the mathematics for these properties under the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act should have been dealt with in 12 months. It has now been brought before this House over 12 years going into 13 years later. I ask the question, why? Why has this vesting of properties taken so long?

7.10 p.m.

Madam Vice-President, when the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation was established, they produced a publication entitled, “Post, Past & Present: A Legacy of the Postal Service in Trinidad and Tobago”—a 2000 commemorative limited edition publication. It is the same postal corporation that we are debating in this Bill today about the properties, these post offices that are now to be vested. But they did a whole comprehensive publication on all the post offices throughout the country, the historical ones which have today fallen into total ruin and a dilapidated state. Many of them listed in this document entitled, “Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation, Properties to be Vested”, are in this publication. So I wonder, you know, how much of a legacy at the end it really comes up to or adds up to.

While this publication clearly recognizes the legacy of the once proud architecture of the post offices throughout the country, I ask the question: why have these 47 properties been allowed to fall into disrepair? I went up, maybe about two months ago, to Rio Claro for a funeral and while I was going up there, I was shocked to see the Rio Claro Post Office in a total state of abandon. The next day, I recall seeing in one of the daily newspapers, in the photo opinion on something, there was a photograph of that same Rio Claro Post Office with the headline: Why has this been allowed to be covered up with bush and everything like that?

Madam Vice-President, many of these buildings are now historical landmarks, and in addition to being vested into TTPost, they should be placed on the register of both Citizens for Conservation and the National Trust. One of the headaches that TTPost will have to deal with is that while the valuation figures will be reflective of a positive asset on their balance sheet, financing from the public purse for these properties to be vested, after 12 years of neglect, will be a tremendous sum. Has TTPost budgeted for this? What would be their expectations of these properties?

We are now hearing in this Senate that it has been a while since TTPost has produced their annual audited statements. So I guess they are going to have to know how to work to—you cannot just vest all these properties in us, and well, where is the money going to come from; how much money are we going to use to get them back? What are we going to do with them? What are the projections for when we bring them back in order if your accounts are a little way back?

I note and endorse the statements and concerns by Sen. Drayton, especially for the need of a corporate business plan by TTPost, which, I think, it would be safe to say since they have not produced their annual accounts for the last—five years? Is it?

Hon. Senator: Seven years.

Sen. A. Sydney: Right. We should get a business plan from them what they are going to do for the next five years to seven years; I think it is only fair. I also support the view that Sen. Prescott SC made in his contribution about the apparent rush to have this amendment passed and endorse his concerns. We have had 12 years, all of a sudden it is coming up, and TTPost knew about this all the time.

TTPost has had its challenges over the past 13 years of its existence. In fact, we have to face reality that many postal administrations, throughout the world, here in the Caribbean and in many of the developing countries, have a great deal of pressure placed upon them, on their postal services. The example about the Royal Mail in the United Kingdom is not a new one; they have gone through several transformations. They have been privatized, they are out of it, they are always asking for Government's funding in the United Kingdom, and have changed the names of their company; at one time it had stopped being called "Royal Mail".

Madam Vice-President, I also note that we have in this Senate, two Members who served with much dignity and with much duty towards the continuing expansion of the postal service. They are very, very, familiar with the challenges that they had to face while they were in office at the time. I speak of the then Permanent Secretary, Emmanuel George and the then Minister of Public Utilities, Penelope Beckles who did a lot and, who understood all the ramifications and concerns, and I know that she had a clear vision on how the postal service should have expanded.

While I support the principle of the vesting of these properties to be once more under their rightful place, under the postal corporation where they should have been originally over the last 12 years, because when the postal service was there, the post offices were all part of postal system. I do not know how under the delegated management authority, you could come and say, "Well, we like those but we do not like those", and you just leave them to fall into decay.

The postal service has not changed, it was always one postal service coming up and all the post offices were there, throughout the country, serving the needs of the people. In fact, I would say that in a country where we have a little lack of signage on the roads to tell us where we are going, you know, it might have been safer or easier to stop a postman to ask for directions where you are going instead of a policeman

in the area. I am of the view that the corporation should clearly indicate how it intends to deal with the vesting of these properties and how they will be used in the future; whether these properties shall permanently remain in the possession of the corporation for exclusive use under its mandate as defined in the TTPost Act. The corporation must give a clear timeline of the vesting of these properties.

In closing, Madam Vice-President, there was something brought on the point of tariffs. When you speak of tariff, you speak of the increase in postal rates. I recall, just before TTPost became TTPost, at that time, the inland postage rate for any letter or mail up to 20 grams was \$0.50 cents. As soon as Transend came in, within a year, they raised the price to \$0.75 cents, and I remember them doing some overprints on that \$0.75 cents on some old stock of stamps they had. It was only after, maybe a couple of years, that they raised the tariff to the current rate of \$1.00 which is the current local rate that is used for mail up to 20 grams, but that has been around for, I would think, nearly 10 years. It has been around for nearly 10 years.

I cannot say whether it should be raised or it should be reduced, TTPost will have to deal with that. If you want to encourage more people to write letters and buy stamps, I do not think you should raise the tariff. You have to find ways of encouraging people to get involved in your philatelic programme or write some more letters. I see clearly now, and which I endorse, that TTPost is currently engaged in a letter writing competition for young people, 15 years and under, and I think it is an excellent idea to get people involved. I do not know how many—I think at the primary schools, at one time, on the curriculum, you had to do letter writing and write a letter to somebody or something like that. I do not know if it still happens.

Sen. Maharaj: It still happens.

Sen. A. Sydney: So as I said, I think this is an excellent idea and I encourage these sorts of initiatives by the corporation.

I also support the philatelic drive of TTPost especially as this is a major contributor of revenue for the corporation. I would like to respectfully suggest, Madam Vice-President, through you, that the year 2013 represent the centenary of the birth of this country's first locally recognized artist, Michel-Jean Cazabon, and consideration for this fact be given by the corporation for a philatelic stamp issue next year. I am sure that my colleagues on this side of the Senate, Sen. Drayton and Sen. Dr. Armstrong, who are both accomplished artists in their own right, will support such a move. Madam Vice-President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George):
Thank you, Madam Vice-President. As I rise to address this Senate at the conclusion of this debate on “An Act to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act, Chap. 47:02” by amending section 61(1) of the Act by deleting the words “within twelve months of the commencement of this section,”.

I want to say, first of all, that I am grateful for all the contributions made by all the Senators in this Senate over the course of the weeks that this debate has been taking place. I want, in particular, to thank Sen. Sydney for that ride down memory lane in the history of the post office in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] In particular, I want to thank him for the little snippet that the Mounted Branch of the police was formed to deliver mail. I think that was quite—that is something I would never have known had you not said it in this Senate this evening. I want to thank you very much; I was here for that little snippet of information.

7.25 p.m.

I want to start by dispelling two statements that were made in this Senate this afternoon. The first statement was by Sen. Beckles, who said that the then UNC Government took the decision to “close down” the post office and said that in a manner as if it was wrong so to do. I simply want to respond by saying that the then UNC Government sought to improve the postal service by bringing in a management operator in the form of New Zealand Post, subsequently Transend, to manage the post office and the benefits of that decision are here with us today in the improved postal delivery service that we have.

However, one of the parts of that entire initiative that was not completed is what we are seeking to do here today, which is to ensure that we get the vesting of the properties done. I want to say to Sen. Beckles, that I do not agree “at all” that the then Government took a decision to “close down” the post offices. The vesting should have taken place and did not and those post offices were left abandoned and that, in part, is why we are also here today, because the abandoning of all these post offices has led to their deterioration and part of what we are doing here today is to seek to halt that process of deterioration.

Sen. Beckles also referred to the fact that the postal services around the world are in trouble and I agree with her on that, because my research also threw up that information. I want to underscore that by saying it is the very reason we must do all that we can to assist TTPost in improving its service and its bottom line and we must do that, not by pampering them but by an approach that our parents might call tough love. We must set targets for them to achieve.

I would have liked to go back and start with Sen. Al-Rawi's contribution when he spoke the last day, but I want to dispel a couple of statements made by Sen. Deyalsingh. The first statement that he made today was: "Why are we introducing Bills in the Senate before introducing them in the Lower House?" Sen. Deyalsingh is a budding or an intended lawyer, so I want to take him to section 63(1) of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, which says:

"A Bill other than a Money Bill may be introduced in either House...;"

I want to repeat that:

"A Bill other than a Money Bill may be introduced in either House; a Money Bill shall not be introduced in the Senate."

This is not a money Bill. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Deyalsingh: I never said it was.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: But you said that we should be introducing Bills in the Lower House and not in the Upper House.

The second thing Sen. Deyalsingh spoke to was the issue of postal codes, suggesting that postal codes and the introduction of postal codes are a prelude to the intended introduction of the property tax. I want to think that Sen. Deyalsingh is simply fear-mongering and fishing for things to say, because the postal code initiative started under my predecessor and what we are doing is continuing that initiative.

For his further information, because apparently Sen. Deyalsingh simply goes through the newspapers or listens to the news to hear snippets of information that are derogatory or that are negative of Government, because he did not seem to know that TTPost, in respect of this postal code system introduction, held several meetings. TTPost held stakeholders workshops in May 2011, at Crowne Plaza and the THA Division of Infrastructure and Public Utilities in Tobago in September 2011. Both events, through you, Madam Vice-President, were published and broadcast on television and in the print media.

Further, the General Manager of Operations and Professor Obadeyi, who was the lead in this particular initiative, appeared on TV6's Morning Edition and CNC3 and in Tobago on the Rise and Shine morning show. There was ample publication of the initiatives of TTPost in pursuing the implementation of the postal codes. I want to say to Sen. Deyalsingh that he needs to pay attention to what is happening in the media on a broader scale, so that he does not only come here and read from things in the papers that are negative of the Government.

What motivates this Government and what motivates me is to seek to improve the situation of the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, every time we come to the office on a morning, the question that we ask is: what can I do today to improve the lives of the citizens that we serve? This measure that we are seeking to introduce here today, which is the amendment to this Act, is specifically for this purpose.

I want to say to Sen. Dr. Balgobin and Sen. Drayton, in respect of the amendment that we seek today, we will commit to completing this vesting in two years' time. What we commit also to do is to report to this Parliament at every budget debate, on the status of this vesting. The first status on where we have gone in this vesting exercise, assuming that we get the passage of this amendment today, will be to let you all know what is happening when the budget debate comes around. I say so because the vesting process takes several steps. The first is the cadastral surveying. The second is valuation. The third is the title search and opinions. That is followed by preparation of the vesting order, Cabinet approval and the preparation of the Legal Notice.

For the information of this honourable Senate, through you, Madam Vice-President, the cadastral surveying, as we have indicated, has been completed. The valuations have been completed and we are in the process of doing the title search and opinions, which are to be done by the Chief State Solicitor. That is the really significant part of this exercise. Once that is completed, then there is the preparation of the vesting order, the Cabinet approval and the Legal Notice preparation, all of which can take place in a short time.

By undertaking to report to this Parliament and specifically to the concerns raised by both Sen. Dr. Balgobin and Sen. Drayton, of stipulating a new time frame in the new amendment, I am suggesting that we report to the Parliament about how this process is proceeding at the budget debate presentations.
[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: And in the fore?

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Another concern was the presentation of audited financial reports. I want to discuss that particular matter. I want to first speak to the 2006 audited financial statements because as I had indicated, the last financial statement we have for TTPost is for 2005. Let me say to this honourable Senate that I have been TTPost's most severe critic in respect of this particular matter of the presentation of audited reports. I have been urging their completion ever since I came in as Minister with responsibility for TTPost. The 2006 audited financial

statements were signed off by the management and board after the completion by KPMG and the settling of certain issues that needed to be addressed. Those 2006 audited financial statements have been addressed and shall be presented to the Minister shortly.

In respect of the 2007 audited reports, at the 18th meeting of the Board of Directors of TTPost on March 29 of this year, the board of TTPost agreed to the sign off on the 2007 audited financial statement. I want to add that over the last 18 months certain issues have presented a very serious challenge in the completion of this particular exercise, because I have been in constant touch with TTPost's board and management on this particular 2007 audited financial statement. As indicated, the board, at its March 29, 2012 meeting agreed to sign off on it.

What the board of TTPost also did in respect of the 2008 and following audited financial reports was to seek the approval of the Auditor General to retain external auditors to do a comprehensive report, inclusive of 2008, 2009 and 2010. The Auditor General has given approval and so TTPost is to pursue, with the external auditors, the completion of the audited reports for 2008—2010 as an omnibus exercise.

Several of the speakers referred to the issue of there being no plan and the Opposition is always singing that song. In respect of that particular issue, there do exist plans that have been formulated by TTPost. A strategic plan for the period 2010/2011—2014/2015, but which has been revised for the period 2011/2012—2015/2016, was approved by the board of directors at the 17th meeting which was held in January of this year. So, there is, indeed, a plan. In speaking with the representatives of TTPost, they have indicated that over time they have always had these plans put in place.

My information is that in 2009, 2010 and 2011, TTPost produced and operationalized plans and business plans that had utilized and built upon the properties that we now speak about vesting, and those plans were done in the context of initiatives geared towards engendering viability and revenue generation through optimal utilization of those properties. To say that there were no plans is to be, not disingenuous, but suggests that certain Senators lacked information. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Deyalsingh: We did not see it.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Let us see it “nah”?

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Those plans do exist.

7.40 p.m.

In respect of several issues which were raised by Sen. Al-Rawi and Sen. Prescott, TTPost presented, and the Clerk of the Senate did distribute to all Members of the Senate, a statement from TTPost which spoke to all of those issues. In particular, Sen. Al-Rawi spoke about taking valuable state property and giving it to a private agency. I am suggesting to Sen. Al-Rawi that TTPost is not a private agency, it belongs to all of us, it is a state enterprise.

In the normal course of things vesting takes place in respect of many, many state enterprises which have been formed over time. We could all recall what happened to the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited, and these things are done as a matter of course, as successor agencies, except that this time we have this issue of the vesting of these properties which has taken so very long, in fact, in certain legislation, vesting is done automatically.

So I do not understand why there should be this big issue of Sen. Al-Rawi suggesting that we have taken a valuable state property and put it in TTPost. What has happened is that many of these properties, because we have not vested them, have deteriorated considerably over time, so it makes good sense to have vested them in the first place, but it is never too late. I think that putting these properties in the hands of a competent authority like TTPost ensures that somebody is in charge of them and will see about them.

I just want to make this little statement about the way that government agencies have historically treated their properties. I do not think—because this is not something that TTPost alone is faced with. The neglect of government property is endemic, and I could give another example in WASA. WASA has neglected its infrastructure and its property for many, many years; a lot of their properties that they used to house the persons who would take care of their pumps, treatment plants and so on, were left to rot. In fact, the pipelines themselves were not policed over time, and so people built on top of the pipelines. We have a problem on the Caroni 54 inch main which goes from the Caroni treatment plant heading to central and south, where people have built on top of it and, we have found there are about 224 persons who have built on top of the pipeline, and this is because of the endemic way that we in public service and public enterprises do not take possession of our properties.

I speak again of the issue of the Hollis line coming to Port of Spain and which passes along the bus route, and even the wall of the Carib Brewery was built on top of the Hollis line, so we neglect these properties and they all go to waste. It is better in this case that the property is put in the hands of a competent agency so that the deterioration is halted, and we have at least the hope and expectation that these properties can be rebuilt or refurbished and come again into good use.

I say so because many of these properties are in areas that serve the population, in very, very far-flung areas. I want to refer to the newspaper article of Monday, March 19, 2012 in the *Guardian* which has the heading:

“Central residents want return of post offices.”

And it reads as follows:

“Thousands of residents in central Trinidad are being affected by inadequate service from TTPost. Among the affected areas...are Caparo, Mamoral, Mamoral Crossing, Chickland Road, Flanagan Town, Brasso Venado, Todds Road, Palmiste and Carlsen Field.”

There was a complaint by a resident who said, and they quoted him:

“TT Post has become totally dysfunctional in these communities as we have to go to Chaguanas at high costs to buy a stamp and mail a letter.”

So people want these post offices close to them. And Sen. Sydney referred to his disappointment when he was heading to Rio Claro to see the state of its post office. I think it is our responsibility to try to assist those agencies to take responsibility, to take hold and possession of their properties and take good care of them.

Now, Sen. Al-Rawi spoke to the issue of how does vesting magically result in profitability, and I think I quote him on that one. Well, it was never said that the vesting will produce profitability. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: It was never mentioned.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: And I think it is stretching it a bit to make such a statement. It is expected to help, and that is all it is expected to do. I want to give a sense though of the condition of TTPost, because I do not think we understand the difficult situation that it finds itself in at this time. But I want to refer to just one area which has do with wages and salaries and what has happened over the period June 2000 to September 2011. Wages and salaries, to give you an idea, have increased from \$53.7 million in 2000 to \$90.7 million in September 2011. So that TTPost is in some considerable difficulty and, in fact, the subvention which it receives from the Government is in the region of forty-odd million dollars.

I say that to highlight the fact that under the New Zealand Post, when TTPost first came into being sometime around 2000 I think it was, it was virtually breaking even. But since that time, about 2001/2002, we have found that exactly

where TTPost was in terms of the subvention from the Government prior to TTPost becoming an entity, that is in the times of the old post office, is exactly where we are again today.

I recall at the time when I was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry, the subvention to TTPost was in the region of forty-plus million dollars; that was one of the reasons for the introduction of TTPost. When I returned to take up this position in 2010, to see TTPost had gone right back from a break-even point when it first came into being, to where the former post office was by 2010/2011, requiring an excess of \$40 million annually in Government subvention was really a disappointment.

The people at TTPost will say to you that I have been insisting that this is something we have to pay attention to, because TTPost must reduce its dependence on the Government subvention. The reduction in that subvention to I think \$34/\$37 million a year, was done deliberately to encourage TTPost to seek to live on less than the \$40 million subvention it was accustomed to, to gradually wean them off the Government subvention. This is, however, in the context that there is a universal service obligation that it has to keep. That universal service obligation most likely would result in TTPost turning a loss, but we have to focus all the time on improving the efficiency at TTPost, so that we have over time a situation where we can countenance the loss that is experienced, once we are doing the universal service obligations efficiently and effectively.

I am just looking through here—[*Searches through documents*]—because Sen. Drayton and Sen. Cudjoe focused on the issue of whether we wanted TTPost to be a profitable institution or one that was focused on social service. I just went through that in a manner of speaking, that there is a universal service obligation which says there is a service people are entitled to as a right, and the postal service is supposed to provide that for them, and whatever it costs once you do it efficiently, that cost has to be met by Government, and that cost may be in excess of the revenue, and that you must do.

The profitability aspect—when we came into Government we met TTPost seeking to get into areas that would augment its revenues, and what we said to them was that when you do a review of those services or those initiatives which you have gone into that are not your core services as under the universal service obligation, determine if these services are profitable or not, and if they are not profitable then TTPost should get out of them, because that would mean that the Government is financing or subsidizing services provided by TTPost which are not its core services as required under the universal service obligation. And we hope that over time these initiatives will begin, if not to eliminate, but at least reduce and make manageable the cost of running TTPost.

In terms of Sen. Hinds' contribution, the least said the better. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Yeah! Yeah! [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Sen. Hinds never fails to amaze me. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: He himself recognizes that.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: He talks here for an hour and you can hardly pick out something of worth to comment upon and, in fact, when Sen. Dr. Balgobin spoke right after him, in fact, within five minutes of his contribution there were several areas that you could comment upon. I want to thank Sen. Dr. Balgobin very much for his contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Yeah! Yeah! "Ah real lucid moment."

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Yes. I know that the TTPost officials are here, and I went over to them and said that they should take notes of what has been said here. I want them to pay particular attention to the contribution of Sen. Dr. Balgobin in suggesting that they should investigate to what extent they could leverage all these properties when they come into their possession, not to exist in a situation of business as usual, but to see how they could use them to grow their revenue. Again, to Sen. Dr. Balgobin, thanks very much for your contribution.

I referred to this earlier on, where you mentioned that this year instead of the TTPost getting \$44 million in subvention, we instructed that they be given no more than between \$34 and \$37million and indeed that was a directive which I suggested be put in place, and it was. It was simply to get them to understand that they simply cannot be coming every year for more and more money from the Consolidated Fund, and that they needed to challenge themselves to be a little more self-sufficient. That particular suggestion and recommendation by Sen. Dr. Balgobin that we use these properties as leverage, is one I hope TTPost has listened to and would take on board.

7.55 p.m.

Madam Vice-President, we have tried to address all the concerns raised, starting with the document that was released to all Senators, to seek to address the issues raised by Sen. Al-Rawi and Sen. Prescott on the first day of this debate; we have tried to address some of the issues raised today having to do with the presentation of audited financial reports. With the issue of the time period for vesting, I have given an undertaking that we will try to get that vesting completed within two years. I will come to this Parliament and report intermittently, in particular at the budget presentation, and let the Senate know what is happening; if any difficulties are being experienced, or if the process is smooth and going through.

I have spoken to the issue of the plans and in fact that TTPost has been producing their plans over the years, and so the issue of there being no plan—that suggestion has no foundation whatsoever.

We have spoken to the issue of the neglect of all of these post offices which has occurred as a result of the fact that the vesting has not taken place. We expect that TTPost will do its best to make sure that these properties, which would be vested in it, will be brought up to functioning state, and help to put it on a sounder financial footing.

So I think, Madam Vice-President, I have attempted to address all of the issues that have been raised here today, including those that were raised by Sen. Deyalsingh which really showed that he either does not read the newspaper, or listen to the television, to listen to good news, neither does he read his Constitution which, as a budding lawyer, I think he must first read.

Madam Vice-President, I want to thank, again, all the Members of this Senate for their contributions. I hope that the Senate will support this amendment. [*Crosstalk*] Sen.Hinds is never around when important things are taking place.

Madam Vice-President, with your leave, I want to thank again all of the Senators for their contributions. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the Whole Senate.

Senate in committee.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2.

Question proposed: That clause 2 stand part of the Bill.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Madam Chairman, I tried to resist the urge not to contribute on this too much—a question for the Government relative to its policy insofar as there were representations and undertakings given by the hon. Minister of Public Utilities. Clause 2 of the Bill refers to the amendment which speaks to removing the time limitation within 12 months.

The hon. Leader of Government Business in the Senate, Sen. George, undertook to do this in two years. My question is whether an amendment in line with his undertaking—because his undertaking is in a vacuum. There is no sanction if he fails to meet his own obligation and marker. Seeing that he is confident enough to give the undertaking and marker, and fully well appreciating that there is a need for a sanction, my question is instead of deletion of the words “within 12 months of the commencement of this section,” whether the words “in keeping with the 24 month obligation” undertaken by the hon. Minister could be factored into the Bill.

Sen. George: Madam Chairman, I have given an undertaking to address this particular matter. As I said, given all of the steps that have to be taken, and which have brought us to this particular place today, I do not want to presume. I would do my best to ensure that we do it in two years, but I do not want to presume, given the difficulties that we have experienced. I think that former Minister and now, Sen. Penelope Beckles, will understand what I mean when I say that. I think that leaving the amendment as is, is sufficient. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Madam Chairman, insofar as the undertaking is now being resiled from, my question is really this, how then do we protect—the last time I understood the Parliament was a place where we discuss the law; this is the law we are making. So, we are in committee stage, there is one clause, I am sure Senators can tolerate discussion on one clause.

My question is, insofar as you have given a representation and have now run very fast away from it, how do we have—[*Crosstalk*]—I do not think that is a very parliamentary expression, hon. AG. My question is how do we ensure that there is compliance? Where is the assurance other than the hon. Minister's words? Suppose the hon. Minister is no longer with us?

Sen. Dr. Balgobin: Could I just make an intervention here? Thank you, Madam Chairman. Sen. Al-Rawi, I struggled with that as well, and I will tell where I ended up. We had it in the law the last time and did not do it, so if we put it in now there is still no sanction if it does not get done.

Sen. Al-Rawi: The sanction, hon. Senator, is the fact that you failed to do it within 12 months and now you are back before Parliament, in the Senate having to justify your business plan or, lack thereof, and why are these properties which go into a corporation, which is not subject to the Central Tenders Board Act? It is not the same as other corporations, hon. Minister, and you are winding up.

In other corporations, you have the Central Tenders Board Act not specifically excluded as we do in section 33 of the parent Act. You also have the ability by the amendment in 1999 to the Central Tenders Board Act; all land which is vested in the State, including certain corporations, must comply with the Central Tenders Board Act.

So the sanction, Sen. Dr. Balgobin, is that you have to come back here today and justify the efficacy of what you are doing. If the hon. Minister, for instance, wanted to take three years or four years, well then so be it, but the point is that there will be a time frame. I am not asking you, hon. Minister to be

unrealistic in the process. The point is, if it is without any form of timeline it is not being true to the original intention of the legislation, even though the business plan is today totally different from when this Bill was piloted in 1999, the parent Act.

So if you want to take three years or four years, the point is, at least another Parliament would have the opportunity to interrogate the position if it is brought back for failure to have complied with the Bill, and that is the sanction.

Sen. Dr. Balgobin: I think I see the point. And I think that in a sense you could argue that it, in some respects, does not matter either way, and I will tell you why. If you have not vested within two years or a year, I think that life, reality, would have moved on and you probably would be facing a different context by the time you come around, in the same way that it has happened here; because you are vesting 43 and not 52, for example. That having been said, I do not think it injures you any to put five years, and say, you have a reasonable period of time to treat with it, and if not then we have another look at it because the logic may by then have become stale.

Sen. Beckles: If I may, can I just make an enquiry from the hon. Minister as to what is the status of both the valuation and the vesting, as I understand it, they are both finished. So that in truth and in fact, all things being equal, you should be able to comply within a year or two. This is a totally different situation from when the Bill was debated where nothing had started, and was impossible to be done. So I am saying, having regard to that, I am just of the view, therefore, and I agree with a two year-period, even three. But I think that having regard to all the concerns that everybody has had, and even for your own, I think, reputation, it is probably—[*Crosstalk*—no, no, no.

Well, you do not have to accept what I am saying. I am saying reputation because you are giving an undertaking, and we all understand that it is much different for you to give an undertaking as different from the Parliament to put it in the legislation. You know very well that notwithstanding whatever you may say, it is not really within your hands personally to ensure that it happens; that is where the difference is. I think that is what you should be questioning.

Sen. Drayton: I would just underscore what Sen. Beckles has just said, although let me say that I am fully prepared to support this Bill. When she made reference to the fact that it may not be entirely in your hands, it is very valid. I am very wary of such commitments. This is not a reflection on your integrity or anything like that, it is just that I have another instance. I recall only too well the

undertaking that every quarter an update on the progress with the Clico restructuring, which is in the law; there was a verbal commitment given by the Minister of Finance that a report would be submitted to this Parliament quarterly, but so far that commitment has not been adhered to.

8.10 p.m.

The FIU is another situation. So, there is a track record with respect to such undertakings that are not put in the law.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: I think the overcrowding of the parliamentary agenda and the competition and legislative priorities that are facing the Government, do, in fact, sometimes in the dynamics and fluidity of the debate, give rise to situations where you may give an undertaking, and then the practical real-life situation, you succumb to it and it overwhelms you, and I think the two examples you gave are, perhaps, good examples.

For example, with respect to the Clico matter, I remember during the course of that debate, we had said that we would amend it so that limitation would not run—the stay would not block the limitation period from running. I think we dealt with that in subsequent legislation, after I received a reminder from Sen. Drayton. But that is an instance where, in fact, we complied, as it were, with a commitment that had been given. There are times when I accept sometimes the exigencies of real-life situations and the competing legislative priorities of such that you really find limited space.

On this matter, for that reason, by itself, I think what it does is to highlight why the Minister should not, perhaps, give too much of an undertaking. I see Sen. Drayton is saying yes. The reason is, when you do so, you do so at your own peril. In this matter, the Chief State Solicitor who falls under my Ministry has a role to play [*Crosstalk*] Chief State—

Sen. George: No, no, we passed those already.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Sure, but in certifying titles you have to do searches and so on. I can tell you that those searches will take a good time.

Sen. Drayton: Put five years.

Sen. Dr. Balgobin: Attorney General, I like five years.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: I am happy with five years.

Sen. Dr. Balgobin: I like five years, and I would tell you why.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: And the Government will accede to the insertion of a five-year period.

Sen. Dr. Balgobin: Very good, because there are 43 properties that you are vesting.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: The good thing about that is we will be here in five years' time to report back to you. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Sen. Beckles: Madam Chairman, I just wanted to make one further contribution. I just want to remind the Attorney General who is so very certain about where he will be in the next five years, he was not here for my contribution, but you have had six Ministers since the Bill was passed to now, and that is why I am saying to the Minister, do not give an undertaking. The simple thing is that you are the sixth Minister. If you are so certain that you are going to be here for the next two years, I do not know if any of the five Ministers before had said that, but he is certain. This is just for your own safety.

Madam Chairman: So what is the wording?

Sen. Ramlogan SC: The proposed amendment would read:

The Minister shall by Order on or before April 09, 2017 vest in Trinidad and Tobago, et cetera.

The amendment would read:

Insert after the words "this section" the words "on or before April 09, 2017".

Sen. Prescott SC: Do we have the substantive section 61 here?

Sen. George: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Do you want me to read it?

Sen. Prescott SC: I should be grateful, because the Attorney General has just thrown something at us that has thrown me.

Madam Chairman: For Senators in the Chamber it says in section 61(1):

"61. (1) The Minister shall, by Order, within twelve months of the commencement of this section, vest in Trinidad and Tobago Post such property which was under the direction and management of the Postmaster General under the Post Office Act at the commencement of this section, as is specified in the Order."

Sen. Prescott SC: I see. So, my query is, insofar as the Attorney General sought to insert something after the word “section”, are we no longer proceeding with the amendment and we are now referring to the word “section” in the last line of the sentence or are we retaining the amendment?

Sen. Ramlogan SC: I understand the problem. I would now read it.

Sen. Prescott SC: What would section 61 now read?

Sen. Ramlogan SC: It would now read:

The Minister shall, by Order, on or before April 09, 2017, vest in Trinidad and Tobago Post such property which was under the direction and management of the Postmaster General under the Post Office Act at the commencement of this section, as is specified in the Order.

Sen. Prescott SC: I see.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Hon. Attorney General, through you, Madam Chairman, while you are thinking of it, do you think that there is any hiccup that we may suffer insofar as vesting such properties, which were vested in the Postmaster General, may leave a vacuum with the properties that are left behind? So, the Postmaster General was using properties, and we have a schedule of 47 of them, and we are vesting 41 of them and six of them are staying behind.

Do you have any complications for those properties if you want to use them somewhere else or can it not be viewed to be an obligation in law that those six properties must be vested, because they were vested in the Postmaster General only ever go to TTPost? This is just a question so that we do not find ourselves with six properties behind that we cannot dispose of in any other way. I do not know the answer as to who owns them and maybe that may give us the solution.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: I appreciate what you are saying, but the difficulty is, I think for now if it is vested in TTPost, it would not bind the hands of the Government to make use of it otherwise.

Sen. Al-Rawi: So long that there was no encumbrance that fettered the Government’s use.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: The converse problem is that if we put any formula now, we do not know where it will go to specify.

Sen. Al-Rawi: I am just raising it out of caution in case you want to use it and you may be hamstrung.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: I am grateful for the consideration.

Sen. Dr. Balgobin: The vesting allows it to come back to the State if it so wishes.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: That is the point.

Sen. Prescott SC: Madam Chairman, may I make another intervention, please? [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Sen. Prescott SC, you could safely ignore that libel.

Sen. Prescott SC: I did not hear it. Madam Chairman, thank you. Is it therefore, proposed, that we withdraw the amendment which is before you? [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: We still need to delete and then add in words. So you will be deleting those words and then adding.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: The deletion remains as is, but it is just that you are adding instead the words “on or before April 09, 2017”.

Sen. Prescott SC: So, the Bill ought to read section 61(1) of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act is amended by deleting the words “within 12 months of the commencement of this section” and substituting something?

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Correct—and substituting therefore the words “on or before April 09, 2017”.

Sen. Prescott SC: Thank you very much.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: All right? That is the position of the Government, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Sure. Clause 2 is amended as follows:

By deleting the words “within 12 months of the commencement of this section” and inserting instead “on or before April 09, 2017”.

Sen. Prescott SC: Have we changed the way we write dates in this country? Would it not have been that at one time we would have said “9th April” instead of “April 09”?

Madam Chairman: There is a different way.

Sen. Prescott SC: Well, I am surprised we did not put it in that way.

Madam Chairman: I am being guided that the printer would make the changes according to the standard procedure.

Sen. Prescott SC: Forgive me, thank you.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: I just want to clarify for the hon. Senator that we did not insert any “semicolon” anywhere in that. [*Laughter*]

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the Senate.

Senate resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Madam Vice-President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to April 17, 2012 at 1.30 pm when we will be debating two Bills; a Bill to amend the Land Adjudication Act, 2000, and a Bill to amend the Registration of Titles to Land Act, 2000. Madam Vice-President, because these two Bills may, perhaps, be closely linked we may wish to debate them simultaneously. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: What about the Regional Health Authorities (Amdt.) Bill?

Sen. The Hon. E. George: That is for the following—

Sen. Beckles: You did say the 17th.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Yes, I did say the 17th. [*Crosstalk*] That Bill is also to be put on the Order Paper, the Regional Health Authorities (Amdt.) Bill, so we will also consider that Bill for debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.22 p.m.