

SENATE

Wednesday, October 21, 2015

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**Appointment of Joint Select Committees
(Extension of)**

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, as Senators may be aware, the period for the appointment of joint select committees, pursuant to section 66A of the Constitution expires on October 22, 2015. In light of this fact I beg to move that the time for the appointment of Members of these committees be extended to Friday, November 12, 2015.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 20, 2015]

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, those who have spoken in this debate are: the hon. Colm Imbert, Member of Parliament, Minister of Finance and mover of the Motion; Sen. Wade Mark; Sen. Taurel Shrikissoon; Sen. Daniel Dookie; Sen. Khadija Ameen; Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan; Sen. Jennifer Raffoul; Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat; Sen. Nadine Stewart; Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon; Sen. Allyson Baksh; Sen. Hafeez Ali; Sen. Paul Richards and Sen. Justin Junkere.

All Members wishing to join the debate may do so at this time.

UNREVISED

Trinidad and Tobago Sen. Vasant Bharath: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute to the 2016 budget debate. First let me start by both congratulating you and wishing you well on your new office as President of the Senate.

I am sure it is clear to all of us that this is a political rather than a developmental budget. It is woefully short on policy prescriptions that are required to build on the strong platform left behind by the last Government. It is riddled with inconsistencies and inaccuracies, which I will point out at a later date, but deliberately calculated to mislead the nation regarding the true state of the country's financial affairs. Its sole purpose is to create panic and to spread fear amongst our citizens. Essentially, it is bad politics at the expense of good economics. [*Desk thumping*]

It is a document, I hasten to add, that shows a complete lack of understanding of our economy, and what is necessary to take us forward in this new world, where we face new global dynamics of trade, of differences between how we do business in the future. It shows a pathological disregard for sound and stable financial management and economic direction. Madam President, the Minister had a golden opportunity to present a road map for a better Trinidad and Tobago, but instead he gave us a dim and dismal document without any hope, inspiration or any plan for future generations. The bombastic and sanctimonious opening statements of the budget, and I quote—

“...people of Trinidad and Tobago rejected the politics of deception, betrayal, greed, arrogance, waste and mismanagement.”

—totally and conveniently ignores the history of the PNM themselves as the most notorious and corrupt organization this country has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*]

From O'Halloran to Calder Hart; the Tesoro scandal; the \$100 million Caroni

Trinidad and Tobago Racing Complex; the gas station fiasco, exposed by then Jean Miles, public servant who, as a matter of fact, died almost pauperized and as a vagrant; the McDonnell Douglas kickbacks; the Mount Hope Medical Complex; ISCOTT; the two failed summits; the National Oncology Centre, this cost this country \$100million, but we had nothing to show for it; the Prime Minister's residence and diplomatic centre, with the \$3,000 bed sheets. Many of you in the back there may not know of; the aborted 50 Early Childhood Learning Centres that were supposed to be built by Haji, the Korean company, they absconded with TT \$40 million; the three performing arts centres, one of them now shut down, unusable, the other not yet completed; World GTL \$3 billion of taxpayers' money down the drain; Alutrint; Alutech; the Tarouba Stadium; Las Alturas; the refinery upgrades; the waterfront project that was supposed to have cost—and we were told in this House \$1.8billion, when we did the research it cost over \$4billion, and will mortgage our children's future for 17 years; the OPVs; the inoperable fast ferries that we bought from Austal in Australia that are now parked up somewhere; the MV *Su* that has never moved a day in its life; the useless blimps; the Tamana Intech Park that we have only just completed that was \$2.2billion spent on it by the previous Government. We have only just found a tenant for that building in August of this year; the \$500 million rapid rail; the secret scholarship fund, and all of it, all of it encapsulated in one chilling statement, by a PNM stalwart and former colleague of the Minister of Finance, and I quote: “all ah we tief”, that is what we are faced with, Madam President.

The Minister of Finance conveniently forgot when he hurriedly made his way to the Uff Commission, and as self-labelled expert, he went to the commission and accused the now Prime Minister of fiddling the funds and fiddling the books at

Cleaver Heights. He asked “where the \$10 million gone?” He accused the now Prime Minister of fronting for a Syrian construction company. Madam President, this is all a matter of public record. This is a commission of enquiry paid for by taxpayers’ money. When the now Prime Minister’s attorneys responded, they said and I quote:

In our final words to the commission given the conduct of Minister Imbert before this commission, we feel constrained to comment on what may be viewed as an abuse of public resources to pursue a private agenda.

This is the man who stands in the Parliament and talks about corruption, nepotism and cronyism. This is a man who was accused in the same Uff Commission, by the same contractor and, in fact, referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions of brazen malfeasance in public office and called upon the DPP to investigate it. So, Madam President, I put no store in the opening statement may by the Minister of Finance because he has absolutely no moral turpitude to be talking about corruption, nepotism and cronyism in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, they now want to present this country with a mass-transit system; a Toco ferry; a port service; a new Port of Spain container port; airport and other industrial parks; overpasses; national highways; national broadband; a maritime ship-building and repair sector; TTIFC; revenue authority; police management agency; police inspectorate; universal health care system and universal health insurance system.

When it comes to transparency and accountability, I just want to put on the record, the one thing, and that is, I want to remind this House, that it was the People’s Partnership Government that introduced the Standing Finance Committee that saw every single Minister of Government being grilled regarding the

expenditure of their Ministries. It was this People's Partnership Government that introduced Prime Minister's Question Time, where for the first time in the history of this country on a monthly basis, the Prime Minister was forced to get up and respond to any question asked of her by any Member of Parliament. It was this People's Partnership that brought into this House the procurement legislation which was voted, of course, against by the then PNM Opposition.

So this, Madam President, is the document that is placed before this House, masquerading as a budget presentation, and you know what? Having lamented the state of the country's finances and the condition of the Treasury, the Minister then proceeds to unveil the largest budget expenditure in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

You know, Madam President, what they are essentially saying is that they had been able to increase the budgeted expenditure over the prior year, as a clear signal that the confidence and the soundness of the national purse was in good hands. Because when they appraised the state of the economy, clearly, they would have recognized that even though there had been a drastic fall in the price of oil and gas, that they had found a healthy national balance sheet. Otherwise they would not have been able to increase expenditure, [*Desk thumping*] otherwise it would have been reckless of them to do that. [*Desk thumping*] And they also found a healthy stock of foreign exchange because had they not done that, they would not have been able to direct the Governor of the Central Bank as they said, to clear up the system, clear up the backlog and to manage the rate of foreign exchange thereafter.

In addition, the Minister has stated very clearly and categorically that he intends to approach international lenders to access major funding for projects.

Well, of course, if you do not have a healthy balance sheet, you are not going to be able to do that, because you just will not be able to get the funds available. So clearly, they have inherited a sound economic platform and a very healthy national balance sheet on which they can make these promises. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I also want to alert the population that when the People's Partnership Government prepared the 2014/2015 budget, it was done so when the price of oil was over \$100. Today, the price of oil is at \$45. The PNM knows that the price of oil is at \$45, yet still, your budget is predicated on a number that is higher and your expenditure is predicated on number that is higher than when oil was at \$100, that it reckless. It is irresponsible.

10.15 a.m.

Madam President, the threat to our economy has been laid. [*Desk thumping*]
What I want to leave the nation with today is the deception and the dishonesty that has been displayed in their very first budget, and that the integrity of the PNM has already been called into question.

Madam President, let me start by saying that this budget will, no doubt, cause inflationary issues in the economy. The author of the document who was so lauded yesterday by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government [*Crosstalk*] clearly does not have a grasp of basic economics, not this Minister, the Minister of Finance.

The increased levies, the increases in fuel prices mean that businesses are going to face a very tough time with regard to the costs, with regard to higher production cost and higher transportation cost. They in turn would transfer those additional costs to consumers and to other businesses through these higher prices. We may soon see spiralling inflation, out of control possibly, in every sector of the

economy. We may even see layoff of employees and workers as a direct result of these organizations, and these small businesses not being able to cope with these increased costs.

In fact, Madam President, we know that some basic food items have already gone up. Doubles we know, has increased in prices.

Sen. Khan: One vendor in town.

Sen. V. Bharath: We also know that taxi fares have gone up in certain parts of the country, and we have not yet taken into account the additional transportation costs of goods, and it is an unknown fact that we do not know the effect of the increase of VAT on a myriad of products that we are told is coming, what effect that would have on the cost of doing business.

Of course, also Madam President, we have neglected the fact that property tax is going to be charged on businesses as well. It is not just residents and so, therefore, there is going to be an additional cost involved in doing business. And who is going to bear the brunt of that cost, Madam President? Surely, it is going to be the consumer. So, Madam President, it is not likely to be a very Merry Christmas for many of our citizens.

You know, on the one hand, Madam President, the Minister has increased the tax allowances for those earning between \$5,000 and \$6,000, but I want to tell you that the \$250 savings that they are going to make is certainly going to be eroded by the additional costs that I just spoke about, the additional cost of living that they are going to have to encounter. But, more than that, there are 42 per cent of the working population today earning less than \$5,000 a month. They are not getting an additional saving because of a tax allowance, but they are going to still have to bear the burden of the additional cost. They are the ones at the lower end

of the scale. They are the ones who are going to feel the pinch the most. They are going to feel the brunt of the increased cost of living. They are going to feel the cost of inflation. They are the first ones who are going to lose their jobs. This budget has absolutely no sympathy for the poor man.

Do you know what? What makes the whole situation worse? What exacerbates this situation is the crying wolf by suggesting that the economy is in a perilous state. It creates panic or the potential to create panic. What does panic do? It makes human beings act in a certain way that actually creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, Madam President, because when people panic, when they hear things are really bad, when they stop spending, there is less money going into the economy. When less money goes into the economy, there is less economic activity. When there is less economic activity, there are less jobs. When there are less jobs, the economy grinds to a halt.

So the cry wolf syndrome that is being espoused by the Minister of Finance, that things are so bad, could essentially backfire on all of us. It is the reason why people like Alan Greenspan and now Janet Yellen who is the chairman of the Fed, they are very cautious about the signals that they send. They are very cautious about what they say because they understand, very clearly, that they have a responsibility that people hang on to their very word to make their decisions but, clearly, in Trinidad and Tobago we have no such responsibilities.

Madam President, let me talk a little bit about the macroeconomic fundamentals of Trinidad and Tobago because everything hinges on the macroeconomic fundamentals. In 2010, when we came into office this country suffered, for the first time, a negative growth of 4 per cent. It was the first time in 17 years, since 1993. Inflation year-on-year in July 2010 was running at 14 per

cent. We inherited, at that time, the Clico debacle, \$20 billion. We inherited \$2.2 billion payable to contractors. We inherited \$1.8 billion in outstanding refunds for VAT and we inherited over 70 outstanding union negotiations that had not been dealt with by the previous regime.

What the PNM is saying today is that we are at fault for having settled those very same arrangements in the last few months, something that they did not do. It is a responsibility that they deflected from in 2010, and they passed it on to the next regime but we fulfilled our obligations; that essentially was what confronted us in 2010.

And, you know, much has been made about the budget deficit that this Government has inherited. But let me say, first of all, for many of you who may not know, because you may not have a financial background, the \$7 billion deficit is only an estimate that will change in the next few months. But, secondly, I want to remind all of us that the budget deficit that the People's Partnership inherited in 2010 was \$6.4 billion, and that is not an estimate that is an actual number. Madam President, \$6.4 billion we inherited in 2010.

But, you know, Madam President, if one were to look back at the *Review of the Economy*—because much has been said about reversal of fortunes and how much money is being spent and so on—if one were to look back at the *Review of the Economy* in 2009, you would see that the surplus—you would see that at the end of 2008 there was a budget surplus of \$11.8 billion. So, the PNM Government went from a budget surplus of \$11.8 billion, a surplus at the end of 2008, to a budget deficit of \$6.4 billion at the end of 2009, and that is a reversal, my friends, of \$18.2 billion in one year, but I would go further.

The Minister of Finance has made much of the cash balances of this country.

I had a cursory look at the current account balance which is the cash balance held at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago in 2008. In 2008, the current account at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, according to the *Review of the Economy* 2011, was US \$8.518 billion. That is equivalent to TT \$53.6 billion, the current balance at the Central Bank. In one year, from December 2008 to December 2009, that figure went from \$8.518 billion to \$1.614 billion. In other words, Madam President, it went from TT \$53.6 billion at the end of 2008 to \$10.16 billion at the end of 2009. That is a reversal, my friends and Madam President, of \$43.4 billion in one year, \$43.4 billion in one year. This is not me saying this. When you get a chance, have a look at the *Review of the Economy*. So, when your Minister of Finance stands in this Senate with his smug look talking about reversal of finances—

Madam President: Sen. Bharath, please, let us not use those descriptions. All right?

Sen. V. Bharath: When the Minister of Finance stands in any of the Houses, and he speaks about reversals of fortunes, you must tell him that between 2008 and 2009, under the PNM regime, there was a reversal of fortune of \$43.5 billion on the current account. But you know what, Madam President? We did not behave like whimpering little prima donnas. We got on with the job. We got on with the job of running the country.

You know, additionally, Madam President, I want to question whether it was deliberate on the part of the Minister or whether he simply did not know that—why did he exclude from the 2015 fiscal year, the one-off revenue items that he is now including in 2016? It comes across as unusual because all of those revenue items were known to us to have come in in September of 2015. Why were they excluded

from the 2015 fiscal account? I would name some of them.

Madam President, TT \$3.84 billion came in for TGU, why was that not included? The \$1.5 billion for the IPO of NGL: why was that not included? The \$500 million from NGC: why was that not included? Because had they been included, Madam President—and they amount to \$5.84 billion—in the fiscal 2015 figures, the budget would not have been \$7 billion, the budget would have been closer—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: The deficit.

Sen. V. Bharath: The deficit, I am sorry—would have been closer to \$1.2 billion. We ask ourselves: why is it that those one-off revenues were brought into 2016 to prop up 2016 and to deliberately make 2015 look worse than it was? That is a serious question because it sends all kinds of repercussions to the international agencies, but you see many would say that the Minister was playing petty politics with the country's finances.

The Minister also went on to talk about the behaviour of capital expenditure during 2015. He actually suggested that capital expenditure was ramped up because of the election. The capital expenditure for all of 2015 was \$8.3 billion. I want to put it on record of this venerable House that over the last decade, the top three years in terms of expenditure on capital items occurred under the last PNM regime.

In 2007, they spent \$8.66 billion; in 2008, \$10.13 billion and in 2009, \$9.05 billion. But figures on their own do not make much sense. So when I put it in the context of the percentage of capital expenditure over total expenditure, it gives you a better idea. In 2015, the capital expenditure of the People's Partnership amounted to 13.5 per cent of total expenditure; in 2014, it was 13.45; in 2009,

under their watch, it was 19.78 per cent; in 2008, it was 18.8 per cent; and in 2007 it was the grand figure of 21.7 per cent of capital expenditure of total expenditure. So when they come here, or when the Minister comes here, to talk about ramping-up capital expenditure, and it was only \$8.3 billion, I have to tell you also, remind this honourable House, Madam President, that \$8.3 billion in 2015 is a far different figure to \$8.3 billion in 2007, in terms of purchasing power. It is a lot less.

10.30 a.m.

So when you spend \$10.13 billion in 2009 it is equivalent of probably spending over \$12 billion in 2015. So what are some of the other facts, Madam President, regarding the economy that we have been so lambasted about? In 2010, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund that we inherited was TT \$21.1 billion, in 2015 when we left office it was \$36.3 billion, that is 65 per cent increase. In 2010 the foreign exchange reserves of Trinidad and Tobago stood at TT \$57.4 billion; in 2015 when we demitted office it stood at \$65.47 billion, an increase of 14 per cent.

[Desk thumping]

In 2010 when we came into office, unemployment was at 6.1 per cent, July 2010; in 2015 when we demitted office it was at a historical low of 3.3 per cent.

[Desk thumping] In 2010 when we came into office, year on year inflation, July 2010 was 14 per cent, Madam President; today it is less than 8 per cent. *[Desk thumping]* In 2010 when we came into office foreign direct investment in Trinidad and Tobago was at an all-time low, US \$501 million, TT \$3.4 billion, Madam President; when we left office it was \$15.12 billion in 2015—five times the amount. *[Desk thumping]*

According to a UN report in 2014, Trinidad and Tobago was able to attract more than 27 per cent of total global FDI amongst small and developing states.

Madam President, he has made a meal, the Minister of Finance, about debt-to-GDP. Many of us are ignorant, many citizens are ignorant about debt-to-GDP and what it means, and when you say 46 per cent they think, “Oh, my God, 46 per cent”, because 46 per cent is higher than 38 per cent when we came in. But when one considers the expenditure we had to undertake, when one considers the Clico resolution, when one considers the gas subsidies, when one considers the wage settlements, when one considers GATE and all of the other capital projects, one can see why it was necessary. But let me put it in context, Madam President, because there are a lot of people out there who are confused. Yes, our debt-to-GDP is 46 per cent, but the debt-to-GDP in Japan is 230 per cent, the debt-to-GDP in Jamaica is 133 per cent, the debt-to-GDP in Italy is 132 per cent, the debt-to-GDP in Ireland is 110 per cent, the debt-to-GDP in the big old United States of America is 103 per cent, Madam President, the debt-to-GDP in Singapore, a country that we look up to, is 99 per cent, the debt-to-GDP in Spain is 95 per cent, France 95 per cent, the United Kingdom 89 per cent, Germany 75 per cent, the debt-to-GDP in Canada is 86 per cent. So our debt-to-GDP, being 46 per cent, ask yourself, is that reason to panic? Is that reason to send the population into a frenzy? Clearly not, Madam President.

You know, much was made of the Moody's report, Madam President, but not a word, not a single word about the Standard & Poor's rating agency in December 2014 which affirmed Trinidad and Tobago's A rating for foreign and local currency sovereign credit rating. You know what they said, Madam President, they said:

The international rating agency cited the country's strong net external asset position, its low external vulnerabilities and stable political system as the

primary reasons for a very positive outlook.

A mere 10 months ago—10 months ago that report was written by Standard & Poor's, can we really believe the Minister of Finance when he says that the state of our economy is as poor as it is in such a short space of time, Madam President? Could we really have deteriorated that much in 10 months?

You know, I had the pleasure, Madam President, of going with the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Minister Howai, to sell Trinidad and Tobago via selling US \$500 million bond—I did the European markets and Minister Howai did the American markets. We were trying to see what level of confidence the outside world had in Trinidad and Tobago, and we floated the idea of selling a bond of US \$500 million. Madam President, this was just over a year ago; the bond was 10 times oversubscribed. We could have sold a bond for US \$5 billion if we wanted to; that was the level of confidence just over a year ago in Trinidad and Tobago. And the Minister of Finance stands here and asks us to believe that things have deteriorated to that point.

Madam President, I want to talk a little bit about the oil and gas sector because that is very important in determining how we go forward, because there is no doubt we are an oil and gas economy, but we all know that oil and gas take a significant amount of time—investments take a significant amount of time to mature. The Minister of Finance recognized this when he spoke, but he was less than honest when he said that oil and condensate production has fallen from 100,000 barrels per day in 2010 to 80,000 barrels in 2015, and, therefore, we must take decisive action in our energy sector to reverse the stagnation and decline of the last five years. What the Minister did not tell us was oil production fell from 150,000 barrels in 2005 to 100,000 in 2010, a decline of 50 per cent—a 50 per cent

decline and that is where the decline started. And in the years from 2005 to 2010, Madam President, data from the Central Bank will show that investments in that sector all but collapsed.

In fact, the PNM regime was continually being warned by the South Trinidad Chamber of Industry and Commerce and other major players that had they not change the fiscal regime things would continue to get bad, from bad to worse and there would be dire consequences to be suffered, but they failed. In fact, some of the articles I have here, I would not go through all of them, but I will just give you an example of one, the *Guardian* of September 18, 2003, South Chamber Slams Manning on Taxes.

The South Chamber accused Prime Minister Patrick Manning of renegeing on a promise for his Government to favourably consider the revision of the fiscal regime for onshore oil production.

They also demanded an explanation for his decision, pointing out, and I quote:

If Manning does not reverse his decision the sector could face terminal decline and loss of thousands of jobs.

Nothing was done, Madam President—nothing.

Again, another article, *Guardian*, April 21, 2005:

Without decisive action in this area we are likely to see more companies exit Trinidad and Tobago's oil production business. We wait to see who will take their place and whether these changes will be in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, there it was, the country failed to make the requisite investments that will take five to seven years to mature. So if you do not take the decisions in 2002 and 2003 you are not going to be able to get any benefits until—well, until

you invest, and that is what this Government did.

In 2010, when we came into office, Madam President, we found an industry that was stagnating. There was just one rig working offshore, Madam President, in 2010, one rig working offshore, and by introducing a series of pieces of legislation—I will tell you, it was 14 pieces of legislation introduced in finance Bills between 2010 and 2015—we were able to correct that, such that the number of rig days, Madam President, went from 1,132 in 2010 to 2,800 rig days in 2015. A more than doubling of rig days, and for those who know and understand the oil sector you will know that is a metric for determining what will eventually be oil production in the country. And as a direct result of that we have started to see a rebounding of foreign direct investment in that sector. In 2010, as I mentioned, \$501 million, in 2011 that rose to \$1.5 billion, in 2012 \$2.2 billion, and in 2014 over \$204 billion in the sector, but it was irresponsible on their part not to have made the investments. *[Interruption]*

Madam President: Hon. Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. V. Bharath: Thank you.

Madam President, in the short time that I have I want to talk, very quickly, about agriculture because that is very dear to my heart. The Minister has talked about a number of incentives that he is going to introduce, I want to inform him—I am embarrassed to do so, unfortunately, but I want to inform him, and it is no fault of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries because he would not have known that all of these exemptions already exist. So, please—and it is very clearly stated and articulated in the Value Added Tax Act, Chap. 75:06, Schedule 2. I can arrange a copy for the Minister of Finance if he so wishes, as well as part of the Third Schedule of the Customs Act which lists all of the items that are currently

exempted from duties.

Madam President, this incentive programme that was done in 2012—Minister, 2012, you are probably aware of this—has all of the incentives, and I know that many of those involved in the sector have been up in arms, people like Mr. Joe Pires from Caribbean Chemicals, and Mr. Kamal Hakim, who has been in the sector for many, many years, and they both said they are perplexed and confused at the Minister's statement because all of these incentives have been in place for very many years. I am also a little bit perplexed with the Minister's statement that, essentially, he will be working primarily on structure, and so on, when in fact the Minister himself in his budget statement has reiterated and reinforced the need to increase food production as an immediate step. So, there seems to be a little mismatch.

The other thing I want to just, very briefly, talk about, Madam President, is immigration forms that the Minister mentioned, the immigration lines that will be removed because there is no need for immigration anymore. I am just letting you know that since June 11 the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago took that decision [*Desk thumping*] and I actually made the announcement at a post-Cabinet meeting on June 11, 2015. And with regard to a 10-year passport, Madam President, I have a 10-year passport here in my hand, [*Desk thumping*] and it was issued to Mr. Prakash Ramadhar. I am also aware that there are some Members on that side who have received 10-year passports, so, please, inform the Minister of Finance that these are already in place so there is no need to—[*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: He is sleeping. He is sleeping on the job. He is suffering from insomnia. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. V. Bharath: So, please, do not waste time trying to reintroduce things that

have already been done.

Madam President, I also want to make mention, I know that Sen. Ameen would have talked about the politicization of GATE and the graduate trainee, I am also very concerned that this may not become another slush fund for the PNM. We are well aware of what the Equal Opportunity Commission would have stated regarding the suspicious scholarships that were granted under the last regime, and I quote:

Records indicate that the vast majority of applicants who were granted financial assistance by the Ministry lived in constituencies ruled by the People's National Movement.

—the commission concluded. So, we want to be certain that these funds are not going to be used for the Graduate Training Programme, and also for GATE, not going to be used for party hacks.

So, Madam President, as I conclude, the Minister needs help, clearly, [*Desk thumping*] and very fast. What this adds up to, Madam President, is something I call depression economics because the entire country is depressed. And, therefore, Madam President—yes, yes, the entire country is depressed; it is depression economics. Madam President, this really is just a hodgepodge of stolen ideas. It is a surreptitious and deceitful document that regurgitates a lot of rejected proposals from the past, and it is an open assault, as far as I am concerned, on the middle class and the lower income earners of Trinidad and Tobago, clearly prepared in conjunction and collaboration with the IMF.

Again, unfortunately, Madam President, we seem to have surrendered our sovereignty to an international institution. [*Desk thumping*] But in any event, Madam President, it contains no notion of how we are going to sustain income, no

revenue-generating measures beyond 2016, apart from suggesting a continuous sell-off of our state assets to fund the vanity projects, much in the same way that a “piper” does to maintain his habit, Madam President. PNM has always been about talk rather than performance, 1962 to now, they have always promised but never delivered, Madam President, and that is their habit. Madam President, we are not all in this together and, unfortunately, the Minister of Finance has not given us any comfort that he knows what he needs to do to take this country forward. Madam President, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

10.45a.m.

Sen. Foster Cummings: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to join this debate, the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2015. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation to the position of the President of the Senate and to wish you all the best during your tenure.

I thank Almighty God for this privilege to be of service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is indeed, a humbling experience, and I thank the hon. Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve as a Senator in this Eleventh Parliament of the Republic. I wish to state that I intend that my contributions during my term will be as meaningful as possible, and will certainly work towards uplifting the state of our Republic as we move forward.

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, and so I wish to recognize my small village of Indian Trail in Couva—unknown on the national stage, but a community of hardworking, God-fearing, loving and affectionate people. I wish also to pay tribute to Agnes and Cyril Cummings, my deceased parents, for the guidance I received as a child, and to my many teachers and lecturers who helped Trinidad and Tobago to shape who I am today.

As I begin my contribution I want to thank the Minister of Finance, the hon. Mr. Colm Imbert, who I think did a remarkable job. [*Desk thumping*] Taking into account the time constraints, he delivered what I considered to be one of the best budget presentations ever delivered in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot, of course, forget the state in which the Treasury was found, the state in which the economy was left by the last administration, it will take more than genius effort to get Trinidad and Tobago back on track over the next five years. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, we are at a turning point in Trinidad and Tobago. I put it that we have lost five years. [*Desk thumping*] I will repeat that: Trinidad and Tobago has lost five years, during the period 2010 to 2015, and the PNM is here to fix that. [*Desk thumping*] The theme of the budget reads, “Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust”, and there is no other theme more fitting, considering what the citizens of this nation had to sit and endure over the last five years. It really was a trying time, and I think the nation has exhaled at the fact that the UNC Government is now the Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We have been severely wounded. The economy was left in shambles as a result of rampant waste, mismanagement, nepotism and corruption. As a matter of fact, corruption was taken to new heights and almost became the way of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. If as a businessman you had no appreciation for the word “kickback”, then you had no access and the door was closed to you and opened only to a few favoured contractors with connections within the Government of the day. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the PNM has a clear path to the development of Trinidad

and Tobago, and our history speaks to that. Any significant development that you can point to in Trinidad and Tobago, you can see a PNM Government behind that. The Point Lisas Industrial Estate—PNM policy; the La Brea Industrial Estate—PNM policy; the free education from early childhood to tertiary—PNM policy. I did not intend to start my contribution in this way, but when I listened to the last speaker, my mind went back to the St. Joseph campaign during the election. I thought we were still in that mode.

Sen. Dr. Henry: He lost.

Sen. F. Cummings: He lost. [*Laughter*]

Madam President, they came to office promising new politics, and many fell for that in 2010, because, you know, when people speak about change and something new is promised, and promises are made about how people plan to do things differently, a lot of people fell for that, this new politics. At the time we did not have a definition for “new politics”. Today, because of the behaviour of the last Government, I think we do now have a definition for what they call “new politics”.

It means poor governance, mismanagement, rampant corruption in the public sector, unaccountability, no transparency, and in almost every Ministry and state enterprise we cannot stop getting revelations of mismanagement, theft and just poor governance all round. That is the new politics that was promised by the last administration, [*Desk thumping*] of which some persons who are here with us today was a part of that Government. And they must take the credit for that, because that is what their legacy is; we cannot hide from that. Whenever we think about the period 2010 to 2015, it will go down in the history books of Trinidad and Tobago as one of the most corrupt periods in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

[Desk thumping]

So to come today and talk about O'Halloran and Gene Miles, who most of us here do not even know; I mean, I do not think I was born as yet. If you come to take part in this debate, then let us talk about what happened over the last five years. Let us talk about the National Insurance Board and the Apsara building; let us talk about that. The building that was bought, refurbished at taxpayers' expense and then rented back to the very tenant at a very small rent. Let us talk about that, if we want to talk about corruption. If we want to talk about corruption let us talk about the Beetham waste water plant, which was awarded at over \$400million over what the lowest tenderer, who was quite capable of executing the job. Let us talk about that. Let us talk about the over \$300billion that was spent over the last five years, and no matter if you look high or low across Trinidad and Tobago, nobody can tell you where that money went. It is as though somebody took it and put it in the Atlantic Ocean and the waves took it away from Trinidad and Tobago, because you just cannot see what was done with that money over the last five years. Let us talk about that.

Madam President, it is as though somebody in high office in the last administration issued a memo to their officeholders saying, "Take as much as you can and as quickly as you can, and then we would leave whatever remains for whoever comes after", because the way the country was managed, we just cannot see value for money. You hear talk about box drains and—well, I do not know what else—box drains. Madam President, \$300billion in box drains is a lot of money. We should have box drains on every street, and some of the box drains are like swimming pools because the water is not flowing. Let us talk about that.

So what has there been? There has been a loss of confidence in the system

both locally and abroad. So now the new Finance Minister and the Prime Minister and Cabinet are charged with restoring that confidence in the local economy to ensure that, one, we get Trinidad and Tobago back on a stable footing; and, two, that we are able to attract international investors to come to our shores comfortable in the fact that they will not have to treat with the question of corruption and kickbacks, et cetera. [*Desk thumping*]

It will fall to us in this new Government, led by an astute leader, the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, and his Cabinet to restore that confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President, restoring confidence when it dips is an essential skill and requires the right attitude, it requires honesty, it requires knowledge, it requires commitment, it requires capacity and it requires experience. The party with the most experience in government in Trinidad and Tobago is none other than the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] I can safely say that the hon. Prime Minister and his Government possess the essential qualities and are fully equipped to undertake the task to restore decency and order to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We owe it to the people of this country. We owe it to the future generations to fix it and to make it right and to make sure that it never happens again. [*Desk thumping*]

Someone was saying to me recently, and I do agree with them, that the UNC had two chances to run this country, and on both occasions they have proven one thing, and that is, they are just not up to the task. [*Desk thumping*] They just do not know how to do the job, because with all the rampant corruption, somebody could have stood up, somebody could have snapped a hand, somebody could have whistled in the Cabinet and say, "No, this is wrong. We should not do it this way. We must leave a heritage for our children. We must leave something for the future

generations to enjoy. We cannot have the state enterprises spending money.” WASA should not be owing \$1 billion in debt. The NGC reserves should not be spent to give money to our friends and favourite contractors. Somebody should have stopped it. [*Desk thumping*]

The very people who today are trying to say that the Minister of Finance is painting a picture of doom and gloom, had the opportunity to say, “Stop, stop, stop, please. Let us stop spending the people’s money in this way”, but apparently nothing was said.

11.00 a.m.

Madam President, the new Government of Trinidad and Tobago will not shirk its responsibility to ensure that the people’s business is conducted in a manner that is transparent, that is honourable and that is right by all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I will take a drink of water at this point, please— pure water.

Madam President, we witnessed over the last five years the neglect of the city of Port of Spain and our urban centres. I imagine that there may not have been a plan because if you are to position your country as the development plan in our 2020 vision, now 2030 vision, to see Port of Spain as a financial capital, as a financial centre in this part of the world, then certainly your capital city needs to have the full attention of the Government. What we saw over the last five years, while it was spoken of as decentralization, was really the neglect of the capital city. The People’s National Movement Government, through its urban development plan, will restore and reinvigorate the capital city of Port of Spain to put pride back into the hearts of the residents of Port of Spain and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, we would have seen over the period preceding the last administration when the PNM was last in office a housing programme which involved the construction of affordable housing, low income and middle income to ensure that persons who did not have the opportunity to own their home could access state housing at a reasonable cost.

Housing is an essential need which the Government recognizes that a role must be played by the State in ensuring that some citizens who cannot afford their homes can get access to state housing. It is not just a question of four walls and a roof. It is a place to sleep, a place to rest, a place where people can feel safe and have privacy and personal space, somewhere you can feel comfortable raising a family, raising your children. And of course, any government that cares about the people understanding this need would try to ensure that such a programme has a key element, affordability.

Twenty six thousand housings units constructed under the previous PNM Government, Madam President. And as we were told during the contribution of the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development when she spoke in the other place, that during that period 2002 to 2010, under the previous PNM Government, 26,000 houses were built at a cost of \$6 million which would work out to an average cost of around \$230,000, and that would be the construction cost we are discussing.

Madam President, during the term of the last UNC administration only 4,178 housing units were built and at the astonishing cost of \$5.3 billion—\$5.3 billion. How can you account for that? And what makes matters worse is that these sums had no Cabinet oversight, approved by the board of the HDC. How can a state enterprise tie the State to such a huge sum of expenditure with no approval by the

Cabinet? Where is the Cabinet Note to support these levels of expenditure? That is what we must pay attention to.

The works for these houses—this would have put a cost of approximately \$700,000 to \$1.2 million per unit. Which segment of the population are you catering for when your state housing programme starts off at \$700,000 per unit? How does the regular working man afford what is supposed to be state-subsidized housing at the cost of \$700,000?—a range of \$700,000 to \$1.2 million. And what it puts—if somebody is talking about subsidy—is a further drain on the public purse. What you are supposed to be focusing on is efficiency and keeping the cost at the—[*Desk thumping*] Because there was no significant increase in the construction inputs between the period that I spoke of earlier and the period of the last Government. As a matter of fact, the cost of steel dropped. There was minimal increase in the cost of cement, and aggregate cost has remained almost constant. What then accounts for the cost of a unit moving from \$230,000 to the first figure on their range of \$700,000? And the only explanation could be waste, mismanagement and the favourite word, kickbacks. [*Desk thumping*]

Somebody said to me and, you know, I am not really minded to believe this, but somebody said to me that somewhere at some aquarium—I do not know if that is a fish tank or what it is—but some aquarium in Cocoyea, San Fernando is where a lot of discussions surrounding these kinds of expenditure took place. We will have to check to see which fish tank that is.

Madam President, this could never be affordable housing for low income earners. It cannot be. It cannot be a government that cares about the people. It has to be a government whose objective is not providing low-cost housing, but providing opportunities for their friends and their favourite contractors. [*Desk*

thumping]

Madam President, this Government does not only intend to provide adequate and affordable housing and to run the programme in such a way that the waste would be cut out, that the mismanagement would be cut out, that the transparency would be returned to the system so that small contractors can have an opportunity to participate in the programme thereby ensuring that we build skill sets, that we encourage entrepreneurship, and that the economy gets a boost by the activity that will trickle down. [*Desk thumping*] But when you have contractors building five, six, seven, 800 houses and the small contractor unable to take part in these programmes, what the contractors that were nurtured in the earlier years, most of them are now bankrupt and unable to do business because they found no opportunity under the last Government.

Madam President, it is a matter of record that only the PNM Government has a genuine interest in providing affordable and high-quality housing for our citizens. And this has always been a major policy initiative of the PNM. The provision for housing in this fiscal year must be regarded as a major element in guiding our urban policy and urban development. A substantial part of the housing stock will be constructed in our city centres with specific emphasis on Port of Spain, our capital city and our other urban centres. This action, Madam President, will help to breathe life back into our capital city.

It is our estimation that over 40 per cent of the housing units needed to meet the housing demand can be accommodated within the country's urban environment. This will assist, as I said before, in urban redevelopment and counteract the present suburbanization trend by providing housing communities in close proximity to existing employment opportunities and infrastructure. So that a

lot of the traffic that you see coming into Port of Spain because people who cannot find housing accommodation close to our urban centres, of course, that will treat with that question as well. There is a clear vision and a plan to develop the inner city and east Port of Spain which has suffered neglect over the last couple of years.

[Desk thumping]

One of the first phases of development previously done by the PNM Government was the redevelopment of Clifton Towers on St. Paul Street. The Government had then allocated land on South Quay for the second phase of construction. The intention was to develop this site with high-rise apartments that would have housed residents from Duncan Street, Nelson Street and George Street. This project was quickly stopped by the last administration and the land was allocated for other use. What the previous administration did not understand during the five years of their tenure is that after you campaign, and after you are elected as the Government, you are the Government for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* You cannot spend five years campaigning. You campaign for a couple months and then you get down to the business of running the people's affairs. That is what you were elected to do.

Our plans, Madam President, will involve the reconstruction of these dilapidated buildings and therefore give people a sense of pride in where they live so that they can feel proud to live and work in this capital city. And those persons who were deprived of this benefit previously will now be able to enjoy a better quality of life.

I said earlier in my contribution that it is as though the country had lost five years. It is as though the country went to sleep and got up after five years with a nightmare dream—with a nightmare, screaming, “What happened to us over the

last five years?” How can we recover from this? [*Desk thumping*] I want to assure this Senate that such action will not occur under a PNM administration led by a serious Prime Minister who knows how to do his job, who knows how to put a Cabinet together. You will not see 20-something Ministers being fired one after the next. [*Desk thumping*] This is a stable Government. [*Desk thumping*] We will continue to improve the inner city and east Port of Spain and govern for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, our goal is to ensure that the available resources of the country are utilized in the best interest of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And in establishing or re-establishing this programme—and that is the housing programme I am speaking about—in order to achieve and to aid with the development of entrepreneurship, small contractors will be reintroduced into the system. No longer will all the state contracts be only given or in some ways going to be found for friends and favourites to reap all the benefits of the State. Contractors will be encouraged to take and make full use of existing incentives, to initiate, to take part in the On the Job Training Programme. They will also be encouraged to sharpen their skills in areas of project management and business management, and we must nurture our small contractors, Madam President.

11.15 a.m.

Allow me, Madam President, to pay some attention at this time to the area of community development. Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago is blessed with a diverse culture, and has the potential to be a leader in innovation. We continue to boast about our artistes, our Carnival, our steel pan, and there has to be the opportunity and the environment for the persons involved in the arts, the persons who come from across Trinidad and Tobago, to fully exploit the potential. The

Government has made a sustained effort to support the development of a more innovative society through the promotion of cultural awareness and the preservation of our cultural heritage. This Government recognizes that music is one area in which Trinidad and Tobago already has made its mark in innovation. In this regard, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts intends to increase the number of music schools from nine to 20 in fiscal year 2016, and this will come at a cost of \$6 million. This will ensure that there is further exploitation of export possibilities in this area, as well as the transmission of these skills and expertise to future generations.

Madam President, it is no secret that the contribution of the best village competition and other cultural events to the social and economic development of this country should really not go unnoticed. They have not been fully exploited, and this Government will lay the platform for this to happen. The proposal for a folk art museum for the best village trophy competition, for the collection, storage and management of materials is one such step in the full exploitation of the matter at hand. As I engage your attention, I must say that this is one of the most important aspects of tackling the issue of crime and juvenile delinquency. I said early in my contribution, that it takes a village to raise a child, and what we have witnessed over the last few years is that there has been some erosion in terms of community life, and the way that a lot of us grew up in the village setting with the village councils and the community councils, and the various interest groups. There has been some movement away from that, and action has to be taken to restore that sort of village and community life setting.

The village and community councils served us well in the past, but it seems to have lost its way, maybe except for Tobago which still has a very strong village

council structure. I am sure our friend from Tobago will agree with that. Strong community organization at that level will lead to better organized communities and an enhanced quality of life. The construction of community centres, Madam President, is essential for such activities to occur. There are many communities that do not have—

Madam President: Sen. Cummings, you have five more minutes.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you, Madam President. There are many communities that do not have community centres and public spaces, and therefore, an allocation of \$60 million for community centres in fiscal 2016 is an assurance that this Government will continue to construct community centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and no community will be denied and no community will be victimized. There are several areas where existing community centres were under construction when the last Government came into office, and a lot of these projects were starved for funds, or the contracts terminated.

As we move forward, Madam President, there has been a lot said by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government about the local government reform initiative, and this Government will support the implementation of initiatives to empower and make communities more involved in the affairs and the decision-making process. We are about taking Government to the people in all communities, throughout Trinidad and Tobago; [*Desk thumping*] from Cedros to Toco, from Diego Martin to Mayaro and Guayaguayare, to Charlotteville and to Crown Point. This Government will place the power back into the hands of the people to ensure that [*Desk thumping*] we achieve developed country status by 2030, according to our policy prescription.

Madam President, I thank you very much for the opportunity to have

contributed to this debate. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. H.R. Ian Roach: Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2016. Permit me first, like others, to congratulate you on your appointment as President of the Senate of the Eleventh Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish you the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon as you preside over the affairs of these Chambers in a firm and impartial manner befitting of nobility and trust of the high office you hold.

I also must welcome and extend my congratulations to the newly appointed Members of this Senate, and those of us who have been given another opportunity to return here to do public service for the love of country. To my former colleagues who are no longer here, I wish to publicly thank them and place on record my sincere gratitude for their sacrifices and contribution to the continued development of our country.

Madam President, while I am on the track of welcoming and acknowledging the positives of our colleagues, past and present, I need to single out two former Independent Senators: Sen. Helen Drayton and Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin, who have gone on to continue their service to country in different establishments: in the TTMA and in the GISL. Although there was some disquiet in certain quarters with regard to the appointment of Helen Drayton to the service as chairperson of a government entity, I see no negatives associated with same, when based on the former Senator's qualifications and suitability for such an assignment. [*Desk thumping*] As we must all know by now, her appointment was not another one, or one without precedent by former administrations.

I remember living in South Africa after the first all-inclusive general elections, when I had served as an international monitor, the African National

Congress was led by the highly respected and loved President Nelson Mandela, who was also considered the moral leader of the world due to the fact that following his 27 years of unjustified imprisonment, because of his stance to end racial discrimination in his beloved country, he embraced forgiveness and reconciliation in word and deed as an imperative to set the wrong right and steer his politically and racially divided country on the path of racial harmony and economic prosperity.

The ANC in the 1994 general elections had secured enough majority in Parliament to govern on its own, and if need be change the Constitution as it deemed fit; but he never used his parliamentary majority to do such a thing. As a matter of fact, President Mandela appointed some from among his arch political rivals, the National Party (NP), and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), who at times had fought running violent battles in the streets of South Africa against members of his Cabinet, in a Government of national unity. He even appointed at one time chief Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the IFP leader to act as president when both he and his vice-president were out of the country. That went a long way and had a major impact on the psyche of political hostility and distress that was still simmering after the election.

I said all of that to say this: there can be positive gains for any government and the country when it sees fit to appoint any citizen from either the Opposition or Independent Bench or any member not in Parliament to high public office, whether it is in the Cabinet or elsewhere in public service if that person can make a meaningful contribution to the advancement of the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago. When it comes to service of country we must all strive to be political party blind if we are to make use of the talent sometimes available outside particular political

entities for the love of country.

This Bill, as we well know, was prepared by the newly appointed Minister of Finance within a few weeks of taking office, which is of itself an accomplishment worthy of commendation. [*Desk thumping*] Not to be overlooked is the significant contribution made by the cadre of public servants who would have worked tirelessly to make this possible [*Desk thumping*] which they have done year after year, Government after Government, Minister of Finance after Minister of Finance, to keep the business of the people running smoothly. To them I say thank you very much.

I have drawn attention today to the contribution of the public servants in our country's management, because they continue to do so regardless of the political entity that heads the Government in full acceptance of their obligations to serve the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago without fear or favour; [*Desk thumping*] they do not have the luxury of determining whether or not they should do so depending upon which Government is in charge. Were it not for their reliability in this regard to act and behave professionally in the execution of their duties, there would chaos and calamity of unknown proportion in this country.

Let me also lavishly congratulate the public at large for continuing to behave and demonstrate to the world looking on that we as a multiracial, multireligious and multicultural society, notwithstanding the strident differences in our politics, can participate in peaceful voting by the ballot box to change our Government without bloodshed, disorder, or civil unrest. [*Desk thumping*] In our political system, like other similar political systems in the world, there will be a majority and a minority party in power. Notice I do not say winner or loser, since all of us assembled in these Chambers should have one noble objective being here, whether

elected or appointed, and that is, the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago. With such an outlook we are all winners because we all want to live in peace and harmony in this republic, within an environment that is enabling and nurtures productivity, allowing us all to achieve a standard of living befitting of the human and mineral resources we are privileged to have compared to less fortunate elsewhere in the world.

Madam President, there are many positive things that exist in this country that we can build on for the benefit of all. But we too often take for granted or instead focus attention on the negatives. There appears, for example, to have been an increased turnout of young persons voting in the elections who, no doubt, recognized that they have a part to play in the shaping of the future of this country they call home. The Parliament may be the first with so many young members demonstrating that there is a space for the young to meaningfully contribute in shaping the progression of Trinidad and Tobago at the highest level of governance, [*Desk thumping*] opening the doors for new ideas and vitality in our sometimes dull and stagnant politics. There is also the obvious increased presence of women in Parliament, which I believe may also be history-making in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

At the same time, Madam President, women fill the positions of Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, Leader of the Opposition, Clerk of the House, Clerk of the Senate, [*Continuous desk thumping*] and at first, a Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, a very significant portfolio in any Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I must confess that I feel extremely privileged to be in the company of such an outstanding collection of female intelligence in this Parliament.

There also seems to be a constant supply of female brilliance and excellence coming out of this year's CAPE examination and national awards for academic achievements, where two female students were awarded the prestigious President's Medal. I think it is just a matter of time before we also see our first substantively appointed female President, Chief Justice, Governor of Central Bank, the principal of UWI and UTT. After all, female students, according to the Minister of Education, have been outperforming male students for some time now. The logical expectation then, if based on qualification and merit, is that there should be more women leaders in every aspect of our productive society in high office. I see none of this trend as negative, but the adding of talent and quality to our workforce.

11.30 a.m.

Madam President, I am content in this debate to limit my contribution to certain specific policy mentioned in the budget speech by the hon. Minister of Finance. I share the views of former Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and other political and economic commentators when it was said that this budget should be considered as an interim budget. Until sufficient time is permitted for the new Government to get a better understanding of the true state of the economy after collection of reliable data necessary to chart our economic destination in the intermediate medium and long term.

This, Madam President, takes me to my first area of concern. That is, the unacceptable absence of independent and reliable economic data from an institution charged with the responsibility, such as the CSO, the Central Statistical Office.

In listening to the debate over the past few days, the new administration made certain claims about the state of the country's economic situation based on

information they were able to obtain from the Central Bank and other Ministries that the Opposition has been disputing as being inaccurate and misrepresenting. Therein lies the critical need to have as soon as yesterday, a professionally, adequately staffed CSO that is sufficiently resourced, properly housed and up and running so as to provide the critical independent and reliable data needed for decision makers and planners to operate and take decisions based on credible information.

The public is entitled to have facts about the state of our finances. During the hon. Minister of Finance's presentation, he said that the Government is to establish a statistical institute to address this lack of reliable data collection which I wholly endorse and welcome. I am personally aware of a Trinidadian professor of statistics lecturing in a highly reputable US university who has offered his services as a contribution to help set up and modernize a statistical institute and to train persons here at home. A competent and independent CSO will put an end to the suspension of data collection and the attendant mischief that goes with same.

Madam President, I do not consider this budget to be one of doom and gloom, anti-people or draconian by its proposed fiscal measures. [*Desk thumping*] By nature, I consider myself an optimist and full of hope. It is my honest belief that the economic challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago due to the decreased revenues from oil and gas presents an enormous opportunity to recalibrate our economy and by extension our social order on the whole. Our priorities have to be reviewed and adjusted based on what we need as against what we want and can afford at this time.

In an article entitled: "The Economist Perspective No wiggle room"—in PricewaterhouseCoopers 2016 Budget Memorandum, Senior Economist, Dr.

Ronald Ramkissoon stated—I quote with your permission, Madam President:

“The challenge for the new Minister of Finance would not have been too serious if 2015 was the first year in which a deficit was incurred. The situation is that more serious, as expenditures have steadily increased and exceeded revenues in each of the last four years.

Notwithstanding much higher energy prices, over the last four years, economic growth was on average, only marginally positive, as the stimulus provided through fiscal injections into the non-energy sector barely offset energy sector contraction.

His”—the new Minister of Finance—“task would not only be to juggle the numbers in respect of revenue, expenditure and financing but more importantly to assure the population that the government has the capability to navigate the stormy waters which lie ahead. Actions of the Minister and Government must encourage faith and build confidence.

...the Minister will want to ensure that he puts a stop to any further widening of the deficit in the 2016 budget. To do this the first call would be to halt increases in expenditure especially in subsidies and transfers. In doing this the Minister must be strategic in respect of existing contracts, promoting growth and in critical areas of social support.”

Madam President, let us be honest and open in our debate about the economic challenges facing us if we are to do what is necessary and prudent to circumvent any further undermining of the economy. I have heard within and outside of the precincts of Parliament allegations of large-scale wastage of public finances and there is a sustained call for the Government to do two things:

1. recover as much of those moneys as possible;

2. demonstrate by its transparent actions that this will not now occur under its stewardship. The public wants and is demanding accountability in the affairs of Government.

It is not my role or my intention to cast aspersions on any person within or outside of Parliament under the protection of parliamentary privilege. I do feel duty-bound to say, however, that it is manifestly unfair for this administration or any other to seek to recover squandered public revenues from the public by the imposition of any new or increased taxes or levies before first cleaning up the activities of wastage of resources, looted revenues and any other misappropriation of funds from the public purse.

Billions of dollars may be at stake here, and I am certain the public would like to know. What justification is there for anybody who does their best to eke out a living and make ends meet, and to keep depositing moneys into an entity charged with looking after their welfare, that then spirits it away or squanders it with no consequences? That would be like pouring liquid money into a pot full of holes. The pot will never be full until the holes big and small are properly plugged. Most of us are talking about the merits and demerits of new taxes and levies, but is enough being said about the continuous mismanagement of the public purse and how the situation is going to be rectified? If nothing is done by the custodians of the pot to arrest this leakage, the options open to the depositors are either to stop depositing their hard-earned cash or to change the entity with the porous pot.

Another area of concern is the Government's social section policies found on pages 34 to 40 of the budget statement. It is encouraging to note at page 40, the Government's intention for people with disabilities—and I crave your indulgence in quoting same, Madam President.

The hon. Minister of Finance said:

“...people with disabilities are consistently constrained from participating in and benefiting from our growing economy. We will create a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities. They will enjoy equal opportunities through an empowered life with dignity. We will undertake substantive action to meet our obligations under the relevant conventions approved by the United Nations. In consultation with people with disabilities, we will immediately undertake a review of all projects and services directed to the community.”

This is a pleasing statement of policy I am sure differently-abled people will be anxious to see take effect.

Madam President, immediate action can be taken in numerous buildings in Trinidad and Tobago—and pavements for starters—as there is often no adequate or reasonable physical accommodation for differently-abled persons to enter or move around without some kind of assistance in public spaces. Look at these very Parliament Chambers, for example. I had been an Independent Senator in the last Parliament for two years and have returned at the commencement of this Eleventh Parliament, the highest institution of legislative authority in the land which passes laws to enforce government policy for the country to follow. Yet, it is distressing to note that adequate physical accommodation is not provided for the disabled and physically challenged.

I cannot consult with you, Madam President, or any other Senator on the floor of these Chambers without you all coming to me as a courtesy. I could not access the chair of the President if I were called upon to preside as officer in the absence of the President, Vice-President or the Coordinator of the Independent

Bench, which has happened on several occasions when Dr. Rolph Balgobin sat in the chair as Presiding Officer.

Madam President, can you imagine a few differently-abled persons, more so in wheelchairs like myself, coming here to occupy the public gallery at the same time? There is no specific accommodation for them. I had hoped that my presence over the past two years would have caused action to be taken, to rectify this obvious neglect, but nothing was done. Therefore, as of today, I must give life to the wise counsel of my beloved deceased maternal grandmother who often said to me, “It is the hinge that makes the noise that gets the oil”. [*Desk thumping*] So today, Madam President, I hope that the noise of differently-abled people is being heard loudly and the oil of rectification is on its way with dispatch.

Parliament and the powers that be must at once remedy this travesty of blindness against the differently-abled, starting in these Chambers. It would be an interesting thing to see if all Members of these Chambers came to a sitting of Parliament in wheelchairs to experience first-hand the challenges in so doing. At the end of that sitting the wheelchairs can be donated to persons or organizations in need of same. This act of civil activism and consciousness would be preferable to blocking streets and burning tyres in frustration. I hope my invitation can be entertained and my lamentations silenced with appropriate action by Parliament and the State.

Madam President, I am not sure if the discerning public and customers of our health care facilities would take me to task if I say that the major problem that the public faces is the lack of quality service in the health care— a health service that is efficient, readily available and accountable. There are just too many medical mishaps, too much negligence and misadventure that occur without

consequences for the perpetrators in our medical institutions public and private.

Perhaps the Government would consider introducing protection legislation similar to that in India where they have a Consumer Protection Act 1986 which exists as we speak. This provides users of their health facilities with an opportunity to get compensation in a very short space of time as opposed to be going through the civil route which is very expensive and very long and drawn out. This certainly will help to arrest and put some sort of consciousness on the providers of this services to the unassuming public, you know, in terms of bringing some sort of comfort to the distress that we have been seeing over the last year or so. I mean there is a continuous report in the media of people dying. You are going to have a baby and the person is dead. You are going to have the simple things and people are dying from this. This should not be in Trinidad and Tobago in 2015, and something must be done. I mean the root of rectifying this where somebody suffers some sort of negligent act because of medical malpractice or something, so people are able to hide behind the cost of litigation. You understand the kind of numbers lawyers make in terms of fees to get doctors against each other. Here is also another difficult task. You have to go outside and that is, I mean an additional cost. So, I think the Government needs to look at that in setting right or correcting the certain anomalies in the provision of health service. That is something to look at.

Madam President, I turn my attention to sports and the Government's declared policy to be committed to the development of sport and youth. This is good news. But while our new tennis, aquatic and cycling centres are about to come on stream and we give credence to their potential for sport tourism, we cannot ignore other areas. Proper management and maintenance of our stadia

should also be important. The Manny Ramjohn Stadium was out of commission for about two years and is now apparently returning to service. The Ato Boldon Stadium has been allowed to lapse into disrepair and the Dwight Yorke Stadium has been unavailable notwithstanding a prolonged closure for renovations and a new track being re-laid.

There is also constant restriction of the use of the Hasely Crawford Stadium for myriad reasons, including to facilitate Carnival-related activities or concerts and for the preservation of the stadium from wear and tear. The rainy season coincides with a very important phase of training for track and field athletes—the building-up period when interval and repetition training sets the stage for more specific preparation during the competitive season. Rainy weather precludes the use of these methods on grass tracks and so allowance must be made for athletes' preparation. Our athletes must be allowed access to proper facilities for their training.

The rationale for opening the stadium for Carnival events, concerts, et cetera, is so that funds can be raised to offset maintenance costs. It would be interesting to find out just how much funding the stadium receives from promoters and how much in expenses incurred in repairing stadium seating and bathroom facilities that are abused by patrons, particularly those who may be inebriated.

There is also a relaxed attitude on the part of promoters to clean up after events, which means that it takes far too long for the facility to return to its intended use. It would also be interesting to find out what caution or contingency fee is charged to promoters, since a small fee would mean nothing to promoters who have no care for the plight of athletes once their event is over and so little effort is expended toward stadium rehabilitation. At any rate, there is the

incalculable cost incurred in depriving young athletes of the use of a facility for the purpose for which it was intended. Might it not be more feasible for the Ministry to set aside funds for stadium maintenance and allow promoters to develop alternative venues for events?

11.45a.m.

Jamaica hosts a multitude of international athletes wishing to do warm-up training. St. Kitts hosted the Canadian track and field team earlier this year. When we speak of sport tourism, will we accommodate the use of our track facilities by individuals and teams who seek warm weather during winter months and spring breaks? If so, how will we justify this in the face of the current treatment of local athletes? Would we be, in the words of a famous calypso, “saving it for company”? There is clearly a need, if we are to proceed with the thrust towards sport tourism, for a more enlightened approach to the use, management and maintenance of our stadia and new facilities about to come on stream.

Just this morning on one of those morning talk shows on television, I was fortunate enough to get a view of an interview being conducted by Hema Ramkissoon with Jehue Gordon, our first gold medallist at the World Games, I think two years ago. Young Jehue Gordon came from a family that was disadvantaged, and he said he never allowed his circumstances to keep him down. As a matter of fact, he used it as a catalyst to be focused and to achieve great things.

Young Jehue Gordon has gone on to graduate from the University of the West Indies with first class honours, and I think that is something to be very proud about. [*Desk thumping*] He is home-grown and which lends

support to the choir of people like Dr. Ian Hypolite, who is coach and psychiatrist; Mr. Ed Skinner, a former Olympian of Trinidad and Tobago who manages and runs, and coaches the sports club called Memphis Pioneers—that they take into their fold very young persons, most of them from disadvantaged homes and have not only mentored them as athletes, but mentored them as young persons to take a part in this society in a meaningful way.

A lot of them have gone on to win athletic scholarships and gone abroad and returned with skills necessary to serve our country. It is something that one needs to embrace, something that one needs to highlight because a lot is not seen in recent times of young persons in a positive light. We always see them in a very negative light. But there are young people who are doing good things and need to be commended for it.

He has just launched a perfume—and I am not giving him free advertisement here, but I am very proud to see that because of his background. I mean, this is a guy who remained home—most times they get scholarships, they go to foreign countries, develop here. And once you go to a foreign university, most times you are tempted to stay, if not on your own, if you are a good student they are tempted to keep you. So we are producing and they are taking at our expense.

So it is good to see that he was encouraged to stay home. He stayed home. He went to the University of the West Indies, which is not a type of university which caters specifically for sports persons and have any special mentorship that they allow you. So he did certainly well, because in my time at University of the West Indies, that they get you in spite of, and not as

a result of, because of the trials and tribulations going through there. So I think it is a proud moment for Trinidad and Tobago; it is a proud moment for those who encourage the development of sport and sport tourism in our country, that we can do it here. We can produce the academics; we can produce the athletes of world class. [*Desk thumping*]

On the policy of crime and national security, Madam President, the institution of strong families and its importance in any initiative to deal with crime cannot be over-emphasized. The lack of strong family units in our society provides a hatchery of criminal recruits that surpasses the recruitment drive of security forces and the construction of prisons. A concerted effort must be made to focus on strengthening of the family as an important unit in the community, and the nation by extension. There is a need for the training and development of social workers to be deployed across our communities and more so in every school, if affordable.

The time may also be upon us to establish an elite police service along the lines of the FBI, Scotland Yard or the Mounted Police, who have overriding powers over all police enforcement, especially with regard to serious crimes of national importance—white collar or other. This elite police service should be staffed with persons who hold at least a first degree and varied specialist skills, like pathologists, accountants, lawyers, computer experts, engineers, psychologists, psychiatrists, criminologists, ballistics experts, et cetera, who are to be paid competitive remuneration to attract the best in each area, highly trained and second to none. They must be technologically driven in every aspect of their work with strong forensic capabilities.

It is clear to me that the large allocation of the budget of 2016 and previous ones to the Ministry of National Security do not seem justified in terms of the return to date. More money, more security officers across the board, more arms and ammunition and other assets purchased and to be purchased, have not made us feel any safer. More money does not mean a better police officer, better prevention or increased detection of crime and successful prosecution. We should concentrate our efforts, therefore, Madam President, and expenditure then, on crime prevention strategies with emphasis on family and continuing building of communities.

Of concern to me, Madam President—and I must make note of this. You see, it says a lot about us as a country and where we are in terms of our safety and security. We are spending a significant amount of money for the last five or six years on the Ministry of National Security and one wonders if this money is being properly used and utilized, or the assets or the focus of this expenditure is really reaping the benefits that we require or we are expecting from it.

Of concern to me is that for the last couple of years I have noticed that persons, friends of mine, colleagues, they are coming to talk to me, be it at home or elsewhere, and they are in possession of their phones, either take out their batteries, leave it in their cars or something so, because they are speaking of the intrusion of their privacy. I do not know how prevalent it is; if it is real, because I am not into calling people's names here, but you will be surprised of the persons who I have encountered who would have come to speak with me and would have done that as a precaution, because they said these phones are "dirty".

Now, I was very distressed. I have been very distressed by that. I have worked in other countries. I have worked along administrations where security is of critical importance, and I am talking years—at least a decade back—and technology of staying in a car and listening to somebody's conversation in a house was readily available. I do not know if that technology is here and how it is being used by our security forces, but I would like the Parliament to get an account of what exactly is the state of that in terms of our national security. Do they have the capabilities of listening to people's conversations? And if so, under what basis and what is being used? I am not a drug dealer. I do not traffic in women—in humans. I do not know why they will want to listen to my conversation. I just do not know why. Anybody who calls me who deals in any of these things, narcotics or whatever it is, why would that be a case?

But, certainly, it must have some truth to it because there are too many people who would have come to me and practised that, and they are not in front of me negotiating so and so. I find it very distressing, and I think it is something that we need to get to the bottom of. Even though we are engaging and setting up a structure—whatever the security structure may be in terms of making us safer as a people—we need also to be very careful about transgressing people's constitutional rights to freedom and privacy.

So I just wanted to raise that as a concern in government expenditure in this way. I would not want them using expenditure to distress the ordinary public; what is this being used for, and if that is, in fact, valid. I would like to hear, at some point in time, from the Minister of National Security, what is, in fact, the position.

The last of my budget concerns forms a discussion I recently had with a board member of a registered charity who pointed out to me that the Green Fund Levy increase from 0.1 per cent to 3 per cent will have an impact on the revenues of tax-exempt charities, as the Act does not make provision for their exemption. Also, if a charity provides training to participants and a small fee is charged to encourage their commitment, such fees will become subject to VAT. Perhaps the Minister of Finance will want to seriously reconsider these matters as far as tax exempting charities are concerned and act accordingly.

Madam President, I also was privileged to listen to Sen. Ameen yesterday in her contribution where she raised the concern of the GATE. I think it is a legitimate concern. I think it is one that should engage public discourse and I hope that it would not have fallen on deaf ears. Today, this morning, while coming here I listened to Dale and Tony who apparently are celebrating 25 years of doing a joint broadcast on the radio. It is a broadcast that I listen to. It is one of the more uplifting and provoking at times, shows, and I congratulate them. I also heard them making comments about the fact that Sen. Ameen had raised that. I think it is a genuine concern.

What was interesting about the Minister of Finance's contribution in the other place, as they will say, criticism was being made of the fact that, I think over one, two, three, four or five of his first sentences or first paragraphs, engaged about consultation. Madam President, I think consultation by any government with its customers, or clients, or the public, is essential, especially when you are seeking to do things that may have a significant impact on them. And if this is the new signal being sent by this

Government, I think it is a welcome one, [*Desk thumping*] because on the last occasion I may have—

Madam President: Sen. Roach, you have five more minutes.

Sen. HRI Roach: Thank you very much, Madam. On the last occasion in the other Parliament, because of lack of consultation and because we do not have in our Constitution what you call a referendum. In the absence of a referendum, what is best if there is significant outcry and rumbling about a displeasure about a proposed measure? You call an election. And when I said that, it caused an uproar. A lot of people were antagonized; a lot of people were angry with me. But I was just saying, as a member of the public charged with the responsibility of articulating views that may be outside what I would have come in contact with, and therefore because of their lack of consultation a lot of things went awry with that. Therefore, I think it is wise and it is a good strategy; it is a good signal for this Government to engage in consultation. Okay?

Madam President, a lot has been said—I also heard Sen. Vasant Bharath a while ago in his contribution, again, speaking about some of the difficulties, some of the assertions or claims made by the present Government in terms of our finances which left a lot to be desired, and therefore, in closing, I just want to emphasize that all of this could be taken care of if we, as the public, can get information that is credible from an independent institution, exactly what is the state of our economy. Before you plan, you must have solid and concrete information. We cannot move on what is speculation. It is going to cause a lot of mischief. That is what is going on, and I hope that this would be rectified soon.

Madam President, a lot has been said—I know a lot has been covered by Members of this Senate about the budget. I am not one of gloom to see things in a negative way. I see things in a positive way. I believe in the not too distant future, the next six months or as the case may be, the Minister of Finance probably would come back here with a more comprehensive analysis of the budget, having satisfied the data collection in a more reliable way, and for that I wait with bated breath.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Budhu. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sarah Budhu: Madam President, I would first like to congratulate you on your appointment and I know you will do a great job in bringing dignity, morality and fairness to the Upper House. [*Desk thumping*] As a new Member, I know there would be a great deal of expectation from me and so I seek your protection, guidance and trust.

Madam President, there are no words that can truly describe how grateful I am to stand here as the youngest female Senator in the Eleventh Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] For this honour and privilege I must give praise to Almighty God for this great opportunity and, of course, our Prime Minister, for this great opportunity who has not only placed sufficient confidence and belief in my abilities, but understands the importance of the younger generation in politics today, for he has given us a chance to truly represent and uplift the people of this beloved nation. [*Desk thumping*]

As I stand here today, I collectively remembered before my interview to become a candidate, someone said to me: “Sarah, you are young. A lot is

expected of you. You would be faced with a lot of challenges and mud-slinging. Are you prepared for that?”

My response was, “Let it come forth. My skin is thick enough to handle any information in a professional manner.” So I just want to make it clear to the younger generation of this country who is listening, age is just a number. [*Desk thumping*] You are never too young to lead. Show off your capabilities, do not let us down.

12.00 noon

Madam President, I also wish to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to the increased thousands of right-thinking constituents who supported me during the election season. [*Desk thumping*] So there is hope, and when there is hope there is life. It fills us with fresh courage and makes us strong again. I want to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for an excellent budget presentation, [*Desk thumping*] a theme that reflects restoring confidence and rebuilding trust, “Let us Do This Together”. It is a budget that paints a picture of a brighter future for Trinidad and Tobago; a budget that will help Trinidad and Tobago to be back on its feet; it is a budget that will promote economic growth; and it is a budget that will restore our nation’s confidence in us. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I listened attentively to the debate over the past last few days from Members of both sides, and I want to say I was shocked with the facts being read and laid before us, on what we thought was a Government working for us. So when the previous administration boasted it was value for money, it was rather a Government that had wreaked havoc on our society, sapping off its energy and stripping it of its dignity and dynamism.

Madam President, as I listened to the opposite side, I often glanced at my

phone to check the date, for I was confused that Members spoke as though they were on a political platform, boasting of their accomplishments rather than placing particular focus on the budget. They build this and they build that; they reduced unemployment; they never imposed any taxes when they came into Government; and they would have done this and they would have done that; they only spent so and so. Madam President, I sat there in astonishment, but we have to forgive them because they are still suffering with ET, and those of you all who do not know ET, it is election tabanca. [*Desk thumping*] Campaigning is over and, apparently, one of the side effects of election tabanca is amnesia. They cannot remember nothing, no wrongdoing. Okay, that was then; now is now—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: This is your maiden contribution?

Sen. S. Budhu:—that is why we are left with an empty Treasury. They spent more than we earned.

Sen. Mark: I just want to know if it is her maiden contribution.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, your voice is ringing through the Chamber. May I be allowed to listen to the maiden contribution of Sen. Budhu. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. S. Budhu: Thank you, Madam President, for your protection. They spent more than we earned and now we have to put back this country on track. Finally, the citizens of this country can exhale after holding their breath against this stench of corruption, nepotism and discrimination [*Desk thumping*] and, at the end of the day, we the taxpayers must highlight it, investigate it and deal with it because it is our money that they were spending. I am sure if it was theirs, it would be better allocated and used rather than being squandered.

You see, this Government is one that is governed by morality, integrity in public affairs, transparency, sincerity and, most importantly, value for money in

public expenditure so we would not be side tracked. We are here to rescue this country from all wrongdoings and damage and ensure our society is treated fairly, so at the end of the day we can shout, “Great is Trinidad and Tobago”. This Government is committed to governing in a transparent, efficient, inclusive and decisive manner, paying due regard to respecting and upholding the rule of law and rights of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, the past administration’s record on education is totally depressing, bogged down by corruption and ineptitude. The then Minister of Education boasted that they built 102 schools and, up to this day, they cannot provide a listing. This is incomprehensible and speaks volumes. What poisoned my ears during the debate was the fact that the hon. Member for Caroni East stood up and, coached by the Opposition Leader, asked about the provision of school books and laptops for the students for 2015/2016. Madam President, I am young and my memory is good. As far as I recall, the People’s Partnership Government was in power up to the first day of school. So it would have been their responsibility to put that in place if they wished to continue. [*Desk thumping*] Do not try to insult our intelligence and brainwash the citizens of this country.

A matter of fact, published on July 16, 2015, one of our daily newspapers read:

“Minister of Education...yesterday assured that the outcome of the September 7 general elections would not affect the distribution of laptops to secondary school pupils when school reopens.” [*Desk thumping*]

Promises they made never fulfilled—I wonder who is dangerously misleading now? Nonetheless, our Minister of Education did address the issue of textbooks for the academic year 2015/2016 during his maiden speech, and also said he will

first focus on the school infrastructural needs before dealing or addressing the issue of laptops which makes, absolutely, sense. Again, we are a Government that will foster, develop and encourage the best practices in our educational system.

Madam President, a total of \$309.3 million of taxpayers' dollars was spent for the purchase of 96,400 laptop computers for the past five years. My point is, after this tremendous expenditure, how many school teachers utilized the technology; how can teachers integrate teaching and learning when they themselves were not equipped with a laptop or have training provided for them; [*Desk thumping*] how many schools actually have Internet access? It might be helpful to remind the hon. Member for Caroni East the words of Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General, and I quote:

“Technology can be a powerful education multiplier, but we must know how to use it. It is not enough to install technology into classrooms”—but—“it must be integrated into learning.”

Madam President, I must commend our Minister of Education's plans. Under this Government, infrastructure within the schools will now be upgraded to support the requirements of digital devices in the classroom; high-speed Internet connectivity within the school premises to allow research; qualified IT technicians would be placed at each school to immediately repair or diagnose the laptop problems; expansion of professional development for teachers; and the monitoring and evaluation of all ICT initiatives to ensure compliance and effective implementation are some of the Minister's plans.

I want to remind them, despite their false claims, no other political party has come close to achieving what we, the PNM, have done to educate and train our population, [*Desk thumping*] and to provide easy access to education. And to this

day, Madam President, we will build on this proud legacy as we continue to make education the highest priority. So stop the propaganda that we are going to deny GATE when it is this said Government that introduced it. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I also want to highlight a serious issue. Every year hundreds of students graduate from the University of Trinidad and Tobago with their Bachelors of Education degree. There are those who specialize in primary, secondary, ECC or special education; their choice is theirs. Madam President, do you know there are thousands of graduates who could not be placed into a secondary school under this PP Government?

A friend of mine who graduated with me in 2013 from the Valsayn Teachers College called the Ministry of Education in June of this year. They told her she needs to hold on, that they are taking in teachers from the 2012 batch of resumes, and I asked: why such a backlog? Is it that only their friends and families or associates were being placed? Is it that underqualified persons were being appointed and filling these vacancies? Why these graduates could not have been placed in the 102 schools they said they built across this nation? Our Minister of Education is fully aware of this situation and thankfully is looking into this matter with immediate effect.

Madam President, school violence reached its all-time high under the People's Partnership Government. What was their intervention? Never heard of any implementation to address or curb school violence. Please allow me to quote from one of our daily newspapers dated March 19, 2014. The front page wrote—

“BAD GIRLS”

—in a large font displaying four pictures of what can be described to me as horrific and frightening. Four photos displaying dreadful acts by our teenaged girls.

Quoting from page 3 of the newspaper.

“Ten female students have been suspended following”—an alarming—“fight outside Mucurapo West Secondary School...”

And amidst all of the media coverage and the quantity of Internet coverage the subject matter has gotten, I could not help think of how painful and shameful it must have been for families to deal with this.

Madam President: Sen. Budhu, I am sorry to interrupt you, but just for the *Hansard* record, could you just tell us what newspaper and you have the date?

Sen. S. Budhu: From page 3 of the newspaper, this was *Newsday*, March 19, 2014. The brawl took place outside the school compound, filmed by the student using a camera phone, uploaded onto YouTube, then shared on social media 1,200 times.

Referring to a previous incident where a school student was stabbed in a school in south Trinidad, Davandand Sinanan, the President of TTUTA, said:

“You have a stabbing in the school and it hits the media. Three days later it dies down...but the public only receives ‘sporadic glimpses’”—of what really takes place.

Madam President, under this Government we will not tolerate this nonsense. As Whitney Houston sang, “I believe the children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way”.

Our manifesto promised that we will develop a culture of discipline, production and tolerance in all schools. We understand that these children’s pattern of behaviour, their attitudes and demeanour, and moreover their actual outlook on life, are a result of certain social and family patterns inculcated in their homes, the school and the wider environment

Madam President, our Minister of Education already has plans to deal with school violence involving a collaborative relationship with various stakeholders in structuring students' support services to ensure the holistic development of each child, filling that gap from the home to the school because this Government understands that once the school system is in jeopardy, our country is in jeopardy.

This Government will fully integrate sports, culture, language arts and physical education into the curriculum. Through participation of sports and physical education, our young children will not only keep our children away from engaging in illegal activities and idleness, but they will listen about the importance of key values such as honesty, teamwork, fair play, respect for themselves and others, and adherence to rules.

Madam President, it also provides a forum for young people to learn how to deal with both winning and losing. Sport-based programmes have shown to improve the learning performance of children and young people, encouraging school attendance and a desire to succeed academically rather than engaging in slackness.

12.15 p.m.

Madam President, I am pleased to know that under this Government, our culture will not be ancient history. According to Pearl Springer, a playwright:

“In our education system, none of our children know about...Kambule.”

She said. Neither do I.

“Culture is life, it gives a sense of self and identity. It is not (found) anywhere...definitely, not in the”—Trinidad—“schools.”

Madam President, we are going to change that. I also appreciate that our schools will be modernized with a view to generating in our young people an adequate

appreciation of our history. Just like hearing about Mahatma Gandhi, Marcus Garvey, Christopher Columbus, our children will now know who is Dr. Eric Williams, Basdeo Panday and Patrick Manning.

As a former teacher, I know first-hand how important it is to have the ability to stay current and utilize the most up-to-date information. I had opportunities to attend well-developed and thoughtful workshops on how to transform teaching and learning. Sadly, the enthusiasm stimulated by the workshops waned when I returned to the classroom and the reality of the thousands of the other things that had to be done and no equipped resources. Because I had no follow-up from the courses or on-going support from colleagues, I would look back months later, only to realize that I have been unable to implement anything that I learned.

This Government intends to develop and implement a formal system for on-going professional development for teachers. The Minister of Education did mention that he will ensure that the education and training of our teachers are adequate to meet the challenges that face our young people, including penetration of foreign cultures, technological devices and social media and shall cater for the different learning styles students display.

Madam President, please allow me to speak a little on some things I have observed during my long hours and days of walking in the constituency of Caroni East. I believe Caroni East is one of the most underdeveloped constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago, sad to say. For the five past years, there were infrastructural developments. Primary school buildings are in dilapidated conditions. Imagine for the year, fiscal year 2014/2015, \$218.56 million was spent on construction; \$106.7 million for improvement and refurbishment and extensions to primary schools and \$15.6 million for procurement of furniture and equipment.

Sen. Mark: She lost her deposit?

Sen. S. Budhu: Madam President, this is no joke money. We are talking about \$340.9 million spent on primary schools. [*Continuous Interruption*] Again, high levels of expenditure.

Madam President: Sen. Mark and other Members, I remind you of Standing Order 51(e). Let us listen to the Senator in silence, please.

Sen. S. Budhu: Thank you very much, Madam President. Did we get value for money? The answer is no. Again, the saying goes, the King was in his counting house counting out his money, the Queen was in the parlour eating bread and honey. Among others, the St. Helena Hindu School is shabby. Thankfully, under this Government, repairs and maintenance of schools will be the primary focus.

Our Minister of Education already highlighted there would be transparency in tendering, close partnership with stakeholders to minimize loss of school time and a collaborative relationship with the Education Facilities Company Limited, EFCL, to ensure value for money.

Madam President, in Caroni East, the roads need to be upgraded and properly lit. In areas where there are schools, there is a need for pavements and speed bumps. Recreational grounds need to be refurbished with proper infrastructure such as pavilions, play parks and car parks. In some villages, there is not even a recreation ground, sad to say. Children are forced to play on the roads thereby endangering their lives and motorists as well.

One such village suffering from this is Ravine Sable in Longdenville. There is also a high demand for community centres, health centres and Early Childhood Care Centres to meet the needs of the single parents. The health centres suffer from recurrent shortages and are not operating at their optimal level. Our approach

to healthcare is quite different. This Government will hold officials, managers and boards accountable for the performance of the national healthcare system with serious consequences for malpractice and maladministration.

Madam President, for the past five years, Caroni residents are experiencing massive flooding, leaving hundreds of families in El Carmen, St. Helena and Kelly Village counting their household losses, crops and livelihood with no relief in sight. For five long years they have been pleading for a flood prevention measure and they are fed up of being ignored.

However, this Government intends to do all in its power to alleviate that perennial problem which the previous administration failed to do. There are a lot of young, unemployed persons living in Caroni East, which has resulted in some of them engaging in criminal activities. This Government recognizes that our youths are vital to the future development of Trinidad and Tobago. I am happy to boast that this PNM Government will soon particularly:

- Develop an annual youth expo and special radio and television programmes to allow youths to discuss the issues that affect them and focus on youth development;
- Develop a comprehensive youth employment policy which will address the specific needs of unemployed youths including preparation for the job market and varying needs of youths in diverse communities; and of course,
- Increased OJT stipend which I believe would drive persons to get employed.

Madam President, crime is a major concern in the Enterprise area and sad to say, over the last five years, it only got worse. Please permit me to quote from the

Guardian newspaper published Monday, June 29, 2015. It stated and I quote:

Central "...went awry yesterday as criminals were reportedly tipped...and police said they did not recover the number of firearms or arrest suspects...expected."

An "...officer who was involved in the exercise said that the leak came from...the police force."

Madam President, this Government understands without security of the tenure at the top, there can be no meaningful improvement in the service and as such, I am in high spirits to know that we shall work towards reform, upgrade, modernizing and transforming our police service. [*Desk thumping*]

In closing, our vision is to make Trinidad and Tobago a better place with a brighter future for everyone where our legend lives on. We, the young ones, will continue to sow the seeds, plough the land and plant the trees, so our future generation can allow our footsteps and work hard for tomorrow's harvest and I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Let me congratulate Sen. Budhu on her maiden contribution. [*Desk thumping*] I think now is a good time to break for lunch and we will come back at 1.30 p.m. So this session is now suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.23 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Mark: Madam President, has the Government abandoned the Parliament?

Hon. Young: Madam President, if I may? The other Members from the Government side are just engaged in a sub-Cabinet meeting and they are on their way down; once we have a quorum, you may proceed.

Madam President: Sen. Sturge.

Sen. Wayne Sturge: Madam President, thank you for the opportunity for joining this debate and permit me at this juncture to congratulate you on your elevation.

Before dealing with the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance and contributions made by certain others in the House of Representatives, permit me to begin by addressing an issue raised by the Leader of Government Business yesterday. The Leader of Government Business, yesterday, very cleverly, “took in front before in front took him” on the issue of One Alexandra Place. The Leader of Government Business mentioned, in his contribution, that the lease for these premises was entered into in April 2010.

From my recollection, in April 2010, we were mere weeks away from a general election when the present Attorney General, in his then capacity as a member of the relevant board, entered into a lease of One Alexandra Place, property owned by his father-in-law. The Leader of Government Business artfully omitted to regale us as to whether One Alexandra Place had the requisite approvals; whether it was OSHA compliant, and when these matters were addressed. The family of the Attorney General, present Attorney General, earned over \$45 million of taxpayers’ money when the building was not ready for occupation but still needed to be outfitted.

Now, Madam President, would the hon. Attorney General, or any right-thinking person, use their money to enter into a lease for premises not yet outfitted? And I am not talking about—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Young: Madam President, I rise on a point of order and in particularly Standing Order 46(6). Senator is making an imputation with respect to the hon. Attorney General who is overseas, and is suggesting improper motives on his part. There is absolutely no evidence that exists that this is a building owned by the

Attorney General.

Sen. Mark: Do not make a speech, just refer to the Standing Orders.

Hon. Young: I am addressing you, Madam President.

Sen. Mark: But you are making a speech.

Hon. Young: I am hearing a lot of flutter and noise in my ears from the other side.

Sen. Mark: “Yeah, yuh making ah speech.”

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, continue. I will monitor it as we go along.

Sen. W. Sturge: Yes. As I was saying, would any right-thinking person use their own money to enter into a lease for premises not yet outfitted? Now, I am not talking unfurnished, I am talking about a building that required—by the very contribution yesterday, required more than \$20 million to be outfitted. So when those on the other side wish to talk about nepotism, cronyism and wastage, One Alexandra Place is a useful starting point. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam President, I now turn to the budget. Two weeks ago, we were treated to a budget presentation which was in reality a high-handed PR job from a man, I suggest, who does not have a background in finance and which, in the end, was nothing more, in my opinion, than political diatribe. We were treated to a budget presentation which, in my opinion, was bereft of any new ideas, short on detail, tall on arrogance and tall on contempt for the populace, particularly the 341,000 people who voted against the People’s National Movement.

After hearing the opening lines of the budget presentation, you would swear that the People’s Partnership was annihilated at the polls in much the same manner that the PNM was annihilated in 1986. When, in reality, the votes separating Government from us, Opposition, was a mere 40,000. Madam President, the reality is that roughly one-third of the population voted for the PNM, one-third for

the People's Partnership and a third of the population did not vote. More people did not vote for the PNM than voted for them. [*Desk thumping*]

1.35p.m.

When examined closely and objectively from the opening salvo to the very end, the budget was littered with misinformation, “robber talk and mamaguism”.

Now, Madam President, yesterday I almost fell off my chair laughing when I heard the hon. Minister of Finance pledge to this House that—in essence gave an assurance that they pledged to win the war on crime. That must be a joke, a sick joke, a joke of epic proportions because the PNM Government in every year they were in office, they failed spectacularly on the war on crime. Murder rates climbed every year consecutively. The most murderous periods of our history, the most violent periods of our history came in when they were in office, [*Desk thumping*] and on resumption of office September 7 to now, in fact, September recorded 50 murders, the bloodiest month of this year. So I do not know what empty promise they are making about winning the war on crime.

Now, Madam President, the Minister of Finance in my opinion sold us a bag of dreams. He sold dreams to all low-income earners that they would have in their pockets an extra \$250 a month through an increase in the personal tax allowance. The reality is, however, that after giving the average worker that extra \$250 per month, the Minister of Finance then proceeded to dig into the back fobs of these very people, and take out every cent he pretended to give them. [*Laughter*] The Minister, through an increase in VAT on food from zero to 12.5 per cent, and by rolling out policies which included an increase in fuel prices, increase in other taxes, business and Green Fund levies, purloined that which he gave to them. And that in essence all those policies would see an increase in prices, which would

ultimately be passed on to the consumer.

It was the type of pick pocketry that would make the “pickpocketers” of Charlotte Street green with envy. In the end, it is the ordinary man who will be running on fumes. This is a budget, Madam President, that does nothing to inspire confidence, create economic growth or encourage economic activity. This is a budget where big businesses gain and small businesses were penalized; where rich folks who purchase luxury items will see a reduction in VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent, whereas the ordinary man will see his food bill increase by 12.5 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] So, if your food bill every month is \$1,000, very soon it would be \$1,150. So out of that \$250 that he has given you, at least \$150 has been taken back by VAT.

Now, Madam President, we saw the plan to introduce the rapid rail or we heard of a plan to introduce the rapid rail, which in my opinion when examined closely, at the end of it all would be a rapid fail. Now, the Minister gave us the impression that the rapid rail would be the panacea to traffic gridlock. In most countries where decentralization is not a priority, there is gridlock. New York City and London, they both have railway systems by way of the subway and tube and other forms of rail, but they still have gridlock, hours of gridlock at rush hour as we do.

Transportation: public transportation is subsidized the world over, yet the Minister of Finance has not seen it fit to enlighten us on the level of subsidization required for the rapid rail. What about the possible adverse effects of the rapid rail? What is the cost-benefit analysis of such a venture? Would we not see small businesses and small people experiencing an end to their livelihood? What of the mechanics, welders, tyre shops and so on? And to pass the buck, Madam

President, we were sold a story about proceeding only after getting a green light from the IDB. What is the likelihood of the IDB, being a bank, not giving the green light when they stand to earn billions of dollars in interest from this venture?

Madam President, they say a man's perception is his reality, and in that vein permit me to raise a few issues which arose from the statement on funding for the Judiciary. Let me say at the outset that my comments on this issue are directed to the decision of the Minister of Finance and not to the Judiciary. I have complete faith in the independence, integrity and impartiality of our judges.

Having said so, permit me to direct attention to an area of law known as apparent bias. Where the perception of bias as opposed to actual bias is raised. The announcement by the Minister of Finance regarding the Judiciary having its own financing, and powers of procurement is an issue which may regrettably raise in the minds of ordinary men, the issue of apparent bias. I say this in the context that there are certain petitions to be heard which the legitimacy—

Madam Chairman: Sen. Sturge, I draw your attention to Standing Order 46(8). Let us keep the Judiciary out of the debates in this Senate.

Sen. W. Sturge: Madam President, as I indicated before, and I am not questioning your ruling, I am simply saying as I said at the beginning, this is not directed at the Judiciary. That is directed at the Government, placing the Judiciary in a very embarrassing and invidious position, where persons may wrongly harbour certain perceptions, if certain decisions do not go their way; that was all I was saying.

Now, for over 50 years from independence to present, Madam President, the Judiciary in Trinidad, like in the United Kingdom, had funding channelled to it through a line Minister who was accountable to Parliament. In the UK it was done through the Lord Chancellor and now a Minister of Justice for obvious reasons.

Why are we changing this after five decades? The fact that the Judiciary has been asking for its own funding is not a good enough reason to give it to them. The fact that it has not been given to them for more than 50 years of independence must mean that conscious thought went into the decision to protect the Judiciary from unnecessary public scrutiny.

The existing constitutional arrangements which have served us and continue to serve us, as well as other democracies, provide that funding for the administration of justice, particularly funding for the construction of physical infrastructure, must be done through the appropriate line Minister, as judges are not elected and as such, not answerable to the electorate.

Those who spend public money must be accountable to the Parliament, and by extension the electorate. To give large sums of public money to a public body who cannot be held accountable to the Parliament, for obvious reasons, is anathema to a parliamentary democracy. To do otherwise and make Judiciary accountable to Parliament is a violation of the doctrine of the separation of powers. It is clear that the ideals of Baron Montesquieu on the rule of law and separation of powers were never considered for its possible implications.

On the issue of giving to the Judiciary powers of procurement, it cannot be gainsaid that a significant percentage of litigation brought before our courts is spawned by the construction sector and oftentimes involves issues relating to procurement. Why then is the Government placing the Judiciary in the invidious and embarrassing position where litigation may arise, and where judges of the Judiciary will be called upon to decide on matters where the Judiciary is a litigant? What if the case is decided in favour of the Judiciary, and against an aggrieved litigant? Why provide that litigant the opportunity to wrongfully cast aspersions on

the integrity of our judges if the rulings go against them?

I heard the Attorney General say that this move is a “clog buster”. Now, for the Attorney General to refer to this move as a clog buster demonstrates in him a spectacular misunderstanding of how our criminal justice system works. There is no clog in the administration of civil justice, since the introduction of the Civil Proceedings Rules. The delay in the criminal justice system is a problem of time management and poor human resource management.

The clog in the system exists not because one lawyer has 700 pending murder cases, but because there are so few lawyers interested in practising at the criminal Bar, in spite of the increasing number of lawyers being admitted to practise every year. Why no mention of an increase in allocations to the office of the DPP? Why is the office of the DPP taking between five to seven years to file an indictment from the date of committal for trial? The office is under-resourced. That, Madam President, is where the clog exists. How do you expect cases to be done when lawyers are running to other lucrative areas of practice? Why are our court rules underutilized on a daily basis? Why is there no incentive to attract lawyers to the criminal Bar?

Now, Madam President, whilst I am on the issue of incentives, permit me to respond to some legal issues that are in the public domain; the whole question of legal fees. The PNM has no moral authority to speak about legal fees. When questions were asked in this Parliament of the then PNM Government about the amount of money spent on legal fees, this was what the then Attorney General Bridgid Annisette-George had to say, and I quote:

In the past, responses were given to questions posed of a similar nature. However, the Government has decided to revisit this issue and as a

consequence, the Attorney General has advised that this question raises two very important competing principles of constitutional law. On the one hand, there is the right of an individual to the respect for his private life which is guaranteed by section 4C of the Constitution. And on the other hand, the duty of a Minister to account to the Parliament for the exercise of his or her powers and duties. The rights of individuals to respect for their private life would include the protection from disclosure to the public of their remuneration without consent.

Madam President, it was the first time a Government bluntly refused to disclose how public funds were being spent. The explanation given about the need to protect the privacy of the lawyers hired by the State was condemned by every right-thinking member of society, but they—then PNM—refused to budge.

Former head of the Public Service, Reginald Dumas, described the position adopted as another step in the Government's march towards secrecy. The then president of the Law Association Martin Daly SC also levelled criticism of the argument used then to hide this information from the public. The argument being that the Constitution barred the disclosure of legal fees paid to private attorneys. So the track record of the PNM and the question of legal fees is one of, let us sweep it under the carpet, close the door, turn off the lights, light a candle; that is their track record. Their refusal to answer questions on this issue remains a blot on our parliamentary history.

Madam President, the People's Partnership Government during their tenure answered all questions on legal fees. During our tenure, no less than 15 questions were asked and answered on the issue of legal fees. Every, single time the Opposition posed a question, it was promptly answered. Full details were given

with comprehensive details circulated in this very Chamber, for the benefit of the media and the public. It is therefore passing strange that the PNM would now seek to disclose figures as if we were hiding something. Nothing could be further from the truth and the question is whether the picture is being painted on a different political canvas for political mileage.

Madam President, statistics they say is the mother of all lies, and statistics and figures can easily be manipulated, and one must always be wary of the approach and method of calculation. Different techniques and devices can easily produce a distorted picture, and we must be careful about that distortion.

So, today, Madam President, I am here to paint a fair and balanced picture with respect to the legal fees. The hon. Attorney General in the other place gave the public the impression that \$900 million was spent on legal fees. What he did not say was that we spent \$900 million on legal fees seeking to protect our country from paying out over \$9 billion in damages. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, it is incredible that figures were cited in a vacuum without any regard to the circumstance and context of the litigation. Permit me to cite some examples: How many matters did an attorney do for the fee claimed? Was it one, 10, was it 100? Two, if the attorney was a junior counsel, was he led by a senior counsel? If he was, it is established and usual practice in the legal profession, for junior counsel's fees to be based on the fees charged by the senior counsel who leads him. In fact, senior counsel will normally be consulted by his junior counsel, and approve that fee before the invoice is submitted for payment.

1.50 p.m.

Why then was there a focus on junior counsel fees in a vacuum? Why was there no mention or comparison to the fee charged by his senior? What was the

value of the claim against the State? In one instance, a fee of \$9 million was allegedly claimed by a Queen's Counsel, but the value of the claim was in excess of \$2 billion. The fee was therefore less than 1 per cent of the value of the claim and was almost 40 per cent less than what local Senior Counsel had charged for the matter. So, in essence, 1 per cent of the damages we would have had to pay out was in terms of legal fees. It makes sense to spend 1 per cent to protect our Treasury from having to pay out \$2 billion.

Now, a big song and dance was made about who was hired and so on. Madam President, if you want quality, if you want to win, then you pay for quality, and if winning does not matter then you can get a "made in China" lawyer, so to speak. What was the risk exposure to the State had we lost the claim? What would have been the true cost to the country and the economy?

It is no secret that the People's Partnership administration inherited a mountain of legal fees and claims in the aftermath of the several mega projects undertaken by the PNM administration. Claims filed against the State by local and foreign contractors in the construction industry alone amounted to over \$2 billion, close to \$3 billion. The case of Sural Barbados Limited, they had sued the Government for over \$700 million over the controversial aluminium smelter plan project. Such a claim, if successful, would have made a significant dent in the Treasury.

The failed gas-to-liquids project: this project spawned two international arbitrations: one in Toronto and the other in London. The risk exposure to Petrotrin was over \$2 billion. Had we lost these arbitrations, Petrotrin would have been forced to pay damages and compensation to World-Gas-to-Liquids Limited in excess of \$2 billion. That would have been rubbing salt in the financial wound left

open by the PNM which had already cost Petrotrin \$3 billion. In fact, the magnitude of this financial fiasco could have caused Petrotrin to go into bankruptcy with substantial job losses as evidenced by the fact that during the financial year 2009/2010, Petrotrin booked \$2.7 billion as payment losses which caused a serious deterioration in the financial health of this critical state enterprise in the energy sector.

The Clico matter: the Clico and HCU financial disasters almost crippled our country's economy. International professional help was obviously needed to stem the financial haemorrhaging. The team of legal experts assembled by the former Attorney General and Minister of Finance was first rated second to none. It was led by Gabriel Moss, Queen's Counsel, and the internationally renowned law firm of Freshfields. Mr. Moss, Queen's Counsel, had in fact advised the British Government in the wake of the infamous collapse of the BCCI empire. Obviously, the members of the team were remunerated for their services based on their professional experience, expertise and skill. Had we not managed the legal environment, the Clico and HCU fiasco could have cost this country far more than the almost \$25 billion we had already pumped into the problem; a problem we inherited from the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Again, the burning hole in the Treasury was caused by the PNM's ineptitude, incompetence and inefficiency as they failed to correctly diagnose the problem and prescribed the wrong drug. They came up with a bailout plan that saw taxpayers pumping money into Clico without any guarantee of repayment, because they treated it as a liquidity problem when the company was, in fact, insolvent. That financial misdiagnosis of illiquidity as opposed to insolvency is what created the major legal headaches that required immediate surgical

intervention to save the life of our economy. Madam President, the list is endless and I could go on to recite the long list of multi-million dollar complexed international arbitrations and litigations that we inherited that could easily explain the legal fees charged.

On the issue of the complexity and nature of the matter, an issue not gone into during the contributions of the Acting Attorney General and the de jure Attorney General. Madam President, rattling off legal fees without reference to the nature and complexity of the case is not only reckless in the extreme, but borders on a certain type of intellectual dishonesty. The junior Minister of Legal Affairs should know this, because he was one of the favoured juniors during the tenure of the PNM, and raked in a whopping \$2 million as junior counsel in the Uff Commission of Enquiry. Indeed, the legal bill for the commission of enquiry was almost \$60 million as bills continued to pour in even after we assumed office. In fact, there is a Cabinet Note regarding the payment of an outstanding balance of legal fees by the attorney-at-law who represented the current Minister of Finance in that enquiry which we were forced to pay.

In a document laid in this very Parliament by former Attorney General Garvin Nicholas, it was revealed that the current junior Minister of Legal Affairs and well-known PNM attorney-at-law, Mr. Michael Quamina, billed the State almost \$1 million for one case. The name of that case, Civil Appeal 110 of 2007 between Republic Investment Limited and the State. When I heard the hon. Minister querying fees of \$167,000 charged by a junior counsel for a case, I was astonished and shocked to see that he charged the State the princely sum of \$440,883 and his junior counsel, Mr. Michael Quamina, charged \$375,666. I am certain that the junior Minister of Legal Affairs would want to explain these

seemingly exorbitant fees in reference to the complexity of the matter, the value and importance of the claim—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, could I just interrupt you? When you are speaking about a Minister, it is the Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General. He is a Cabinet Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Sturge: Yes, I am sorry. The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General. I am sorry, I referred to him as legal affairs. I am certain he would, in any event, want to explain these seemingly exorbitant legal fees in reference to the complexity of the matter, the value and importance of the claim, et cetera. But the luxury of such accuracy and fairness was not afforded to others who were viciously attacked because they are not here to defend themselves—the duration and importance of the case.

Madam President, some cases take longer than others. Some cases involve more work than others. Some cases may be more important, because of the implications of the legal issues raised, thus a constitutional case alleging discrimination by the State is a matter that has to be taken very seriously as there were a number of discrimination cases against the PNM administration which required our attention. Take, for example, the case of the extradition matter involving Edward Muntslag, the co-accused of Dino Bouterse, the son of Surinamese Vice-President, Dési Bouterse. This was yet another example of a complex legal matter which could have had far-reaching consequences for diplomatic relations if not properly managed and, therefore, required the services of highly skilled counsel to conduct the matter.

Likewise, the case involving Dr. Wayne Kublalsingh and the Highway Re-route Movement. Had the State not successfully defended this claim, the plans to

build a major highway would have been thwarted. The State would have faced numerous lawsuits for breach of contracts for enormous sums of money if an injunction stopping the work on the highway was granted. Taxpayers would have had to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in compensations to contractors and end up with no new highway.

Madam President, it is therefore deceptive and misleading for anyone to speak about legal fees without giving the proper context of the case. One of the most important cases in our jurisprudential history, Maharaj and the Attorney General, resulting in the payment of one cent in compensation by order of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, but involved significant legal fees, because it was a novel constitutional Motion.

On the issue of the outcome of the matters, perhaps the most conspicuous omission by the Attorney General and the junior Minister was the failure to mention anything about the outcome or result in these cases. Minister, sorry. It is one thing to condemn the lawyer hired by the State, but it is quite another to speak about the success or failure rate. This is important because, under the PNM, the State was accustomed to paying high legal fees and losing matters. The list is long and endless. I am advised that under the People's Partnership administration the matters in which external counsel were briefed led to an almost 95 per success rate in claims filed against the State [*Desk thumping*] with phenomenal savings to the Treasury. The issue of whether legal costs were awarded, they also stayed away from that.

Madam President, we the members of the People's Partnership have absolutely nothing to hide and nothing to fear. We however demand that there be fairness, transparency and accuracy when the AG mounts the political pulpit in this

Parliament. The mothballing and tallying of legal fees from state agencies and state enterprises, individual Ministries and the Ministry of the Attorney General is dangerously deceptive.

In the interest of fairness, I therefore call upon the Attorney General to table a document naming each and every single attorney, local and foreign, and the fees paid listing the following information, because what was notably absent was the fact that several prominent law firms did work and were not named. So table a document stating: the name of the firm, the fee charged, the name of the case, the value of the claim, the issues involved, whether the State won or lost, whether costs were awarded in favour of the State. They cannot come here in a fit of road rage to destroy the reputation of innocent people without giving the full picture.

[Desk thumping]

Madam President, while I am on the issue of legal fees and legal briefs, I want to ask the Attorney General whether he intends to continue the practice of giving lucrative legal briefs to friends and family of the PNM alone. Madam President, a handful of senior counsels, including the current President of the Law Association, Mr. Reginald Armour SC, were among the major beneficiaries under PNM rule. Coincidentally, Mr. Armour and Mr. Douglas Mendez, another beneficiary, they are the very same attorneys who regularly appeared in court for the PNM and its officers including the current election petition that they seem so scared about.

I want to ask a question, Madam President. I want to ask the hon. Attorney General to tell the nation whether he has awarded a lucrative legal brief from the State to his private lawyer by the name of Theresa Hadad. Miss Hadad is not known as an expert in public law and she is, in fact, the Attorney General's private

lawyer in the Las Alturas Commission of Enquiry. It is passing strange to say the least that she would be favoured with a legal brief so soon after he assumes office. The Attorney General pompously and piously proclaimed the virtues of the lawyers working in the Ministry of the Attorney General—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, “pompously” and “piously” are unparliamentary words to denote a Member of the Senate.

Sen. W. Sturge: I am sorry. Madam President, there are lawyers senior to Miss Hadad working in the Office of the Attorney General, and they have been complaining bitterly about the fact that the Attorney General is saying one thing and doing quite the opposite. I, therefore, today ask the Attorney General to explain to the nation why he bypassed all the lawyers in the Office of the Attorney General to retain his lawyer, Theresa Hadad, in this case. What were the criteria used to select Miss Hadad, given the fact that she is his private lawyer?

Madam President, I also want the AG to tell the nation whether the lawyers who are appearing for the PNM in the election petition have been rewarded with or given any State briefs as this may raise suspicions—certain suspicions, I would rather not say—and tell us how many briefs they have received and what fees were charged.

Madam President, whilst I am on this point, I wish to state that I take note of the sudden sense of political urgency and activism by the President of the Law Association. The Law Association remained silent when lucrative briefs were being given by the PNM to certain favoured sons. They saw no conflict of interest, they saw nothing unethical when millions of dollars were paid by the PNM administration to senior counsels such as Reginald Armour, Douglas Mendez and others. There was no cry by the Law Association for accountability then.

2.05 p.m.

All of a sudden we see the current Vice-President of the Law Association appearing on CNC3 as a political analyst on the night of the general election to criticize the People's Partnership. A few days later he is appointed Chairman of NGC; the Guardian Media Group, part of the ANSA McAL Group, in essence had now become a vessel for spewing diatribe of the PNM manifesto. The budget reply of the hon. Leader of the Opposition does not even make front page in the newspaper under the Guardian Media Group. In fact, it was relegated to page 5 on the Saturday.

Madam President, today I ask the nation and the legal profession whether it is ethical for Mr. Gerry Brooks to remain as Vice-President of the Law Association in light of the fact of his obvious political allegiance and affiliation with the PNM.
[Interruption]

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, you have five more minutes.

Sen. W. Sturge: Obligated. I also want to ask the President of the Law Association to indicate whether he intends to accept any legal briefs from the State whilst he continues to serve as President of the Law Association. I pose this question as Mr. Armour publicly objected to his predecessor, Mr. Jairam, accepting a legal brief to serve in the Clico commission of enquiry.

Madam President, there is a tactical and diplomatic erosion of independent institutions in our country, masked by the veneer of service to the State. We now have a former Independent Senator being appointed Chairman of two state-owned media companies which exist to disseminate information about the work of the Government. She is serving on a board with other PNM party supporters but somehow manages to maintain her independence. In a few short weeks the media

house formerly known as CNMG is now called “PNMG”, thanks to “Helen of destroy”.

Madam President, for the first time in our political history Government Ministers are being hidden from the media and the public, and that, I hasten to add, has nothing to do with their looks, but, strangely enough, the Government has been able to get away with one-man post-Cabinet conferences chaired by the Minister of Communications, Mr. Maxie Cuffie, starring Mr. Maxie Cuffie and featuring only Mr. Maxie Cuffie, astonishing that the media has swallowed this like a sugar-coated bitter pill with nothing to say.

Madam President, I also want to ask the Attorney General whether the Government intends to proclaim the procurement legislation in light of his concerns about legal fees; after all, that Act specifically addressed the question of legal fees. It was brought by the People’s Partnership Government in an attempt to ensure transparency and fairness in the procurement process for goods and services for the State. The Procurement Act, which was passed with the full support of the Independent Bench in the Senate, the Opposition had abstained, but it provides for issues of procurement.

Madam President, in closing, there is just one more issue which I am concerned about, very concerned about. In the run-up to the 2015 election campaign we saw the emergence of a certain group in the PNM called the Heliconia Foundation, we then hear the Minister of Finance lament the fact that certain qualified individuals cannot get jobs or jobs commensurate with their qualifications, and, having regard to their history, the slush fund in the community development Ministry, the then community development Ministry, popularly known, or notoriously known as the scholarship fund, we wait with bated breath to

see whether the 500 persons who are going to be hired are 500 persons from the Heliconia Foundation. Given your history I do not doubt for one minute that that would occur.

In closing, Madam President, I thank you for your protection, and I thank you for your ear as I delivered my maiden contribution. Thank you very much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: We will now hear from Sen. Creese. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Stephen Creese: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, fellow Senators, I would like to take this opportunity before I begin my formal address to congratulate your good self, Madam President, on your ascension to office, and to also extend those sentiments to my fellow Senators, those of whom are for the first time appearing in the Senate like myself and to those who are returnees. I wish to congratulate you all and I wish to take this opportunity to note the quality of contributions thus far, and hope that my contribution would stay at least at that level.

In my contribution I would be seeking to argue that the issues surrounding the question of inclusion/integration/assimilation are critical to interpreting and understanding what may be some of the limitations within the budget. I will also be arguing that integration, social inclusion, assimilation, though critical to the transformation process—and I will be taking some time out to look at what has been happening in the transformation process—but at the end of the day it is the question of political integration that is more likely to tip the scales on the side of transformation and the delivery of our people from a very difficult past. I will be routing these arguments within the context of the municipal government system, as I will be arguing that the principle of subsidiarity is critical to the broader question

of integration and assimilation and/or inclusion within the total societal system. Quite frankly, if I am successful in my address, you would come to realize that integration, assimilation, inclusion, transformation, subsidiarity even, are three different sides of the same issue. But before getting into the meat of that I would like—lest some amount of imbalance appears in the way I come over—to congratulate the Minister of Finance in recognizing the need to treat with the issue of capacity and institutional strengthening with regard to the labour movement, as I myself have come out of that movement having been a member of the General Council at one stage of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, having been an education officer in the Fyzabad/Palo Seco branch, having been on the General Council of the Public Services Association, and I would have need to, at some time during this address, refer to the assistance that—and I think I should declare that as a matter of interest—the services provided by the then president on at least two occasions when I needed to have services from my trade union, which at the time was PSA.

Having said that, however—and I note that one of the persons on that trade union team is in the House on the Government Benches.—I also wish to note the approach being taken with regard to moves within the energy sector to ensure that more use is being made of compressed natural gas, and I would have some further comments to make about the way the whole energy perspective has been developing. I note, also, that—I think it was hon. Minister Khan who might have made reference to the absence of an energy committee involving Cabinet Ministers, because I think we all have to recognize that, by and large, we are in an open energy economy, and I prefer to use that phrase rather than open petroleum economy, and in the meat of my contribution I would explain why.

I also wish to acknowledge the approach being taken with respect to GATE, and I look forward to the continued debate on how to make GATE more user-friendly. I myself have a different view about the location of UWI, of our university, in the Penal/Debe area, having been born in Fyzabad and growing up in the south, and having, when I considered entering UWI, to weigh the cost of getting, as my colleague had indicated, the cost of getting accommodation and/or transportation, and in those days there was not the north-south highway. So it took a long time to get from deep south to St. Augustine. So that the concept of having a university in the south is one which I am afraid I have a bias, given the part of Trinidad from which I am commuting, and used to commute from back then.

As a matter of fact, I would be one of those to make the case for the extension of the services provided by Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies to be closer or to be extended into the deep south. So, I admit to a bias about the location of these tertiary institutions and their availability to people in the deep south. Having said that, I would proceed to deal now with the areas where I feel there is need for further discussion, and there is need to appreciate that perhaps the budget could have been a little more kind in terms of appreciating where we are at this juncture of our history. And it is in that sense I have a question about the overarching philosophy or policy position that rationalizes our historical context, and I think there is a need for a more focused perspective at how at this juncture of our nation-building enterprise we are to bridge the gap between where we are and where we conceive ourselves as wanting to be.

There used to be a course back in the late 70s, early 80s when I attended Cave Hill called History for Law and Social Sciences, and I think in that course they attempted to give us a sense of the kind of social movements along which our

respective peoples were travelling, so that as future public servants, future managers, future entrepreneurs in this society we would be better able to utilize our knowledge and capture the resources and channel the resources available so that we make sense of our history. So, it is clear that our social and economic planners, financial planners—it is clear that they need to be grounded in the realities of our historical challenges and invest it with a sense of the social movements, social classes even, that vie or compete for power in our island space.

So at the heart of any budget exercise there has to be a sense of where we are, how far we have come along what road, and fiscal and monetary policy has to be informed by this, or there will forever be, in our context, two economies, one legit and one not so legit. There will be the dominant legal or legitimate economy, and then there will be the underground economy of what everybody—who got the memo—knows what they have to do.

2.20p.m.

In the budget presentation, there are only two references to the trade union movement and the credit union movement. I admit to another bias, that I come from both. I alluded to my past participation in the trade union movement. I am currently the vice president of a credit union and, as a matter of fact, that party to whom I referred to, who assisted me in their trade union capacity as a senior executive at the time in the public service, we sat on the same board of that credit union back in the late 1980s, early 1990s.

It is an interesting thing when they count the numbers of who are credit unionists; I always have some scepticism about the statistics, that there is some amount of double-counting, because we pop up in different places. I myself have been a member of three credit unions, two trade unions. But in the budget

presentation, there are only two references to the trade union movement and the credit union movement. One reference speaks to a provision for educating, training trade unionists, and the other reference speaks to the ongoing question of forever-pending credit union legislation. I think it is since 2008 the credit union movement has been negotiating with successive regimes over the question of a new credit union Bill.

Madam President, some would argue that these are two sides of the same coin, that one has fashioned and shaped the other. I am speaking here of more than half the adult population, who are either in a trade union or a credit union, if not both, and it is one movement. This movement is comprised mainly of the sons and daughters of yesterday's slaves and indentured servants. Are they forever to be huffing and puffing and threatening to blow the house down, or are we going to let them come in?

I am arguing that the budget is the place to issue that invitation. Put in a constitutional reform context, the budget is the place to signal the intention to rewrite the social contract, that elitist arrangement they fashioned at Marlborough House, that model of non-inclusion. [*Desk thumping*] At last, perchance, a house for Mr. Biswas. Wheel and turn, Mr. Finance Minister, there is need to go and reflect again. Let the stale air of yesterday's oligarchic arrangements out. Let the fresh breeze of new social relationships in.

This analysis eventually will come to a head, that is, of the social movements, the trade union movements and its checks and advances, the credit union movement, its checks and advances, when at a point of confluence in 1990 bring us to the stage where Act 21 of 1990 was passed. It is my argument that that is a significant milestone or kilometric stone, kilometric marker, along the road

from indentureship and slavery.

It is no accident that one of the things that that Act sought to do, it sought to entrench the “metric” system. One of the problems with that Act and the implementation of it has to do with—we have not to this day aligned the other government divisions, other government districts, with the districts created by the Act. In other words, that Act abolished the old districts of Victoria West. So you go about the country and you would see these signs saying Victoria West, Victoria East, St. George East and West and so on, the Ministry of Works, and that Act really sought to abolish that, but that continues to exist. It is like if you have a metric system, but you are still seeing milestones. I return to this again under the question of transformation and under the question of subsidiarity.

The institution building that is involved in the development of trade unionism and “co-operativism” is also involved in that rather stillborn relative, the friendly society, for this too is no more than an attempt by the non-included to provide insurance against adversity. So it is perhaps a good thing that that other person to whom I referred, who is in this House, is the Minister responsible for trade union matters and credit union matters.

I will return to the relevance of this initiative by the poor underclasses in my discourse on economic transformation. Suffice it for now to say that the impoverished and the exploited were always prepared to be the source of their own salvation, and it is the misguided political elites who have fashioned “dependency instruments”.

I am drawing reference to all of the foregoing to establish that our people were fashioning instruments calculated to deliver them out of the colonial Babylon, whichever ship they came on. We, members of the two dominant ethnic groups,

have traversed a similar path. When next you are in Gasparillo, for instance, visit the East Indian Friendly Society. You see, our people have been fashioning these self-deliverance instruments, and in a sense their development has been arrested by the intervention of the modern political party. I am saying this as a proud descendant myself of one of the founders of the Indian Walk Friendly Society with a branch in Rio Claro.

You see, Madam President, the transition from Butler to Williams, like the transition from friendly society to corporate insurance companies, like the transition from trade union activism to the creation of the modern political party, was a questionable turn at the junction. I almost said like the transition from the railway to the omnibus.

I am taking it for granted that we all accept that the movement for independence and the establishment of the Republican Constitution are but the formal recordings of development along the political continuum. That our people were always mobilizing to deliver themselves to reduce the economic stagnation that surrounded them, to break out of the 19th Century into the 20th, and that the political momentum had its roots in the personalities that led the early trade union movement, to whom we collectively owe a debt of gratitude. So I understand the spirit then in which the \$15 million allocation to the trade union training and development is being made. The question is: Is a similar outreach being made to the credit union movement? So our people, in spite of the elitist political arrangements, have been moving to include themselves.

I want to break my scripted address to give an anecdotal narrative which I think is important in demonstrating, not only the link between the credit union movement and the trade union movement, that it is one movement, in

demonstrating that the personalities are very often the same, because if I call the names of some of our leading trade unionists today, you would recognize that they are operating in the credit union movement as well. I think the President of the Credit Union League is a trade unionist President. A former President in the name of Mr. Brian Moore actually was the President of the league and a former President of the credit union which I now serve, and the list goes on. Former Vice President of PSA in the person of Mr. Stephen Thomas, who was a functionary at the Ministry responsible for credit unions—again, both a trade unionist and a credit unionist.

But the narrative I wanted to share with you has to do with the history of HCU, the Hindu Credit Union movement, of which I was a member as well, and which brings home my point about Act 21 of 1990 being a confluence point between all these movements: trade union movement, credit union movement, the political aspirations of the underclass.

When I was CEO at the San Juan/Laventille Corporation, one mid-afternoon I took a trip into the Croisee and I saw one of my sanitation workers. He was all dressed up: white shirt, tie, with a brief bag. Normally we would see him in monkey suits, coveralls. So he caught me staring at him, so immediately he apologized and said, “Chief, I finish work yuh know. I make my six hours”. Okay. So afterwards I asked people “Wha going on with he?”, only to find out that he was then a recruiting officer for Hindu Credit Union.

But the story does not really begin there. The story begins that prior to the person who recruited him for that position—who incidentally was a councillor at the Mayaro/Rio Claro Corporation when I was the CEO there, and who came to me after he left the corporation, while he was trying to register an organization called

TOPS with the Registration Recognition and Certification Board, in his efforts to unseat NUGFW.

He came to me to get to understand how the Registration Recognition and Certification Board could tell him that he needed to win all 14 corporations, or all 13 who were registered through NUGFW as the bargaining agent, when in fact, “You CEOs”, he said to me, “sign separately for each corporation”, because each corporation is a separate bargaining entity. “So the CPO negotiates for all of you, but you sign separately, but they are telling me that it is one.” When as a matter of fact, Port of Spain has a separate union and San Fernando has a separate union, so it is really the former regional corporations who were aligned to NUGFW.

Eventually he was frustrated out of that mobilization, but having worked at, at least, two corporations where he was mobilizing, I was able to see what were the numbers of people and the percentages that he had, in fact, gotten to sign slips and so on, from paying dues to him. At the end of the day, he was frustrated out of his attempts at mobilizing TOPS, and I wondered where he had disappeared to, and then I found out when I saw that sanitation worker dressed up as a recruiter for the credit union. So apparently he utilized all the forces, all his allies who were part: the “wannabee” shop stewards, branch officers and so on, and converted them from trade unionists to credit unionists.

I relate this story to make the point that we are one and the same, and the differences are really superficial. We made the same trip, as Stalin would have it, though Eric Williams would have disagreed with that, but we made the same trip on a similar ship.

So he moved from being a trade unionist to a credit unionist; the rest is history. You would not find that in your history books, but it ought to be there,

that is why I am putting it into *Hansard* today. To say to those of us who frustrate trade unionists, to say to those of us who may have opportunity to frustrate credit unionists, the consequences are what we saw, good or bad.

But I am insisting that 1990 is pivotal in the social history, the history of the movements of our people to liberate themselves. It comes second to perhaps, after the independence movement, 1970, because the advent of the NAR administration, the first of the one-term governments, and the abolition of the old, moribund county council system, ushered in modern municipal government. I am zeroing on the Municipal Corporations Act 21 of 1990 because it is the most significant development along the path, object to subject, from exclusion to integration. It is our first flirtation with participatory democracy. Then that administration, for reasons I would not go into here, was unceremoniously kicked out of office, and the municipal dream became stillborn.

The skeletal framework drafted by the NAR lawmakers went underfunded, understaffed—I think the fancy word now is “under-resourced”, and then was officially slaughtered with the passage of the Revenue Authority Act. It took 20 years, from 1970 to 1990, for the concept of “power to the people”, to be translated into a concrete legislative Act.

What Williams had fashioned was the Corporation Sole. He had invented a bureaucrat class where power resided with a new elite who ran a local variant of state capitalism. Some of us had reached. The NAR administration gave to the rest of us, however, a window of opportunity in municipal government: assimilation, integration, inclusion.

2.30 p.m.

Budgeting for a plural society cannot take place in a social vacuum. It has to

be invested with a sense of who we are and how we are to deliver ourselves, transform ourselves even, in this time and in this space. And, yeah, Brother Valentino is right, we are in fact running out of time and space.

I cannot close the chapter on inclusion without referring to the other marginalized groups and raising the question as to the extent to which their situation is being addressed in the budgetary provisions before us.

Fellow senator, Sen. Roach perhaps stole a bit of my thunder, and rightfully so, in this regard because the question I wanted to pose at this stage is, are we satisfied that the institutions that cater for the differently abled are being adequately funded? Are we satisfied that mainstream institutions and public buildings cater to their special needs? Are we forcing some of them into special schools simply because there are no ramps at regular public schools? How are they to get to the first floor, the second floor in most of your junior and senior secondary school? Physical disability is not a necessity correlated to mental disability. Sometimes we forget that. The failure to treat fairly and equally with our disabled citizens is a constitutional matter because it strikes at the heart of the national anthem, “here every creed and race...”

Madam President, if we are to transform ourselves as a nation we have to have everyone on deck. In the words of Martin Carter, “all are involved, all are consumed”.

Madam President, economic transformation. Transformation, economic or social, as CLR James put it, is really about a way of seeing. Is the glass half full or it is half empty? Traditionally we have been integrated into the wrong end of the world economic system. As hewers of wood, drawers of water, providers of, you know, first-stage products, we run into problems in the transformation from being

a sugar plantation economy, monocrop was the word they used to use, and to all extents and purposes our energy economy, our oil and gas—monocrop.

As David Rudder put it, what is to become of us when the world does not need islands anymore? Budget speech after budget speech, they routinely parrot out stuff about diversification. And we have been hearing that since sugar plantation days. About diversification of the economy, and then proceed to make the same percentage if not quantum distribution of the cash resources. There is a definition of madness that states, that if you keep on doing the same thing and expecting different results, go get yourself checked. The ability of successive regimes to effect any changes in the economy is legendary. What is proposed is largely more of the same.

Let me assure you, that while the talk and concern about crime has been met with a proposal to give national security a larger slice of the cake, unless we are manufacturing guns, ammunition, armoured cars, bulletproof vests, paddy wagons, the consequences will be minimal. The consequences of this approach, though well intended, will at the end of the day amount to nothing more than a foreign exchange leakage at best. Quite frankly, what is missing is a discourse and what type of crime we are speaking of. Is it white collar crime we are going after with this expenditure? Is it drug smuggling and gun running? Is it human trafficking or is it merely about the knee jerk response to the paid foot soldiers to provide a security service for the real lords of the empire.

Is the focus on crime prevention-oriented? Is the focus on crime to be community based and a sense of community activism, and communities taking care of themselves? And what is the role of municipal government in all of that? That is why I insist that the Municipal Corporations Act 21 of 1990 gives us a

vantage point from which to proceed.

The prescriptive remedies for any of the above is clearly quite different, the different types of crime. And I would tell you something that history has taught us about crime in the Caribbean. I am sure those of us who would have done some history at high school even, there is a line that they smuggled and grumbled, grumbled and smuggled. It think that came out of Recorder, Hall and Roget It was that greenish, bluish book. They smuggled and grumbled, grumbled and smuggled. That is what the planter past in the 17th/18th century did. And that was the response to the navigation laws, you know, the Code noir and so on.

Because the whole point of trade, Europe to the Caribbean, was that the islands existed as, you know, to provide a service to Europe and, of course, the Navigation Act was to ensure that all the shipping—because at that time shipping was big commerce—would accrue to the particular mother country. So they smuggled and grumbled. So there was a relationship between all the different—the anglophone, the francophone, the Spanish-speaking whatever, Dutch-speaking whatever colonies in the Caribbean, an official position, but at the ground level or sea level, I should say, they smuggled and grumbled, and grumbled and smuggled. They were not brave enough like our friends to the north like the Americans to have their tea party revolution and so on and, you know, as they say “buss it” from the colonialists. So, they smuggled and grumbled, and grumbled and smuggled. The question today is whether culture still prevails. You all live here. You may know the answer better than me as to what our business class does when the laws are not favourable.

The budget needs to be clear for clearly attainable options, making the case for the comparative advantages that we are seen to have and delineate a path

towards getting there. The question becomes, what are we good at? But we always have to bear in mind that the opportunity calls for leaving one's sector, our industry, to pursue another. But what are we good at? I respectfully submit that we have been growing food here for centuries whether as Native Americans, first citizens or as slaves for the Sunday market or rice planters on the plains of Caroni. Much of the foreign exchange won by oil and gas is lost to conspicuous patterns of consumption. A VAT list with 7,000 items is almost laughable.

UWI started out as an agricultural institute. We need to get back on track. If our political realities dictate the retention of expenditure in our employment programmes or our make-work programmes, our URP and CEPEP, then make these hands available to our farmers, not just with lip service, but make these hands available to farmers as part of a larger plan of rural access, road development and land tenure regularization. It is time to summon the board of Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, PSAEL and read the riot act about the need to farm out farmlands under lease to the oil companies with the same speed and despatch with which oil blocks are farmed out. That is the economy in which we live.

Yes, Madam President, we have a comparative advantage in the oil and gas sector, but we have the same advantage in the music industry because in 1914 when the first vocal recording was made, oil only employed about 1,200 people, and the quantum of, you know, barrels per day minimal. So, we need to have a conversation on the core elements of the economic transformation. And I am arguing the case that at the level of the national budget we have to treat with the age-old sub-issue of ownership and control of the country's economic resources as well as land tenure and ownership. You see, "we in town too long" to be this far

behind in the creative arts as an industry. We are really—it is sad. I mean, Lord Beginner, Terror and Roaring Lion, Belasco and company; it is almost 100 years.

Madam President: Sen. Creese, you have five more minutes.

Sen. S. Creese: Thank you. And we have to treat with this as part of a sustained strategy that provides opportunity for the release of our creative and entrepreneurial energies. The question revolves around whether the economic model we fashion fits our national psyche and our core of deliberate human and material resources.

Does state capitalism constitute an adequate response to a history of dispossession? We have to admit that local capital formation was not up to the task when Williams opted for the statist model that we have held on too long to enterprises, that should have been divested and the resultant financial resources reallocated to other areas crying out for attention. It is not too late to do this. And we recognize, yes, that there was the need for some amount of state capitalism, but this should be a means to an end and not an end in itself. We recognize that, yes, local capital formation was underdeveloped and the State had to press on.

In that regard the Minister of Finance should be kicking off the debate on the new role for credit unions by following the lead of the National Insurance Board. I am saying that the approach to criteria should not come by restrictive legislation by inviting them in to participate in the state sector. Take for instance, NIB allows you to send your pension there, but the Treasury does not allow you to send your pension to a credit union. Why can the national Treasury Pensions Division not do the same, eh? Why does the government paymaster discriminate against the assignment of monthly salaries to credit union accounts? The ultimate breakthrough will come when the national budget announces the commencement

of arrangements for credit unions here like their counterparts in the USA to have similar cheque processing facilities. That is what we should be discussing. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, on the question of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is really about locating decision-making as close as possible to your people, where the rubber, as they say, meets the road. I am saying that within the context the only institutional familiarity that we have is the Municipal Corporations Act 21 of 1990 which sets up the municipal corporations and that is where we should be operating and functioning from. That is where we need to provide greater resources so that we can deliver goods and the services.

I want to close by making the point that Act 21 of 1990 has not been given a fair chance to function. [*Desk thumping*] It has been under- financed and under-resourced. And I will take one simple example to make that point. When I was the CEO at San Juan/Laventille and in that period all those developers in the Santa Cruz valley would spring up left, right and centre and I had one building inspector. For those of you who are familiar with that area, the scrutinizing of plans, the ensuring that people built as per plan was virtually impossible. And in the rural aspects of there, and when I was at Mayaro/ Rio Claro, when I was at Siparia it was the same thing. You see these long weekends, the Easters and the Christmases and on, the brethren would gather, bubble a pot and put down a house. [*Laughter*] And that is how they defeated us. We, again in Siparia, had one building inspector. Penal/Debe, one building inspector. Sangre Grande Corporation one, Tunapuna/ Piarco and the list goes on. Only the boroughs and cities had a building inspectorate with senior and junior officers. Under-resourced and underfinanced.

Finally, I want to draw extension to part 15 of the Municipal Corporations

Act that allows the chairman and/or mayor to form a regional coordinating committee and to invite other government departments or anybody approved by the Minister to participate in the meetings and plan for the region. Thus far, and I want again to give credit where credit is due, the previous PNM administration made us develop strategic plans for each corporation and they told us your budget would be based upon how you conform with that. And the Partnership administration made us develop 14 local area plans so as to stimulate local economic development. And we went into an arrangement with CEDA and so on to get that going.

I close by saying that if we allow that process to flourish, we will be travelling somewhere. My concern with the combination with rural development and local government is whether, listen, a second attempt for the central agency to be too much involved in local activity.

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

2.50 p.m.

Madam President: Thank you very much, and may I congratulate Sen. Creese on his maiden contribution in the Senate. [*Desk thumping*] I now recognize the hon. Acting Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Acting Attorney General and Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President. Members of the Upper House it is indeed a great pleasure, privilege and honour to stand here in the House where it all started for me not so long ago, to be given the opportunity to address the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

May I begin by starting, that like many others before me, I would like to

offer my sincerest congratulations to you for the position that you have assumed, and look forward to your years of service or your continuation of the many years of service you have already given to Trinidad and Tobago, now wearing a different and most important hat. I would like to also take this opportunity to congratulate all Senators, especially those who are here for the first time, and just to offer some unsolicited advice, at what a great honour it is for each one of you to represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the portfolio that you have been asked to hold.

It has always been said that the Upper House has a certain level of dignity and aura about it, and one where levels of intellectualism come and gather in the House of Parliament to have a certain level of debate. Unfortunately, here this afternoon—and I take absolutely no pleasure in saying this and in delivering this message—there has been a blotch on that normal aura and that dignity that normally accompanies the levels of debate in this House. Unfortunately, this afternoon we have heard, and he is absent now, Sen. Wayne Sturge, saying in a most undignified, cowardly and unabashed manner, attacking in a certain manner that cannot be condoned, he attacked certain individuals under the cover of parliamentary privilege, who do not have the ability to stand here and defend their names. So, it is with that in mind that I stand here today, with the grief of having to get into some level of response to what I have heard from the other side, most unfortunately this afternoon, and with a great level of disappointment.

I would like to start, please, Madam President, by addressing what I can only call an area of mischief that is being raised by those on the other side, from the UNC. We have heard it in the other House at Standing Finance Committee stage, with respect to the move by this PNM Government, and the promise by the Minister of Finance, which is really a delivery of what is now the Government's

policy, finding its genesis in the PNM manifesto, with respect to the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago.

From inception, Judiciaries all over the world, and especially in commonwealth jurisdictions, have argued for a level of financial autonomy. This is an important pillar in that concept that must be protected, known as judicial independence, which is part of the separation of powers. And it is with a great sense of pride of being part of this PNM Government, and being given the role that I serve, that I was happy to see the Minister of Finance deliver in his great maiden budget, this promise to the Judiciary. And I would just like with your leave, please, Madam President, to read the section from his budget presentation, his budget statement that deals with the Judiciary and this area of financial autonomy, and he said. I quote:

“Most importantly, consistent with our 2015 Election Manifesto promise, to improve the efficiency of the administration of justice, we intend to give the Judiciary the financial autonomy that it has asked for, for so many years, coupled with the ability to manage its own resources, projects and programmes, including the responsibility for procurement and construction of judicial facilities.

To achieve this, we intend to engage in detailed consultation with the Judiciary early in 2016, to achieve consensus on practical and workable mechanisms to facilitate this paradigm shift by the end of 2016.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, those two paragraphs are very carefully worded to deal with a very important concept, which is the recognition of judicial independence. And I cannot for the life of me understand how anyone with intellect and any citizen of

Trinidad and Tobago could attack an effort to give the Judiciary its independence. So, as I sat here in both Houses and heard the mischievous attacks on this concept, and as the Minister of Finance put it, a paradigm shift, to give the Judiciary financial autonomy, it has disturbed me.

So, I rise here to correct and to hopefully add, for the final time, some clarity. As is stated here, we will have very detailed consultation with the Judiciary, and we will work out with them moving to a consensus position, how it is that this can be done in a practical and workman-like manner. The first point is, they will continue to have a line Minister to bring whatever urgent matters of importance are necessary to be brought to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago.

However, what we envisage is similar to as it operates now with the THA. Once they are given their allocations, they will then be able to employ their own staff; they will be able to build their own judicial complexes. No one has gotten down into the grain of detail as to how this will be done. That will be worked out by the Judiciary, who I am certain would be ever mindful of the many bumps in the road that may lay ahead. But, this Government stands committed here once again this afternoon to providing the Judiciary with the independence that it so well deserves. [*Desk thumping*]

The next area that unfortunately I must deal with is this of One Alexandra Place. In a very cowardly attack, but not unsurprising, we heard mention about the Attorney General, who is out of the jurisdiction. What has been raised, and the elements of corruption with respect to One Alexandra Place, was stated very clearly yesterday—and will become even clearer as we move forward in the months to come—is to do with the outfitting of One Alexandra Place. There has been no suggestion of wrongdoing whatsoever with respect to the rental of the

building. And to stand here in this House and suggest that it is unusual or abnormal for a person to rent an empty building and then to outfit it to its own specifications and needs, is to say absurd, in the very least. There is absolutely nothing wrong with, and I challenge anyone to say it is unusual, to have a building that is empty and then outfit it to your specs.

The elements and allegations of corruption, which I am not going to get into any level of detail, because that would be for others to follow, is with respect to the award of the contracts for the outfitting of this building. [*Desk thumping*] Award of contracts that were done by the former administration, and we saw, thankfully, once again a strong public service and strong public servants refusing to give in to the line Minister's request for a particular contractor to be given a contract for the outfitting that was tens of millions of dollars above what the quantity surveyor required. [*Desk thumping*] That, Madam President, is the element of corruption which must be investigated.

We then move to the suggestions with respect to the criminal justice system, and in particular the DPP's office, which is acknowledged as being under-resourced. Both the Attorney General and myself are on record as saying, and I will repeat it here and give the undertaking, that we see it as being an extremely important element in the improvement of the criminal justice system that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is provided with more resources. This PNM Government will provide the DPP's office with more resources for it to play the part that the Constitution envisaged that it would with respect to the delivery of the criminal justice system. [*Desk thumping*]

We have heard here this afternoon in a most unfortunate manner, the names of certain individuals being called by Sen. Sturge, well recognizing that they would

Appropriation (Financial Year 2016)
Bill, 2015
The. Hon. S. Young (cont'd)

2015.10.21

not have the opportunity to defend their good names. It is not by chance, it is not by coincidence, and it is not by a lack of thought that when the hon. Attorney General and myself made our contributions in that other House, with respect to the assault on the Treasury and legal fees, names were not called. We are not against the provision of information, the provision of names. But anyone who understands what must follow after the findings that we have found, would know that it is not proper nor correct to come into this House or the other House and throw out the names of individuals and figures next to it. We were very careful not to do that. There is a specific reason it was not done, and we will maintain that position as it unfolds. However, what we have heard in a most cowardly fashion here this afternoon is the calling of names.

Madam President: Senator. Hon. Attorney General, could we not use that phrase of “cowardly”. It is in respect of another Member of this Chamber, so let us just deal with—

Hon. S. Young: I am guided, Madam President. The People’s Partnership Government, in response to a question, had published the fees that were paid by the Attorney General’s office for a specific period of time, from 2010 to 2015. At the time, the schedule that was originally provided was found to be incorrect. The then Attorney General, Mr. Garvin Nicholas, came and corrected it, and it totalled for that period, \$408 million. It is undisputed and it cannot be refuted by anyone that that was an unprecedented level of expenditure with respect to legal fees for a five-year period. There is no way to defend what took place.

However, in the preparation of that fee schedule there were errors,. One that I have heard repeated despite corrections—and it was repeated again here this afternoon, and through you, Madam President, I would use the opportunity to

correct it—is with respect to legal fees paid to me for \$440,000-odd, and the suggestion that that is for one matter. I would like to place finally on the record to clarify: those fees were for three separate matters, they were junior fees and that fee is all inclusive of VAT. So, it is for three separate matters where I was being led by senior counsel, three tax appeal matters.

Then the suggestion that there was a fee of \$2 million paid for me. Again, wholly incorrect. It was for a period of representing UDeCOTT in the Commission of Enquiry into the Construction Sector that totalled \$1.9 million VAT inclusive, for work done over a cumulative period of nine months. As opposed to what we have found where fees were charged for up to the sum of a million dollars in one invoice for work done in the preparation of matters up to the drafting of a statement of case. My friend took great time to try and talk about the complexity of matters and the amount of work done. Any practising attorney-at-law will know that to commence a civil claim you start with the filing of a claim form and a statement of case. Work done up to the filing of a claim form and a statement of case, as voluminous as it may be, could never, in my respectful opinion of practising law for 18 years, attract a fee up to the drafting of proceedings prior to it being filed, of a million dollars. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I can stand here with a level of authority and comment on that, because at the time I was involved on the other side of these cases, and like the UTT matter, which spectacularly collapsed in two days after cross-examination of the then administration's witnesses, that fee of a million dollars for that matter, and again we will refrain from calling names on the matter, there is no way it is reasonably justifiable in any manner whatsoever—complexity, amount of time, experience of the attorney—to attract such an outrageous and outlandish fee.

3.05p.m.

Madam President, we were very careful in the examples that were used in the other place, and again we tell the nation, and I say here without any hesitation that what has been unearthed with respect to the expenditure of legal fees, of totalling, as at date, almost \$900 million and we expect it to climb to a billion dollars in the period of five years—is unjustifiable and unreasonable. It has been an assault on the Treasury and on taxpayers and right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, by the use of legal fees over the five-year period. I challenge them to justify to the nation—for example, a fee of \$660,000 being charged by a junior attorney for a matter that he did not even have the courtesy of appearing in court—how that is defensible.

Madam President, the normal fee schedule that has been condoned by the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago is an hourly rate schedule. So to sit here and suggest—where right now I think the maximum is for a senior counsel of \$3,000 an hour—so to sit here and suggest that any junior attorney who would have a maximum of \$2,000 an hour could rack up, for up to the drafting of a statement of case, \$2,000 into a million dollars, that number of hours, based on the complexity level, et cetera, I am sure is almost impossible if someone did the math. They would be sitting there non-stop 24/7 for many, many months to be able to charge a fee of \$1million without doing any other work. Let them say with a level of certainty that that is what they did.

We heard my friend speak about arbitrations and the level of—let us do a comparative analysis. It was over \$5 billion in damages being claimed against the State. He quoted one matter, in particular, the World GTL Plant. The World GTL Plant claim was a claim brought in the courts of New York by American attorneys.

Again, I have had sight of those documents in a prior incarnation. Anyone who knows the American litigation practice of law and how it transpires will know of the exaggerated levels of claims. A person has a cup of hot coffee spilled on them from McDonald's, they put in a claim for \$10million. So to utilize the amount of damages being claimed, anyone can claim any level of damages, tell us what the court or the tribunal of arbitration did with respect to the level of damages. Again I say here, unreservedly and without fair of contradiction, that the level of fees charged to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to those matters is unjustifiable, unreasonable and potentially in breach of legislation. [*Desk thumping*] Unconscionable, I am told by the Minister of Finance. Value for money.

Sural. What we said, in relation to the claims brought against this country by Sural, is that we unearthed what can only be described as a surreptitious wander off the normal path to ask the Ministry of Finance to pick up the tab of fees for the solicitor, a solicitor who, hereto, was unknown in the world of litigation, charging the Ministry of Finance a million dollars a month for an arbitration. Again, in my 18 years of practice, unprecedented. By the time we got hold of this they had racked up a fee of over \$18million for the solicitors in this matter. Unconscionable is the concept that I will use to phrase that.

My friend spoke about CLF and tried to pitch the whole blame onto the former PNM administration for the expenditure on the CLF's Clico debacle. What I have failed to hear throughout the budget debate in both Houses, Madam President, and I was disappointed to hear it take place here in this House of intellectualism, once again, is what happened for the last five years. That intervention took place in January 2009, the PNM Government left 18 months

thereafter. What happened over the next five years—how long they took after, five years and three months?

Hon. Senator: Yeah.

Hon. S. Young: Five years and three months. Why was it not solved? What value for money did the people of Trinidad and Tobago get for the millions of dollars expended in legal fees? He called the name of the English QC. He called the names of some of the solicitors and what happened over that five-year period. If you blame a previous administration for a mess, you had five years and three months to clean it up and we have come in and found ourselves in an almost similar, not if worse position than it was left in May 2010.

In a very upsetting and disappointing attack on a young attorney, and he called the name, a Miss Theresa Hadad, and tried to make a correlation and a link between Miss Hadad and the Attorney General, who is currently out of the country. I tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago here today, that the only reason Miss Hadad was retained by the Ministry of the Attorney General to do this case is because the state attorneys that were asked to do the case feared for their lives. This is the case dealing with Rajae Ali, and when the Attorney General approached those in our Ministry and asked them to take up the case, it was an emergency application being made to the Court of Appeal by the favoured juniors on the other side, the state attorneys told us, unconditionally, that they would prefer and they were not prepared to take the case. The prisons officer who is dealing with it received a death threat. So how could we then, as conscientious and responsible Ministers, ask these young attorneys in our Ministry to go forth in those circumstances.

So what I would like to do today is give kudos to Miss Theresa Hadad for

stepping up to the plate and taking the brief. [*Desk thumping*] To give kudos to a young attorney to do what is right and to accept the brief. And the fees in that matter have not been set. I go on record here in this Senate today, to repeat myself, this administration is coming with a new dispensation with respect to legal fees. And I will say it here publicly, on the *Hansard*, we are going to use a fee schedule, an hourly rate fee schedule. We are only going to retain senior counsel in matters that require the expertise of senior counsel.

Our first port of call for junior counsel is going to be within the confines of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. We have spoken to that staff. I challenge Sen. Sturge to tell us who are the state attorneys that said they had a problem with Miss Hadad being retained, because when we asked the state attorneys, for one reason or the other, they did not want to take the brief. And I doubt very much whether he was telling the truth, because we have told the state attorneys, and we have already begun to put in place, Madam President—[*Sen. Mark stands up*]

Madam President: Hon. Attorney General, let us just take that off the record about—

Hon. S. Young: Take what out of the record, Madam President?—that Sen. Sturge did not tell the truth?

Madam President: Correct.

Hon. S. Young: Madam President. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Members, Members, Senators, please, let us have order. We have been proceeding on a fairly good basis, so let us continue. Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you, Madam President. I put on record here today that if it

were our administration rather than expend \$444 million on fees to external lawyers that money could have been well utilized to bolster the human resources within the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. We have told the staff and the lawyers at the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, and I put it on record here today that we intend, through a reduction of retaining external counsel, to utilize the funds in our allocation to provide training and to look towards better terms and conditions, to rebuild the office of the Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*]

When we came in, Madam President, the level of morale was at an all-time low. I was told this morning, by one of the favoured of the former Attorney General, when we asked him to do something, to produce a note for the UN, which, apparently he had been travelling extensively, all over the world in the last five years, under the premise that he is the expert on that area of law, and we asked him this week to produce a note on that area of law he had travelled for extensively, for the last five years, he told the PS, point-blank, there is a new administration in place, "I eh doing their wok". This is not the work of the PNM, Madam President, it is the work of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That type of behaviour will not be condoned by this administration. Again, I make note that I have refrained from calling the name of the individual.

And in wrapping up now, Madam President, a number of names, a number of individuals were attacked by Sen. Sturge on the other side. He attacked the President of the Law Association. I hold no brief for the President of the Law Association. I may well clash with the President of the Law Association when it comes to how I intend to deal with legal fees. Before I close off on the legal fees, in addition to the hourly rate system I will introduce, I am going to say that when

you are doing state work and you are going to be paid for legal fees for state work we are going to demand, at the outset, a discount on what is the market rate to save the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago money. [*Desk thumping*] And if there is a problem with that there is work elsewhere.

The President of the Law Association has been attacked here this afternoon in a most discouraging and upsetting manner, as has the Vice President. Individuals who have stepped forward, not because they are PNM members, not because they have any alignment or association with a political party, but because they have seen it fit to give of their time and their effort, their areas of expertise to come forward to serve the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And sad is the day when people who are willing to serve Trinidad and Tobago are attacked under the cover of parliamentary privilege. And I challenge Sen. Sturge to do as the Minister of Finance once said, “Come outside!” and tell those tales outside of the Parliament about those individuals.

This continued attack on former Independent Senator, Helen Drayton, who I had the pleasure of sitting in this Senate with, is completely unwarranted. Just because a person is willing to serve their country by sitting on a state board does not mean that they are aligned to a political party. And I call now on the public of Trinidad and Tobago to stand up to the bullying that takes place from the UNC Government and say it is unacceptable—[*Sen. Mark stands up*] I am not giving way.

Sen. Mark: Point of order.

Hon. Senator: What point of order?

Hon. S. Young: What point of order, standing up and waving your hands? This is not the House.

Appropriation (Financial Year 2016)
Bill, 2015
The. Hon. S. Young (cont'd)

2015.10.21

Sen. Mark: Take your seat, “nah”.

Hon. S. Young: I am not giving way. I am not giving way, sit down! Sit down, this is not your House!

Madam President: Sen. Mark, what is the point of order?

Sen. Mark: Madam President, point of order.

Hon. S. Young: What is the point of order?

Sen. Mark: On a point of order.

Madam President: Yes, Sen. Mark.

Hon. Imbert: You are not the Speaker.

Sen. Mark: Standing Order 46(4).

Hon. Imbert: Well sit down now, “nah”.

Sen. Mark: He is saying—

Madam President: I know 46(4), Sen. Mark, please take your seat. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam President. The attacks that are being made on the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are willing to serve Trinidad and Tobago I call upon all right-thinking citizens to change the tenor of the conversation and let them know that it is acceptable for people who want to serve and better their country to do so. [*Desk thumping*] To do so without being attacked especially under the cover of parliamentary privilege. You have something to say, say it outside.

3.20p.m.

With respect to the procurement legislation, again, I had the pleasure of debating that procurement legislation in June of last year. The Government that was then in charge took five years to bring procurement

legislation to the Parliament. When it was brought to Parliament, debated and agreed to by this side that was then in Opposition, now in Government, why did they not proclaim it? I will tell you why, Madam President. They did not proclaim it because the regulations were not in place. This was pointed out by the Attorney General—who is not present—and myself in the Senate debate, that this is meaningless without the use of regulations. They did not pass the regulations and bring it to the Parliament in time for it to be proclaimed.

So to sit there after five years and three months and not accomplish the job, and call upon a new government that is only in place for a matter of a month, is again, misleading and mischievous. But I will give you the assurance here, my friends on the other side, it is at the highest list of our priority. We are trying to find the work that was done by the former committee put together to create the regulations, and we will then meet with you in an effort for us to bring the regulations to the House, and then proclaim the other areas of the Act that are necessary. We intend to bring the procurement legislation to the House with slight amendment and to pass the regulations so that it will, as quickly in a time frame as possible, be utilized by Trinidad and Tobago.

Finally, the attack on the Heliconia Foundation. Madam President, with the greatest of respect, once again I find this to be a very unnecessary and unwarranted attack. The Heliconia Foundation is a group of young professionals. I have engaged in discourse with them. It is not a group of professionals that come across with a complete party position. It is a group of young professionals who have a great thought process and it is a group of

professionals that are willing to engage in debate of an intellectual nature. [Desk thumping] As I am being told by the Senator in front, it is not a ministerial fan club. This is a serious foundation, and again, I call upon the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to stand up in defence of young professionals in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Reject the utterances from the other side who try as they may, to try and bring down everything positive in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Mark: That is a PNM group.

Hon. S. Young: Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Madam President, I end by saying that this administration is going to do things differently and we are going to do things properly. This administration does not run here under cover of parliamentary privilege to attack individuals and call their names in a manner where they cannot respond. This administration is going to remain committed to the idealism and the ideas and the philosophy of its manifesto that is now government policy.

I end by saying that I thank you very much and I thank the Members of this House, even my friends on the other side, for allowing me the indulgence of addressing the Senate this afternoon. I end by congratulating the Minister of Finance for over a three-week period after taking office, for the phenomenal, positive job that he did in bringing this budget to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Madam President: Sen. De Freitas. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Mark: A little bit young. Good stock.

Sen. Nigel De Freitas: Thank you, Madam President, for acknowledging

me. At this time I wish to offer my congratulations to you on your ascension to the office of President and look forward to your contribution to the upkeep of the highest standards of debate, decorum and good parliamentary practice as presiding officer.

Madam President, I also offer my congratulations and thanks to the other Members of this honourable House, both young and not so young alike, who would have expressed congratulations to me on the day of swearing in and over the last two days of this budget debate. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I am not only honoured, I am humbled to be given the opportunity as one of the young Members of this honourable House to contribute to the development of this great nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I begin, I stand before you and the hon. Members empowered by the confidence placed not only in me, but in young people as a whole, those that served with me as colleagues and, more importantly, those that are looking on and being inspired to offer themselves for service in the future. [*Desk thumping*] For it takes a special kind of leadership to not only envision a better future for our people, but to understand that in order for that future of come to fruition, it is the young that must be involved in the laying of the foundation of that vision, [*Desk thumping*] for it is we who must continue to build when inevitably the leaders of today become the leaders of yesterday.

Madam President, on October05, 2015, the hon. Minister of Finance presented for this nation, a budget that sought to cushion the turbulence of an economic storm with providing a positive outlook for the future. For this,

I offer not only my congratulations given the short time frame in which this was achieved, but my sincere thank you on behalf of all young persons who are, no doubt, the real beneficiaries of such an action.

Madam President, as a young person in this honourable House, I have become both an observer and a contributor; an observer of those that are more experienced than I, and a contributor as a young Senator. What I have observed is that both the Government and Opposition, and now the Independent Bench as well, in this debate and in the debate in the other place, have indicated that they subscribe to a philosophy that is in the best interest of this country. Therefore, it is only fitting that I use this philosophy as a measuring stick from which I can not only assess the contribution of the hon. Minister of Finance, but also the contributions of those that were once the former Government and now seek to oppose.

Madam President, the philosophy of which I speak is that the greatness of a nation is not based solely on the amount of money in the Treasury or even the size of any army that it has, but predominantly on how we, the people, treat the weakest amongst us: the sick, the elderly, the young, the poor. For it is only when we find ourselves in one of these categories, or one or more of these categories, do we realize the reality of that statement.

As such, my contribution will take the form of an analysis in two areas: comparing the previous Government's interpretation and subsequent manifestation of the philosophy via their actions, along with this current administration's intentions via the budget presentation. The first would be on the topic of Tobago and tourism, which I am so proud to do. The second

would be in youth affairs and, to a much lesser extent, sports.

Madam President, I take this opportunity and the topic of Tobago and tourism to remind you that the general perception of Tobago is that it is the smaller, less-developed sister isle to Trinidad and, as such, the context in which I make my contribution and the philosophy as stated above, applies. In the area of Tobago and tourism first let me say that I am overwhelmed with emotion as a young Tobagonian to be part of a Government and a Parliament that boasts of having the presence of seven Tobagonians. [*Desk thumping*] And I will correct that number, because it is seven plus one. On the day that we started this debate we happened to swear in an Independent Senator who is also from Tobago, so it is now eight. [*Desk thumping*]

So we boast of having the presence of seven Tobagonians in varying capacities between the Lower and Upper House, when the Constitution of this country really only makes provisions for two and that, in the Lower House. So now we have seven—well, eight.

Madam President, we should have had more. We should have really, really had more. However, I would like to draw to your attention that the Members opposite, despite referring to themselves as a partnership, did not see it fit to appoint at least one Tobagonian Senator [*Desk thumping*] from the many subsidiaries of that entity which contested the general election in Tobago, and I will just point out here that we had those purporting to be independent, we had those purporting to be completely separate and we had those that were boldfaced enough to say that they support the People's Partnership, and yet we find none of them on the opposite bench this evening. Nonetheless, I am still proud. My colleagues are still proud and

more so, all of Tobago are proud. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I also stand before you refreshed; refreshed by the increased quality of communication between the Tobago House of Assembly and the central government which, for the better part of five years, has been strained. Madam President, it is like standing on a beach in the early hours of the morning in cool Tobago, waters caressing your toes, the cool morning breeze filling your lungs and you breathe deeply. It is refreshing. [*Desk thumping*]

I am just going to elaborate on this a little bit, because the quality of communication to which I speak is one that when you are talking about communication, there is really one way in which it happens. You have two entities, one that would speak and one that would listen, and when you talk about listening, you can listen in one of two ways. You can listen to understand and then reply to what was said in a meaningful way, or you can listen to give either lip service or just to reply to what was said, not really understanding and giving a meaningful contribution.

What I am saying is that with this mature central government, we have a level and a quality of communication now between the Tobago House of Assembly and the central government where you would have an entity that not only listens but tries to understand the special needs of Tobago and then responds accordingly. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, Tobago can expect a greater say in its development at the national level as, for the first time, the hon. Minister of Finance made mention of being guided by the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan for Tobago, a document made by Tobago, a document made for

Tobago towards the development of Tobago, in Tobago. And this is important because the budget that would have been presented by the Secretary of Finance in Tobago in June, would have used this document; and this document, just to give you some context, would be equivalent to the Vision 2030—now Vision 2030 document of this administration.

Therefore, it is a plan laid out by Tobago for developing Tobago and its economy moving forward, and, therefore, to hear of this document being mentioned in a national budget and the hon. Minister of Finance saying that he would be guided by this document, really lifts not only my heart but the heart of all Tobagonians. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the reason why this would have happened—and I put this forward—is because this mature central government—and I say, mature, because again, in the quality of communication, they listen to understand and reply. And this mature central government would understand something that Tobago has known since 1888, and what they understand is that a developed Tobago can only have but one outcome in the long run, and that is a better Trinidad and Tobago for all of us. And it is because of this understanding that you would see certain things that are happening.

I submit to this honourable House that as we go through this economic climate and as the diversification of the economy becomes important, that if it is you truly want to start to diversify the economy and develop a Trinidad and Tobago, that you start with Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Because an investment in Tobago—and I will say it here—will only give you the kind of guarantee on the return of your investment towards a better Trinidad and

Tobago. And to really prove this point, I draw your attention to an article in the *Guardian*, February 20, 2015, titled: “Tobago closer to global credit rating.” And it reads:

“In order to secure the rating, which the Moody’s team has indicated will be positive, the THA has been subject to intense scrutiny of its financial operations including examination of its institutional framework, its sources of income, the performance of revenues of the THA, expenditure trends including the evolution of its recurrent expenditure, its contingencies account expenses, THA deposits, cash management and liquidity and debt financing and management.

T&T now enjoys a Baa1 rating and the outlook for the THA’s rating may be on par. Interim reports indicate the island is on the high end of the spectrum when compared to other rated Latin American regional governments whose scores span Baa1 and Caa3.”

And I will just like to say now that this was in February, and the rating was Baa1. It did actually come out as Baa1 and as we all know, it was subsequently downgraded when the country itself was downgraded:

“The island's balanced fiscal results (operating surplus), very low debt levels and solid liquidity position were noted in the report and should impact positively on the overall grade assigned.”

And they were actually saying if it was given, and like I said before they gave it:

“If given a Baa1 rating, Tobago will be one of the highest ranked in the Caribbean scoring higher than Barbados, Jamaica and St. Vincent, among others.”

3.35 p.m.

Just to give a little context. This rating, this Baa1 rating—for the young people that would be listening—will go a long way to boosting investor confidence and advancing the THA's development plans. And that is just to say, Madam President, that if it is that an international agency can give Tobago and its economy a Baa1 rating, why cannot Trinidad and Tobago invest in Tobago towards diversification of the economy and the development of Trinidad and Tobago?

I would like to draw attention because, as I indicated earlier, the perception of Tobago is that it is a smaller less-developed island. I would like to suggest, especially with the previous administration, as to why it is that they would have consistently given just 4.03 per cent of the national budget, even though in their budget statements they would have indicated that they were given more and I really cannot, for the life of me, understand why they would try to report as though it was higher when it actually was just a bare minimum. That bear minimum would have come from the Dispute Resolution Commission and I will just read from the *Hansard*, dated October 23, 2000 where that debate would have occurred, and the summary of that report and its recommendation would have said:

“That a percentage in the range of 4.03% to 6.9% of the national budget, 4.03% being the minimum, be allocated to the Assembly...”

This is important and I want the honourable House to mark that word “Assembly” because it will come up just now.

“...to cover both the recurrent and development allocations for each financial year, such percentage to be reviewed from year to year in the light of prevailing circumstances.”

And I would just like to read from the budget statement of fiscal 2015 that the

previous administration would have read in this honourable Senate and the other place.

“For fiscal 2015 the budgetary allocation for the”—THA—“is \$2.609 billion, of which \$2.20 billion will be recurrent expenditure, \$384 million for capital expenditure, and \$23 million for the Unemployment Relief Programme.

Furthermore, under the various other heads of expenditure, Tobago will receive an”—additional \$1.09 billion, an amount which— “In total therefore Tobago will receive \$3.7 billion or the equivalent of 5.7 per cent...”

Now, I refer you back to that “Assembly”, and this is misleading and I am not exactly sure why they would have wanted to mislead Tobago because we in Tobago knew exactly what was going on. What is happening here is they are saying that Tobago is getting 5.7 per cent, and if I just finish this you would see exactly what was going on. So they are saying that Tobago will receive in total \$3.7 billion or the equivalent of 5.7 per cent of the national budget, and then they go on to say:

“We remain committed to the recommendation of Dispute Resolution Commission.”

Now if you go back to that word that I asked you to stick a pin in, the Dispute Resolution Commission states that a percentage in the range of 4.03 per cent to 6.9 per cent of the national budget, 4.03 per cent being the minimum, be allocated to the Assembly. So if we go back to the actual allocation to the Assembly, which was \$2.609 billion, and take that percentage of the total budget in that year, we see that the actual allocation was the bare minimum that the Dispute

Resolution Commission was saying that you had to get—a 4.03 per cent. And the context of this, in general, is that we look at this administration, and this administration did not at all try to hide or play with language at all in terms of its allocation to Tobago, and I will just read from the budget presentation of this administration.

This budgetary allocation of \$2.772 billion is equivalent to 4.4 per cent of the national budget. This is significantly above the minimum legal level established by the Dispute Resolution Commission, and that is true. It is. So what I am saying is that in the last two years when there was no economic climate or storm per se—and I just want to say in that budgetary allocation in 2015 and the previous administration, they had budgeted for \$80 a barrel and \$2.75 per cent in gas—is that the oil and gas price would have been at a higher level at that point, and yet they would have allocated to Tobago 4.03 per cent, and now we come forward to the fiscal year 2016 and we have an administration that is allocating 4.4 per cent in a worse economic climate. What I would like to say, Madam President, is that is commitment to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is understanding what building a great nation is.

Madam President, I would like to say and ask you to imagine, for a second, that had the previous administration understood this philosophy and developed the tourism industry, let us say, in Tobago, instead of fostering a runaway horse, as indicated by the current Minister of Tourism, the country of Trinidad and Tobago may have been better prepared to withstand the economic climate we are currently experiencing, as Tobago would have been able to contribute more to the national GDP, thus playing a greater part as a partner with Trinidad.

Unfortunately, that opportunity was lost and in the last five years, Tobago,

like I said, only received 4.03 per cent, the bare minimum as outlined, and what I am trying to say is that this current administration picks up where its previous incarnation left off, despite having lost those five years. We have already begun the task of turning promise into policy, policy into proposal, and proposal into project. Tobago can now expect not just an upgraded terminal, but instead a new airport terminal which will, no doubt, bring a much-needed facelift to the tourism industry. [*Desk thumping*]

And this is important as a very wise individual told me last week, when you are trying to develop a tourism industry, especially as it is important for Tobago, the airport terminal is the first impression that is made to international tourists and also the last impression that is made. And therefore, if you come to a terminal that is not at your best and if you do not put forward that best first impression, it can set the tone for that entire vacation for those individuals, therefore being counter-productive to any initiative that you would try to take in terms of inviting people to your island and developing a tourism industry.

Madam President, Tobago has also already begun receiving more representation on state boards, something that the Tobago House of Assembly would have lamented over in the last five years as the air bridge and the sea bridge are, really and truly, to us in Tobago an Achilles heel to our development. Without that reliability and predictability in the air bridge and sea bridge, what happens is that Tobago businesses suffer, Tobago tourism suffers, and therefore, we would have lamented repeatedly over the five years in terms of trying to communicate to the central government at that time, the importance of the reliability and the predictability of these two services to Tobago. Therefore, what would happen is that we would have asked to have these representatives on state boards, who can

then put forward the Tobago issue and represent Tobago on these boards, trying to bring some semblance of predictability to these services.

Madam President, because this central Government, the one that we have now, understands that a developed Tobago really can only lead to a better Trinidad and Tobago, you would see in the putting forward of other projects on a national level, the development of Tobago being inherent in that, and I really want to point out two things. The port in Toco—and as much as it is being said that this port in Toco would develop the economy in Toco, and develop Toco in that sense, I also would like to reiterate that this is one of the initiatives that would also develop and increase that liability and predictability that we have been asking for in terms of Tobago.

I will just ask you to imagine that right now on any given long weekend, in the 12-month period that makes up a year, that it becomes very, very difficult not only as a Tobagonian, but as a Trinidadian who is coming to Tobago for a vacation to get a boat ticket or even travel with some level of that reliability or predictability that is needed. Therefore, if it is that you have two boats right now—I can tell you that on those long weekends they are full to capacity, and therefore, the demand is higher—that a port in Toco which I assume you will be adding two more boats onto that, you will now have four boats which will be able to give you that predictability and reliability, and also to increase the carrying capacity between Trinidad and Tobago beyond that demand. And therefore, you would see that a project that is really operating on a national level assisting Tobago, and that is because, again, you understand that a developed Tobago can only lead to a better Trinidad and Tobago.

I also point to the autonomy of the Judiciary and the way that this also helps

Tobago in the sense that with the financial autonomy of the Judiciary, with a Judiciary that has financial autonomy, it is hoped that you would see that with this financial autonomy, the special needs of the Judiciary and its execution of its functions, Tobago will be taken into context and it will be able to develop that in Tobago. And therefore like as I said, we see these national projects coming out and Tobago being kept in mind even though it is not specifically said.

Madam President, I continue. The understanding of the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago and the quality of communication that has been elevated has already yielded a focus by this administration in the tourism sector to public/private partnerships to deliver infrastructure which seeks to expand the room stock on the island. Again, a much-needed initiative for the tourism industry. It also has already yielded commitments to improving security on the island with not only the construction of new police stations at Old Grange and Roxborough, but an appropriate local police unit within the THA, an initiative that underscores the importance of security to tourism and also the importance of security to the peace and peace of mind of Tobagonians. Madam President, it does not matter how you slice it, dice it, mince it or blend it, this administration's commitment to a better Trinidad and Tobago, to a developed Tobago, is real.

In the area of youth affairs, I listened intently as the Member of Parliament for Princes Town in the other place underscored—and it was also underscored here in this Upper House—and I listened intently to the previous administration's commitment to youth, what he did was underscore the previous administration's commitment to youth, citing that he in fact was the youngest elected Member of Parliament, and to this I say congratulations and well done to him. However, if we are talking about commitment to youth via involvement in public service, I would

like to point out the following titles:

One youngest Senator in the history of Trinidad and Tobago in the Tenth Parliament and now younger so in the Eleventh Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago;

One youngest male Senator in the history of Trinidad and Tobago;

One youngest Cabinet Minister in the history of Trinidad and Tobago;

One youngest parliamentary secretary in the history of Trinidad and Tobago;
and lastly

The youngest Vice-President in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I submit to you that that is what commitment to youth looks like and I have not even begun my comparison as outlined earlier yet.

Madam President, in Trinidad and Tobago there are few ways in which a Government can show their commitment to the youth of the nation and, by extension, to building a great nation. Some of these are through secondary and tertiary education, the post-education transition into adulthood and sport. On the topic of commitment to youth via education, I can trace the actions with the People's National Movement through various administrations to the days of Dr. Eric Williams, when secondary school education was made accessible to all; an initiative, I was told, was widely accepted and appreciated by mothers of the time. I can trace this commitment forward to the years to tertiary education with the start of the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Programme, more commonly known as the GATE Programme, in 2004, which sought to make tertiary education affordable to all.

Madam President, I can find no equal on behalf of the previous

administration in relation to the commitment to youth, to education beyond the expansion and number and types of programmes funded, and lastly attempts at reducing cost to that programme, the latter of which was contrary to the philosophy I outlined earlier. To make my point, I draw your attention to a newspaper article from the *Tobago Today*, titled “Gate Shut on 6 Tobago med students”, and dated Wednesday, September 09, 2015. It reads:

“Six medical students, five of them Bishop’s High School graduates, have had their dreams of becoming doctors crushed as they have been told that the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Programme...is no longer covering their tuition bill at the University of the West Indies’ Mona campus in Jamaica.”

The article goes on to recount how the students had already arrived in Jamaica to begin their studies, only to be told it is not funded.

The article goes on to offer an explanation for this, which was alluded to by the Director of the Programme, that the opening of the San Fernando Teaching Hospital was now affording Trinidadian nationals the opportunity to stay at home instead of going to Jamaica to study medicine. Now, it may be argued by the previous administration that the current economic climate warranted a reduction in the number of individuals supported by the programme that could be educated at home. However, Madam President, I would like to draw your attention to the following *Newsday* article titled, “Funding revoked weeks before exam” dated November 21, 2013:

“Clearly the time, effort and sacrifice some students make are not valued or even taken into consideration. This is especially true of some medical students at UWI Mona Jamaica.

We have left our homeland and secured thousands of dollars in funds for housing and food through loans or through great sacrifices of our parents all in the goal of becoming doctors to serve the people of our country.

The reality of some of these young aspiring doctors is that two weeks before exams begin they are informed by our government that their GATE funding has been revoked. It is understandable that the Government is trying to keep the cost of education down. But two weeks before exams you choose to cut several students GATE funding after they had financial clearance for the entire semester?

Does our personal sacrifices not matter or the accumulation of student loans? Is it just that two weeks before exams that we must now find TT\$90,000 to write exams for this semester?

It's a sad day in Trinidad when you put your own young people through this type of distress in a foreign country. Imagine if it were your children!"

3.50 p.m.

Madam President, in November 2013, this administration, again, had budgeted for an oil and gas price of approximately US \$80 and US \$2.75 per MMBtu respectively. So here we are seeing in 2013 that process of cutting GATE funding would have started when there was no economic storm or climate to speak of. Then conveniently, a year later, they would have tried to do the same thing again. What I am saying is that, notwithstanding the current economic climate, I suspect that the attempts to cut cost to the programme was, in fact, an attempt to channel individuals to the San Fernando Teaching Hospital as alluded to in the article previous, and doing so in what some would call an aggressive manner as many affected were either not notified and never consulted.

Noting the current economic climate, once again I draw now your attention to the following *Newsday* article titled:

“Med students assured of GATE funding”

And dated October 01, 2015, as it relates to the same topic but this time, handled by the current administration:

“Government has assured that they are prepared to fund all medical students who have been registered and accepted to enter the medical faculties at the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica; St Georges, Grenada and Cave Hill in Barbados.

These students would have been accepted by the respective campuses to receive the funding by Government through the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE).”

Madam President, fast-forward four days and I draw your attention to an excerpt on the budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance and I quote:

“We will hold extensive consultations with the national community on the most efficient manner for administering an effective education programme, including the GATE programme, with the primary objective being to ensure that assistance with education expenses is given to those most in need of it.”

Madam President, no cutting of funding without consultation; no students in distress. I submit to you again, that is what commitment to youth looks like; that is how you build a great nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the commitment does not stop there, it continues post-education to the allocation of \$62 million in order to increase stipends by 20 per cent to the On-the-Job Training Programme by this administration. An allocation

which, given the current economic climate, underscores the importance placed on youth development.

In contrast, I draw your attention to an article in the *Daily Express* titled:

“OJT stipends to increase from April”

Dated January 18, 2014, which stated, at the time, that a further \$33 million was allocated to the programme by Cabinet in order to increase the stipends. This would have been the first increase to the programme in four years since the previous administration took office. In 30 days this administration not only increased the stipend in light of the economic climate, but did so by almost double what the previous administration would have in a better much economic situation. I submit to you, again, that is what commitment to youth looks like; that is how you build a great nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the commitment does not stop there. This administration has gone one step further to propose a Graduate Recruitment Programme that seeks to employ at least 500 graduates costing \$55 million, an initiative to which I can find no comparison with the previous administration. The greatest proof of commitment to youth by this administration comes not from all that has been said before, but from an article in the *Daily Express* titled:

“Youth leaders optimistic after first meeting with minister”

Dated Tuesday, October 13, 2015 and I read:

“I feel quite hopeful that we might now be moving in the direction of a consistent and well-coordinated approach to youth work with greater collaboration between the youth councils, other youth organizations and the ministry.”

The article goes on to say:

“None left disappointed as Minister”—of Sport and Youth Affairs—“Smith made both a broad commitment to the youth agenda and very specific commitments to improve their locus standi nationally, to facilitate the achievement of their goals.”

The article goes on to report comments by the President of the Trinidad Youth Council in response to suggestions made by the Minister and I quote:

“Nicholson described the development as unprecedented saying, ‘I don’t think that any minister has had an interest in the two youth councils working together in this way before.’”

This article ends by saying:

“Describing the overall discussion as ‘healthy and progressive’, Nicholson said, ‘As long as we remain true to what was discussed here, there will be major youth development in the country in the next five years.’”

Madam President, I rest my case under youth affairs, I now move to sport.

Madam President, what can I really say about the previous administration actions as it relates to sport? If I were to sum it up in one word, that word would be LifeSport. And I do not think I am going to go into it anymore because it has been ventilated in the public domain so much. This administration’s commitment to sport comes through the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs’ comments in his budget contribution, regarding his commitment to working with athletes towards Olympics and with the TTFF towards qualifying for the World Cup, as well as the development of a sports institute.

I just want to add here that I have had conversations with him and I wanted to raise the point in regard to sport and I think one of the hon. Senators on the other side would have—not on the other side, the Independent Senator would have raised

in terms of the development of sport and ensuring that stadiums within the country are developed and refurbished. I want to speak here towards the Dwight Yorke Stadium really and through that increased quality of communication between the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly, it is hopeful—I am hopeful as well as all of Tobago is hopeful, that after the Dwight Yorke Stadium is refurbished, that we would be able to have meaningful conversation in terms of its management, either it being put under the Tobago House of Assembly for management towards the better development of sport in Tobago for the athletes in Tobago. We are very encouraged that this would happen because of that level and quality of communication that I outlined earlier.

As I wrap up, I think it plain for all to see that anyone who subscribes to the philosophy stated earlier and who truly cares about this country would see this budget for what it is. It asks a little more from those who are capable and nothing from those who are not. It lays not only a road map for moving forward despite the economic climate but a time frame for arriving at a destination to which we all agree we must return. It is in keeping with the sentiments of the hon. Prime Minister, puts out an open hand, an invitation to work together, for we on this side understand that no matter how good the captain, you cannot weather a storm if the crew does not work together. And so I end with the words of the great Martin Luther King adapted for our current situation:

We can either work together to build a future for our country as one people under one flag under one nation or surely perish together as fools.

Madam President, I thank you. Hon. Members, I thank you for lending me your ears and I would like to say, may God continue to bless our nation. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: May I congratulate the Vice President of the Senate, Sen. De Freitas on his maiden contribution. Sen. Edwards.

Sen. Dr. Aysha Edwards: Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me this opportunity to join the debate on a Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2016”.

First, allow me to join with others and congratulate you on your elevation as Madam President, as you are the third female President in the Senate. Madam President, through you, allow me to congratulate all Members of the Senate on their ascension to public service.

Madam President, I propose to confine my contribution to five subject areas, namely: education, national security, housing, tourism and health. Whilst my area of expertise is health as I am a medical doctor, I will discuss the four other areas that are of importance to me as a Tobagonian.

Education: technical, vocational and trade training in Tobago is insufficient. As the Cove industry estate continues to be operationalized, one wonders where are we going to find the tradesmen, craftsmen, machine operators and equipment maintenance workers from. The work being done by MIC in Goldsborough is acknowledged, but it is hardly sufficient and the youth camp is no longer in existence. I am challenging this administration to bring some of these technical training programmes and competencies to Tobago.

Madam President, we need to take another look at the GATE system. Tertiary education is not free. What we have is a tuition assistance programme. For a Tobago student, we have to consider air transportation, land transportation, boarding, books, et cetera. Let us consider a student from Tobago who comes to

Trinidad once per week for a class. The cost of their air transportation is \$300 per day for that class. The cost per year is \$15,600, and if that programme is for four years, the total cost, in just air transportation, is \$62,400. There should be a programme where upon graduating with your first degree and securing a job within your trained field that some portion of your salary should be taken out per month for a specific period to go back into GATE. This is the way that we can make GATE sustainable.

For candidates going immediately on to postgraduate work, we can then defer this payment—or for candidates who subsequently start post-graduate work before the end of the contractual payment, we can defer the payment until they finish their postgraduate work. I am aware that this may not be the perfect way of fixing GATE, but I am hoping that this formulary at least will give someone some ideas or generate some idea in terms of fixing it.

For the Tobago student living and working in Tobago, have we considered satellite or online classes, where students have real-time interactions with their peers and their lecturers? Some students are actually fearful of flying and the boat system is not consistent.

I want to commend the THA on its collaboration with family life, Tobago, in providing a character education curriculum in all high schools in Tobago for the past 10 years. These are the public/NGO partnerships that we need; these are the public/NGO partnerships that we can use to aid in educating our young people.

In terms of national security, I would like to commend this Government, through you, Madam President, on taking on the battle of crime head-on. I am encouraged by the large allocation for national security. However, as this administration creates its crime plan, if it has not done so already, I would hope

that it is a comprehensive plan that includes Tobago. The crime rate in Tobago is on the rise. For some, they may not completely understand this; let me try and explain.

When I lived in Trinidad, I lived in one of the so-called affluent neighbourhoods in the western peninsula. I locked my doors, I stayed off the road at nights and I did several other things that I had not recognized had infringed on my freedoms as an individual. On moving back to Tobago, I went out with my cousin. He was driving my car. He got out of my car and did not turn off the ignition. Fearfully, I ran around to the other side and took off my car. He asked me, “why?” And I said, “No one is going to steal my car”. He started to laugh. Up comes a gentleman driving a Range Rover, jumps out his vehicle and leaves it running, and I asked why. And they said, “Where is he going to go with it?” Tobago is that small. There is nowhere to go with it.

So you can imagine how distraught I was when, at 11.42 a.m. yesterday while in this august House, I would have gotten a WhatsApp message about a double murder in Tobago, bringing Tobago’s murder rate to seven to date with one having been solved, according to ACP for Tobago, Garfield Moore. I do not have the solutions but I know that we, in Tobago, cannot keep thinking that all crimes happening in Tobago are not from persons from Tobago. I have said this before in the Tenth Parliament and I will say it again today: we, as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, need to recognize that we actually have the power to eradicate crime. We need to send a strong message to our citizenry: if you are not a productive member of society then chances are, you are a nuisance.

4.05p.m.

Housing: the cost of property in Tobago is significantly higher than that in

Trinidad. In Tobago even if you have bought land or inherited land, you would hear stories of the cost of construction being twice or three times that for the same structure in Trinidad. Most persons in Trinidad and Tobago agree that we need to generate revenue and most persons, in principle, agree with the property tax. Where you would have lost some of us is when you are proposing to keep the same schematics as that of 2010. The Minister gave an example of a couple owning a home in Woodbrook, having bought it for \$10,000 and it is now worth \$3million, saying that they will get some form of exemption. I know he was going ad lib and that he was explaining that the formula would be expounded and explained.

The issue that I am having with this example is that all properties gain equity with time. Are these exemptions based on whose name the property is in or lives on the property or both? What about the person who inherits a multi-million-dollar property or using the example as above? A 23-year-old person working for \$6,000 a month now inherits his grandparents' home. Would there be exemption to his property tax? Would the property tax now go up, which would probably out of his means for keeping that property? I recommend that we look at giving incentives to first-time homeowners, and persons who keep their property up to a certain standard, so that the quality of our neighbourhoods do not fall because of this tax.

Madam President, through you, was the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government in this august House yesterday, saying that in the PNM manifesto it states that a part of local government reform will see property tax remitted to local government bodies? And, therefore, I am hoping that this is realized, and that if I am paying more, then I expect to benefit from improved goods and services from local government bodies.

We must recognize that we have a group of young professionals who are

unable to own homes. This group of university graduates are deemed to be earning too much money to qualify for low-income homes, and, on the other hand, do not qualify on their own to get mortgages from commercial banks.

Tourism: the national tourism policy of Trinidad and Tobago includes the statistical position of the nation in the Caribbean region. However, the goals, targets and key success factors are not smart, they are not specific, nor measurable and processes are void of accountability. Trinidad and Tobago's tourism product is void of documented, implemented and widely communicated tourism regulations. What are the incentives to operate a tourism-related business in Trinidad and Tobago? The benefit package being offered by the Government is not nearly as competitive as other destinations.

A good example is that the country offers a tax exemption of up to seven years in respect of gains or profits from approved tourism projects. Whereas countries like the Dominican Republic have a tax incentive law that provides a 15-year exemption to companies engaged in tourism development, including, hotels attractions and tourist-related activities. I think the time has come for the Ministry of Tourism and the Division of Tourism and Transport to create a smart tourism plan. And by this, I mean a plan that is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. This will inform the administrative structure and the utilization of resources going forward. In Tobago we need to consider diversifying our economy and having a proper private sector established.

At present, THA is responsible for upward of 75 per cent of employment on the island. We really need to look into private investments or foreign-direct investments in the tourism industry by offering attractive incentive packages. There are two categories of tourism: overnight arrivals and cruise ship arrivals.

The front page of the October 18, *Tobago News* spoke of bumper season for the cruise ship industry. The article went on to explain that the Secretary of the Division, Mrs. Tracy Davidson-Celestine, indicated:

“...in the season running from October 29, 2015 to May 3, 2016, there will be an estimated 50 ship calls to Tobago....and...an estimated 90,000 passengers are expected to visit the island...this is a reported 60 percentage increase from last season’s figure of 60,000 passengers.”

I would like to point out that the Bahamas is the number one country for cruise ship passengers in the Caribbean. Nassau is the largest port in the Bahamas, attracting almost three million cruise passengers each year; three million. So in the Caribbean context we are not competitive. We need to realize that each Bahamian is a tourism ambassador. We need to look into funding that is available to prepare our citizens to be good hosts at home and abroad.

Tobago needs reliable transportation, for the domestic tourists who come to Tobago without their car—and that is all the Trinidadians that come to Tobago. The hon. Sen. De Freitas spoke about long weekends, but really, it is every weekend and it is not just Saturday and Sunday. It is Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

The possibility of seeing the island is restricted only to a few sites, unless they have rented a car or have a friend who is willing to take them around. We need reliable and affordable public transport. I was encouraged yesterday when I heard the hon. Minister Franklin Khan give an example of a British couple visiting Tobago and taking the ferry to Toco, so that they can probably see parts of Trinidad during their vacation.

In Tobago we continue to spend very large amounts on festivals which are

having progressively worse attendance or worsening attendance annually. I am sure that this is multi-factorial, however, we must recognize that there is consistently poor service to Tobago. We have one working ferry most times, which greatly decreases the amount of inter-island trips. So for the British couple who may want to visit Trinidad for one day, presently, they cannot do so.

Furthermore, for the international passenger who wants to come to Tobago, they are not encouraged to do so. CAL seems to miss the mark in adding flights all the time. We can recall at least once when we would hear about CAL adding flights on the news; that does not transmit to foreign tourism, that is okay for the domestic tourist and just okay. I have heard many horror stories and a few of them involved my foreign friends who visited Tobago, had a great time and then their flight to Trinidad was delayed or cancelled, resulting in them missing their international leg, and there is nothing put in place for these passengers: there are those who stayed at Piarco; there are those the airlines offered hotel rooms, but now they have to pay for their ground transportation, pay for a meal, and pay for whatever the cost is to change their flights. We need to ensure that we have proper infrastructure and standardization of our tourist product, for us to be taken seriously.

Health: I want to first congratulate the hon. Terrence Deyalsingh as the new Minister of Health. We have great expectations; no pressure. [*Desk thumping*] I read the PNM manifesto on health, and some may say it favours primary care physicians highly. I would like to say that health is multi-factorial and fixing our system requires a multi-factorial approach. I would like to put on the record the difference between primary care and public health. I think it is important as persons sometimes believe that the two are interchangeable but they are not.

Public health involves system management. Using the WHO definition of public health:

“Public health refers to all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to provide conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on entire populations, not on individual patients or diseases. Thus, public health is concerned with the total system and not only the eradication of a particular disease. The three main functions of public health are:

- The assessment and monitoring of the health of communities and populations at risk to identify health problems and priorities.
- The formulation of public policies designed to solve identified local and national health problems and priorities.
- To assure that all populations have access to appropriate and cost-effective care, including health promotion and disease prevention services.”

Thus, one expects that the public health leadership structure must be strong and visionary to be able to implement this effectively. The public health system must also have the power to effect change. I think we undervalue the relevance of our public health officers, and hence our system is weak.

Public health officers are not all times doctors, but may also be persons who pursued a Master's in public health. There are some doctors who pursue this Master's Degree. While I am encouraged by the Minister of Finance acknowledging that there is a severe shortage of medical personnel, and highlighting that this Government has taken the stance that all medical students at

various UWI campuses receive GATE, I would like to challenge him, through you, Madam President, and the Minister of Health to now take up the mantle to retain the services of trained specialist physicians. These are physicians who may have benefitted from GATE and scholarships, whose skill sets are now required to build our nation.

We need to look at why persons who go abroad for further training are not coming back. Are we actively trying to recruit these persons? We need to engage the University of the West Indies to find out how we can create a seamless transition from an undergraduate MBBS Degree to a postgraduate DM Degree. We need to ensure that the intake to these is substantially larger and that students starting these programmes have a clear guideline on the requirements for graduation. The Government may want to look into discussions with the Faculty of Medical Sciences through the university to find a solution to this problem.

I would like to turn my focus now to primary health and primary health care physicians. According to the WHO:

“The ultimate goal of primary health care is better health for all. WHO has identified five key elements to achieving that goal:

- reducing exclusion and social disparities in health (universal coverage reforms);
- organizing health services around people’s needs and expectations (service delivery reforms);
 - integrating health into all sectors (public policy reforms);...
 - increasing stakeholder participation.”

4.20 p.m.

The person at the front of this is the family physician. This is a specialist

physician. I am taking this time to say this as persons believe a GP equates a family physician equates an unspecialized doctor. This is not true. Primary care is health care provided in the community for people making an initial approach to a medical practitioner or clinic for advice or treatment.

In the other place, I heard about health centres being opened Sunday to Sunday. Madam President, through you, I am appealing to the Minister of Health that this is not a good idea. This can contribute to breaking an already fragile system. I do believe that there is a lot of work to be done as physicians and patients complain about large clinic sizes and long waiting time. We need to look into public and private collaboration and standardization of delivery of services.

Using Tobago as an example, there are three health centres open 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. Monday to Friday; imagine then adding on Saturday and Sunday. Whilst on one hand I could see the convenience for some patients and, in some cases, the de-cluttering of the emergency rooms, on the other end of the spectrum, I see health personnel burnout. A health centre is not only manned by a doctor. Can I respectfully suggest that the moneys that would be used to keep these health centres open on a weekend be channelled into health and wellness programmes or campaigns.

These private/public sector relationships exist in various countries, and we could look into what works in these countries and create a smart plan that is tailored for our communities.

Madam President, the time has come for us to be serious about preventative medicine. We are topping the region in some of the chronic diseases, for example, diabetes. The time has come for us to have preventative cardiology clinics, for example, and I am sure we have trained cardiologists that would be willing to take

up this mantle.

The Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association has on several occasions asked for the Ministry of Health, through the Minister of Health, to make approved continuous medical education a part of recertification of doctors, and this should be a standardized process. For some reason this has not happened. We are really hoping that with this Government or with the Government, the new Government, that we will see this. On this end, all is not lost as several specialist groups and the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association host monthly CMAs. Within the region, the Caribbean College of Family Physicians has partnered with Caricom to bring standards in CMA and this is the type of partnership that we here in Trinidad and Tobago can benefit from.

The time has come for us to seek accreditation of private practices and health centres as this happens internationally. Madam President, the time has come for funding for a chair in family medicine at the University of the West Indies as well as funding for other academic level posts within the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

Madam President, the time has come for there to be legislation to ensure that the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Board can receive yearly dues from doctors. At present, this does not exist. It slips me the amount that it costs, but it is nominal. It is about \$200, yet physicians do not pay that money every year.

In the 2014 budget which was read on September 09, 2015—no sorry, in the 2015 budget, let me get it. No, it was the 2014 budget, which was read on September 09, 2013 on page 47 and I quote:

Additionally, Government will soon announce plans for infrastructural improvement to Port of Spain General Hospital.

I am not sure that that was the first time that this institution was mentioned for repair, but to date Port of Spain General Hospital remains without some of the updates that other institutions have benefited from even after it has been said repeatedly that the institution is not structurally sound.

Madam President, as an intern, I worked at Port of Spain General Hospital. Port of Spain General Hospital has some of the most committed, dedicated officers. They work Sunday to Sunday without complaining. You would not believe that, but they work Sunday to Sunday without complaining. There are examples where doctors are off, yet they still come to the hospital. It is as though they are addicted to the place.

Madam President, in closing, I would like to say on behalf of all the medical practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago, we are indeed saddened whenever one of our clients dies. We will be the first to acknowledge that there have been issues of negligence, so we also welcome the proposed legislation that deals with negligence and malpractice. We hope that the Government will also look into legislation that will allow us to work in an environment that is befitting of the persons that we serve.

And with these few words, Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: We will now take the tea break, we will resume at 5.00 p.m. This sitting is therefore suspended. **4.27 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. It is with great pleasure and privilege that I rise in this honourable Senate today to make my contribution on this first national budget

Sen. The. Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

of this new People's National Movement administration. It is opportune because it comes at a time when our nation is facing serious economic challenges and that of course require strong, deliberate leadership to steer us through these times, and this you would find in the PNM administration under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister.

I would like to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, for his insightful budget presentation which outlines measures that both shore up and strengthen the economy with the ultimate goal of providing a decent, sustainable standard of living for all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and, most notable, Mr. Vice-President, it takes care of the elderly and the vulnerable. They were indeed well taken care of.

Before I go into my core contribution, there were some questions which were asked yesterday by Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon, and I sought to get them from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for her. I would spend very little time on them though. With regard to the installation of the pipeline from the north-west peninsula to Diamond Vale, I am advised that there was an omission in the original design, and this omission is now going to be corrected so this new device is now going to be installed and the error was made in the last administration.

With regard to the asset integrity study, the study is deferred due to funding and, of course, they are looking at alternatives right now. So, they are investigating other sources to do that study.

With regard to the Labidco Administrative Complex, that is deferred due to our prioritization of infrastructure works at the present location.

With regard to the CCR unit, arbitration proceedings have been brought by

Samsung and, therefore, I do not believe I should actually comment on this matter at this time.

With regard to the ULSD unit, the structure of the plant had failed in terms of partial static loading due to design flaws. The plant was built at a seismic factor of .3g—I am assuming that is grammes, I do not know —and it was later recommended that the factor be increased to .75. So the structure is now to be strengthened to the higher seismic factor. So, I think in a nutshell that is what you enquired of. Yes? Any further considerations, I could always have it sourced from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for you or the Minister would answer in the other place.

So that before I begin to talk about trade and trade performance, I want to paint a bit of a picture about the global economic landscape, and it is that global growth is projected to reach 3.5 per cent and 3.8 per cent in 2015 and 2016 respectively. However, growth in Latin American and the Caribbean slowed to 1.3 per cent in 2014 and is projected to further decline this year. The USA and Canada are projected to grow in 2015 at 3.1 per cent and 2.2 per cent respectively, and the Caribbean region will expand by only 1.7 per cent.

So, yes, Trinidad and Tobago is considered to be at the doorsteps of some economic contraction. I would want to say that there are opportunities, both at home and abroad for our manufacturers and our service providers in the global markets still to ensure that this is just an adjustment phase.

5.05 p.m.

So whilst I would say that our short or medium and our long-term economic plans do in fact kick in, this Government gives a commitment though to rebuilding the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and setting this country on a path of

sustainable growth. We will be bold, we will act expeditiously in pursuing suitable economic policies to create alternative revenue streams and possibilities for increased trade and investment, and the overall growth of the non-energy sector in particular. Trade plays an important part in the development of any country, however, in the case of a small-island developing State, like we are, it is particularly critical. On an average, revenue from international trade transactions account for approximately 50 per cent of total revenues in Trinidad and Tobago. However, according to the 2015 *Review of the Economy*, for the period April 2014 to June 2015, Trinidad and Tobago's balance of trade declined by 63.1 per cent to \$10.9 billion from \$29.7 billion during the previous period. And both our exports and imports of visible trade also diminished as well.

Unfortunately, our non-energy exports during the period April 2014 to June 2015 declined as well from \$55.4 billion in the previous year to \$49.5 billion. We did in fact have 14 months of growth in the non-energy sector but growth was very small, and then, of course, this followed with a decline in the last year. So that, therefore, I make the point that Trinidad and Tobago is in urgent need to find new markets for these non-energy products, and to attract investments inward as well, in order to expand our existing manufacturing base and to, overall, spur economic diversification, and much has been spoken about that.

Within the region, Trinidad and Tobago's merchandise export performance has been relatively weak, and that is so disappointed. Based on the *Review of the Economy* total exports declined from \$21.8 billion over the period April 2013 to June 2014 to \$12.5 billion, and, of course, that is about a 50 per cent reduction, which is cause for concern. So I emphasize again, that our priority is to ensure that the business community has the necessary assistance, the support and the

programme of incentives, all of the initiatives that they would need to successfully penetrate the existing markets, and, of course, the non-traditional markets as well.

I will speak a little bit about Caricom. Our commitment to regionalism is of paramount importance, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry intends to do its part in reviving and rebuilding the stalled Caricom Single Market and Economy process with the explicit objective of promoting the free and efficient movement of goods and services, labour and capital in the shortest possible time. This initiative will seek to facilitate trade and investments, contribute to regional economic growth and development, and, of course, reinforce the ties between Trinidad and Tobago and its Caricom neighbours. We need to understand that their success in Caricom is in fact our success.

The trade directorate of the Ministry will work closely with Caricom to formulate and to advocate our positions on strategic initiatives in COTED, which is the Council for Trade and Economic Development, in the context of the obligations under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, and that would include areas like—new areas like e-commerce, and it will include services, government procurement as well, and facilitating competitiveness in general. So that we in Trinidad have always seen the region's market as our first stepping stone before we engage with the rest of the world, and I speak on behalf of the business community. In this regard, our exporters have traditionally gone after the more developed markets in Caricom.

I want to say still, though, that there are significant opportunities in Guyana, and in Belize, and in Suriname, in particular, in the areas of agriculture and energy services, and we intend to help our service providers to fully explore and to take advantage of these opportunities. There have been, in more recent times, several

Sen. The. Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

partial scope agreements; they are in various stages of completion and these are with Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador. We recognize these three markets make up a population of about 20 million, so it is very important that we build upon this foundation and we in fact exploit these agreements; agreements were signed but we need to execute and we need to exploit, so that it is to the benefit of the local private sector.

And, of course, in an effort—still on regionalism—to strengthen and support our regional initiatives, the joint action for diplomacy and commercial relations with extra-regional markets in South and Central America, Asia and Africa will be pursued and enhanced, and you would recognize that they are often missions from abroad and they tend to treat with Caricom as a whole in joint initiatives rather than country by country. So these regional initiatives will continue, and we are proud to be a part of that.

I want to add as well, though, that significant work has also been done by various private sector entities to enter specific African economies to tap into their growing demand for services as well. And, therefore, the Ministry of Trade and Industry will therefore deepen Trinidad and Tobago's relations with countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, not only in the traditional areas like energy services, which you have started quite a number of years now, but also in the non-energy sectors as well. This initiative will assist Trinidad and Tobago companies to tap into these further opportunities which lie abroad.

Our diaspora in the USA, in Canada and in the UK and elsewhere will be utilized again to develop linkages, to help expand our export networks, particularly in those areas—in those countries, USA, Canada and in the UK as well. I want to add that Trinidad and Tobago has a vast network of diplomats and officers across

Sen. The. Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

the globe and it is critical that we use these ties to our benefit, even in places where perhaps where we are not represented it is necessary that we make an assessment of these places so we would examine the gaps in diplomacy, because commercial diplomacy is an important tool through which we can open doors for our business people.

I make the point of Cuba, which is now a more liberalized market, where the PNM administration of 2007—2010 opened a trade office, and it is now that it is heavily utilized by our business people, and included in our budget, in the budget of the Ministry of Trade and Industry there is an amount to strengthen that office, so we will in fact be hiring another officer for that office, and this is how we can use our commercial ties. Again, we see the necessity perhaps to be even in Guyana and Suriname, so, again, we are a facilitator to businesses who sees potential in doing business in those countries.

I will speak a little bit about CARIFORUM, then the European Union Economic Partnership Agreement, as you know that was assented to and that gives effect to the goods liberalization commitment for an initial phase. In the first phase you will have a reduction of tariffs and then, of course, there will be a second round of tariff reduction. Definite efforts have been made by national bodies to implement the EPA but there is a sort of a perception of an information deficit with regard to the rights and responsibilities under the agreement, and that is particularly among the private sector, and, of course, that is keeping back developments with Europe.

So in an attempt to fill this gap the Ministry of Trade and Industry's Trade Implementation Unit, they have been mandated to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago fulfils its obligations, number one, but also be given the priority to ensuring that

there is implementation of the agreement but also there is utilization of the opportunities which present themselves through this particular agreement. Quite a few speakers spoke about competitiveness and drew reference to the Global Competitiveness Report, and Trinidad and Tobago being ranked 89 out of 140 countries and the downwards slide of about five positions, so I am not going to make heavy weather out of this, but, of course, we do know that the areas of concern are poor work ethic in the labour force, corruption, inefficient government bureaucracy and access to finance.

I want to say that this administration commits itself, through the Ministries of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, National Security, Public Administration and, of course, all the other Ministries where necessary, to a whole of Government approach to ensuring that these trends are reversed and that our country and our businesses remain competitive and on the cutting edge to ensure world-class performance, again in the best interest of all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So, again, I am not going to make heavy weather about the concerns that were already spoken of.

But, again, I have examined the pillar on institutions and where the last government failed us over the last five years, and I make a commitment again that competitiveness begins even with us as Ministers, as Senators, as parliamentarians, and so we commit ourselves to selflessness, to objectivity, to openness, to inclusion, to accountability, to honesty and leadership in the course of all of our duties because that is where competitiveness starts. [*Desk thumping*]

I will just speak to the ease of doing business. The business climate in Trinidad and Tobago has claimed—and you got to admit it—with bureaucratic and inefficient systems, and that is not overnight, but it may be the case that local

businesses have gotten used to or they have adapted to these systems. The fact remains that we need to challenge this culture of mediocrity, of inefficiency and wastefulness, and we need to convert it to one of efficiency and innovativeness and productivity, and this Government will do just that. [*Desk thumping*]

According to World Bank, Doing Business 2015 report, here we are again at 79th out of 189, but there are four indicators that concern us, and these are: dealing with construction permits, 113th out of 189—not good enough; paying taxes, 113th again; registering property, 159th out of 189 countries; and enforcing contracts, an abysmal low, 180th out of 189 countries, and that is not good at all. It is that this Government intends to implement the reforms in these and other areas that are necessary in effort again to create a more enabling environment for businesses to thrive and grow in Trinidad and Tobago. And technical assistance, in this regard, technical assistance from the World Bank will be sought to ensure strategic reforms and to ensure that these reforms are articulated and, in fact, implemented.

I speak about something that is a little bit unfamiliar to some and that is secured transactions, and we are well aware that access to credit for the private sector is crucial to growth and development and, particularly, to the small and medium sectors, and that is a reality faced by all of those businesses in Trinidad and Tobago, and, of course, the small and medium sized, I think they make up more than 90 per cent of the business community, right. The assets of a typical SME, however, they comprise mainly moveable property which in most instances is not sufficient to secure a loan from banks and other financial institutions. These banks right away will say this is not bankable, right, and such a constraint really stifles the growth of businesses by inhibiting their ability to sustain and grow their employment base. This is what we want to move away from, especially in the case

of the SMEs, we want to help those businesses to grow and prosper as well, move from small to medium and to large; a lot of businesses start that way, a lot of family businesses start that way and grow into large businesses as well.

And it is that the Ministry of Trade and Industry will collaborate with other Ministries and definitely with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, and also the Registrar General, the Banking Association to address this critical issue, through the development and the implementation of secured transactions and collateral registry system. I did not even know about this. This system is a legislative and institutional framework which is designed to facilitate the use of moveable property as collateral, and this reform is being undertaken with technical assistance from the World Bank through a reimbursable advisory services agreement.

I am pleased to report that work on this reform has already commenced and a mission from the World Bank will be here later this month, and the purpose of the mission is to meet with stakeholders in order to conduct a diagnosis of the country's legal and institutional environments and to move on from there. We have spoken a lot about diversification and new sectors for development, so that let me say, Mr. Vice-President, the focus of the Ministry of Trade and Industry is not only on the growth of trade, business and investments per se, but I want to say that the Ministry will commit its resources and focus its energies on the diversification of our economy.

5.20p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, that is alongside the hydrocarbon sector, which has been the dominant contributor to our economic success alone; although I am quick to add that that sector is not finished. People are thinking that it is. Yes, hydrocarbons

are finite, but it is not the end of that sector. But we do have to, in fact, bring the non-energy sector up to some level of supremacy so that we have some kind of assured revenue reform and that these revenues are, in fact, sustainable.

Our economic fortunes have reversed and, therefore, we must put this reality of diversification sooner rather than later, particularly as the last Government failed to prudently and effectively manage the country's resources, and we see where that has put us today. Commodity prices were high then, and that was the time to take charge and reform the economy and so on; that did not take place. For many years we have been talking about this diversification of the economy, to wean ourselves from the dependency on the energy sector and, therefore, remove the impact of the volatility and the vicissitudes associated with the energy market. Again, the last Government failed to do so. In fact, the concern is that lip service in general has been placed on the diversification of the economy.

I want to say that the Ministry of Trade and Industry along with many other Ministries in this Government will be introducing new strategies, new programmes, measures, incentives, initiatives, to further diversify the economy, and to this end you would find that there will be greater partnerships. When the Minister introduced the budget, he spoke over and over again about collaboration and cohesiveness as a unit, in terms of the private and the public sector. So greater partnerships and business relations will be fostered to collectively address and benefit from all of these new opportunities which we expect to emerge.

That collaboration will be so structured to engage the ministerial and private sector minds to ensure that when projects do, in fact, emerge, that they move swiftly to materialization. Sometimes many projects are there, and they are just milling around. At the end of the day we need to know: Is this going to work? Is

Sen. The. Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

this not going to work? Therefore we need the meeting of the minds of the business sector and also the Government, to ensure that these move swiftly to materialization where possible. Of course, we give the necessary support in terms of the initiatives and the incentives as is required—with prudence of course.

Mr. Vice-President, within the budget the Minister of Finance had again outlined the eight areas: agriculture and agro-processing, fish and fish processing, maritime services, aviation services, creative industries, financial services, tourism and software design and applications. The agriculture and agro-processing are now going to be driven by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and to this end I am going to work closely—we are all going to work closely—with Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat, as well as all of our international partners to provide the necessary support towards the production of value-added agricultural products which meet local demand, reduces our food import Bill and also adds value to local products for export.

I was saying to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries that I had a visit by an ambassador, and I think he also visited him, from Sri Lanka, and it was interesting, because from the coconut we just use the water. In their case they use everything: the water, the jelly, even the husk. The husks are, in fact, compressed into a cake which is used for manure as well. I mean, we have a dying coconut industry, and I speak of it because of Point Fortin. We really need to work with our international partners, but this will be entirely up to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and agro-processing.

The maritime services—there are several areas of focus, including infrastructural development, additional port and dry-docking facilities for leisure and marine sea craft. Of course the Government is also looking to establish a

Sen. The. Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

maintenance facility as well to look after Government's fleet of naval and maritime vessels. All of this will seek to catalyze the development of the ship repair and ship-building industry. Again, you can expect that you would find the private partnership arrangements that benefit both sides.

I could mention that only recently we were having a conversation with someone from the IDB who said that there is, in fact, funding available for these kinds of projects in the vicinity of US \$2 million and up to about US \$400 million, not requiring government guarantee, so these facilities are, in fact, available to the private sector. These are the kinds of discussions that are to take place.

The Minister in his presentation spoke about CL Marine, for instance, which is again a private sector dock that has extreme potential. So it is in using both the private sector and the public sector facilities that we will, in fact, find the development of this maritime services sector, and we will make sure that this is made a reality.

The creative industries—I am just going to speak about a few. I think CreativeTT has been quite proactive in the development of the creative industry sector. Of course that includes the advancement of film, music and entertainment. Some people may say that is a slow crawl, but it has been happening. So that they are at the stage of strategic planning in all of the subsectors: fashion, music and film as well, but I want to point out, Mr. Vice-President, that the Ministry has allocated additional moneys for this sector in fiscal 2016. I think last year they may have spent about \$6 million. To this end we are now allocating an increase of more than \$4 million to sort of match the potential for this sector, and that is what we see.

Financial services—again, the Ministry of Trade and Industry will be

collaborating with the Ministry of Finance on the development of the policies and strategies to provide some support for these sector-related projects.

Let me speak a little bit about innovation. Some see innovation as a very complicated endeavour, and it is another thing that is talked about a lot—innovation. But the fact is, without it companies will become obsolete and find it more difficult to grow and to diversify. That is a fact. Historically, it is a fact that innovative firms and countries tend to out-perform their competitors, and research conducted by the London School of Business on innovation indicates that organizations or countries that focus only on incremental product enhancement cannot prevent decline in their own market as they mature and new competitors enter their field.

In the light of this, we want to say that research and development is considered to be a critical area in which the Government, again, and the private sector must collaborate in order to contribute to the diversification and expansion of business as well. So that, again, our Government sees as a priority the development and implementation of an innovation policy which will be the foundation for ensuring business sophistication. It is about time that we see some more sophisticated products being manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago, and the source of that is innovation.

Let me talk a little bit about the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, which plays such an important and supportive role in terms of its national strategy aimed at trade competitiveness, economic diversification and the sustainable development of our country. The Metrology Act, for instance, will be brought into effect—it was proclaimed—and this will improve our country's ability to produce world-class goods and services which can, in fact, be traded locally. What is

needed now are the regulations for the Metrology Act to be brought into effect, and we commit to doing that soonest.

With regard to export support financing—exporTT is the country's sole export promoting agency, and its approach is to strategically support companies to be able to be more competitive, to be less risk averse and to gain entry, not only to the traditional markets, but also to the non-traditional markets. So that during this year, in addition to its normal activities, exporTT will be a little bit more aggressive, and they did that maybe a week ago, in bringing buyers to Trinidad and Tobago for interest in our goods and services. That is a more cost-effective approach—bringing the buyers here instead of having our exporters going out all the time. [*Interruption*] Yes, and I thought it to be very successful.

I want to say that our export sector, however, requires significant financial support and, in this regard we have been in discussions with the Eximbank to look at recapitalization of the bank to support the Government's trade priorities and diversification thrust. Also we are looking at, again, an improved slate of trade receivables, financing products as well. For a long time now on the table, has been this establishment of this Can \$10 million line of credit with Cuba, and we want to see this materialize as well.

I want to say to you, Mr. Vice-President, it is not going to be business as usual. I think we all have to push harder to expand the country's export sector to support industrial growth and, of course, in the long run to provide jobs, and to improve foreign exchange earnings as well. At the end of the day it is for prosperity for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I speak a little bit about investment and, of course, you will appreciate the critical role it plays in economic growth and diversification as well. This

Sen. The. Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

administration has inherited an investment deficient regime which I would say is characterized by poorly managed processes and systems, and I speak of investTT. I know that Sen. Bharath would not be happy with me saying that, but investTT started about three years ago under a previous Minister of Trade and Industry. I want to say that I am not pleased at all with its performance. We in the Ministry are continuing to assess and to say it is valuable; investTT must exist, but I think it needs to be totally looked at again. I am not sure that we have the right people; I am not sure that we have the right systems. Maybe we would want to look at perhaps having one promotional agency for Trinidad and Tobago. Maybe it is that the back room operations can be done by one organization instead of both, but we have got to look, more than ever, at doing things efficiently and effectively. It is because approximately \$70 million was spent on overheads and projects over the last three years by the last Government and, to our mind in the Ministry there have been minimal returns to date.

The company has been extensively facilitating local investors, which is absolutely important, but which is a service done by many of our Ministries, or which ought to be done by many of our Ministries, and also it is done by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. There is nothing wrong with investTT having that arm of facilitation as well, but we cannot overlook the reason it was primarily established, which was to facilitate foreign investments, and not a lot of that has taken place; so that is very, very disappointing. So a lot of money has been spent. I think investTT has tremendous potential, but they speak about \$600million in investments and so on, but many of these projects are yet to receive the necessary regulatory approvals. So I think they are counting the chickens before they are hatched.

For instance, I will tell you something. I am not happy about some of the individuals. Just as the last Government was over-travelled, so it is with this organization as well, over-travelled. I think they are matching their counterparts in the TDC, and in the other House we had spoken about that. I want to tell you that the last 18 months some of these executives have travelled to Geneva, New York, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, China, South Korea, San Francisco, Texas, Miami. And the point about it is we have not derived the kind of responses and investments that we should have realized from all of these trips. Just like the last Prime Minister's trips to India and China, we just have not realized the investments.

As a matter of fact, they seem to have a fascination with the Far East countries. There is one officer in a fairly senior position in investTT who travelled to the Far East for Christmas vacation, to join with family, when, in fact, what they did was to just include a business opportunity with it, and the Government paid that first-class travel all the way to the Far East for Christmas. That is highly unacceptable, and we are going to put a stop to all of that.

5.35 p.m.

And then, of course—"leh meh tell yuh"—there are some other issues, you know, and I will just give you a little bit and tickle you a little bit. [*Crosstalk*] No. We need to be serious about investTT and for instance, they have gotten an award, and we spoke about it in the last term, a prestigious UNCTAD Investment Promotion Award for Excellence. And what is interesting is that this award was based on the investment of one company. And I am not going to be calling a name, but it is an Indian-based recycling company which investTT claimed brought \$83 million worth of investment to Trinidad and Tobago. You would not

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

believe what is interesting is that there were attempts recently to deliver a package to the company, and of course, we could not deliver it because there was no place of operation, and it was returned to sender. No address found.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senator, I would just like to let you know right now that you have five more minutes of speaking time.

Se. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: So at the end of the day, \$83 million gone and the company really does not seem to exist. Again, these are the kinds of misfortunes that we have witnessed and many others as well. There is another investor who was supposed to invest \$6 million in exotic fruits like lychee plants and so on and poultry as well. Six million dollars and they have said to have employed 20 people, but as far as it was reported to us, there is one person. I do not know if it is a robotic arrangement and very automated system with regard to the pruning of these lychee trees and so on. I will leave it to you, Minister, to find out about that.

So, all of these arrangements, I mean, there was a golf tournament—\$3 million spent and 20 golf players came into Trinidad and Tobago. That is about \$150 million per golfer, I mean with no [*Crosstalk*] \$150,000 per golfer. I mean, and no great benefit to Trinidad and Tobago at the end. No follow-up, you know, on these leads and that is money down the drain again. Not good enough.

So, I will be quick. We really have to move towards remaking or redoing investTT, but it is here to stay. There is other legislation that we have to look at, and I will very quickly tell you about that. We need to enact new investment legislation. The antiquated Foreign Investment Act (FIA) of 1990, of course, needs to be redone. The international environment has changed significantly into one of increased liberalization, and of course, it demands significant changes to our legislative framework.

We again have to look at our model investment, promotion and protection agreement, again, to ensure that this agreement is in fact robust and modern, and will be a model for all other countries as well.

I am concerned about our industrial parks. And let me make the announcement that the industrial park in Point Fortin, after languishing for the last five years will in fact be opened on November 23 of this year. Tamana InTech Park like so many other projects under the People's Partnership, once it was conceptualized or built by a PNM administration, it lay dormant and is still waiting to be fully operationalized. And it was only close to the election—I mean this is a technology park—that there was a rush within the last two weeks before election that a call centre was placed there. A call centre is not the ideal type of business to place in a technology park like Tamana InTech Park.

I want to announce that the first phase will in fact be opened within this fiscal year. Twenty one lots will in fact be opened to the public. [*Desk thumping*] Let me just add, and of course, that fits into our whole plan for connectivity to the north-eastern area in Trinidad.

The Piarco Aero Park: work is under way with that as well and that now falls under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Tobago: we will work with our counterparts; we will work collectively and collaborate in promoting the Cove Eco-Industrial and Business Park. Whenever we are doing business we try to do some collaboration that will benefit us both.

I want to say just as I close, I want to say that we will be also spending some—TTBizLink and the SEW. We have just negotiated for another loan of US\$25 million with regard to that. So they are going to be looking at the enhancement of the overall operations of the Single Electronic Window that will

indeed enhance our competitiveness as well and will strengthen existing relations with our partnering agencies and introduce new e-services as well, and so that really helps the ease of doing business as well.

E-commerce is on the cards again, very important. So you can look forward to that. The national consumer policy is very, very important and we look forward to a harmonized consumer protection legislation as well, and also a tribunal to effectively address consumer complaints and issues as well. And we look forward to country-wide consumer educational campaigns as well in the favour of the consumer.

As I conclude I want to reemphasize our commitment to transforming the economy to one that is resilient, to one that is robust and dynamic and that in fact serves all of the business people in Trinidad and Tobago and indeed all of the citizens Trinidad and Tobago. There will be dialogue with all of the stakeholders, and I mean all of the stakeholders, the used car dealers, all of the Chambers whether it Chaguanas, San Juan there will be collaboration across the board, civic society, local content, there will be full collaboration by our Government. We are very, very serious about facilitating new revenue streams and creating all of these trade and investment opportunities. We will be facilitative and we will help our economy to grow and develop.

I want to thank you very much, but I want to say that this administration, this PNM administration will in fact restore confidence. We will in fact restore trust and we will in fact do this together. I invite the others on the other side to join us as well. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Thank you, Sen. The Hon. Gopee-Scoon for your contribution. Sen. Singh.

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

(Sen. Avinash Singh): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Before I start I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Almighty God for allowing me yet again the strength and the ability to come in this august Chamber to represent the interests of the people of this Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I would also like to thank the hon. Prime Minister Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley for his wisdom and his guidance in allowing us the young people of this nation to take responsibility for our future [*Desk thumping*] and to take responsibility for the future generations to come.

Mr. Vice-President, I would also like to acknowledge and congratulate our Madam President, in her assent to the Chair and I therefore look forward to her contribution and keeping the decorum of this august Chamber in moving forward. And your good self, Mr. Vice-President, for being I believe the first 36-year-old in the history of this country to sit in that position. [*Desk thumping*] I would also like to congratulate all Senators—Government, Opposition and Independent. Some I have had the opportunity and good honour to serve alongside, whether it be temporary and whether it be permanent, while sitting on the Opposition Bench in the Tenth Republican Parliament.

Mr. Vice-President, let me also take one minute of my time to congratulate my alma mater the Couva East Government Secondary School, where I spent seven years of my life, for having attained seven scholarships in the recent time, and particularly the principal Mrs. Madhuri Persad-Ali who also taught me Caribbean history. So congratulations to that government secondary school that has attained that level of success. [*Desk thumping*] In also extending this regard and congratulations all students of Trinidad and Tobago I assure you as a 26-year

old Senator, we the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago assure you that your future is definitely in good hands and safe with this People's National Movement in Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am honoured to join this debate at this point in time on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2015. I also join my colleagues in congratulating the Minister of Finance for presenting a budget which can be described as timely and sobering with a focus on realities and challenges which currently face our country and consistent with the theme "Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this Together".

But, Mr. Vice-President, as most citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are aware the last five years have been extremely traumatic and one does not have to look far to recognize the signs of this trauma. When you look at some of the experiences that the population has had to endure, you would have realized an uncontrolled, out of control crime, systematic weakening of our state sectors and institutions, accusations of rampant institutionalized acts of corruption now supported by mountains of information, and as we speak information and files like these are turning up with evidence of these blatant acts of corruption. Increasing disregard for the rule of law by those who mask themselves as role models for our young people. Mr. Vice-President, these are just but a few. The list can go on.

So it was indeed refreshing for me and by extension the majority of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago to have witnessed a public official, the country's Minister of Finance presenting the true realities of our country's economic condition which represents a marked departure from what we have had to endure over the last five years.

Mr. Vice-President, this is indeed a good start because as a young man I

have always been taught and believed that being truthful will always assist in overcoming all challenges and is the main ingredient in restoring confidence and rebuilding trust. So together—and I say together because we expect to have participation from the Opposition Bench and the Independent Bench—because if we really care about Trinidad and Tobago we will leave the party politics outside and we will definitely move towards that direction for benefiting all of Trinidad and Tobago.

While I am here let me remind this honourable Chamber that while having the opportunity to sit on the Opposition Bench in the Tenth Republican Parliament as an Opposition Senator, we the Opposition back then supported over 95 per cent of legislation brought in this Chamber. So, I would like to advise the hon. Members of the Opposition, please, carry that good faith in terms of dealing with the people's interest and the people's issues.

Mr. Vice-President, we the right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will turn things around towards a brighter future and in agricultural terms—because let me declare, I am also a farmer—we will create that environment and we look forward to lush, green, productive pastures ahead.

Mr. Vice-President, as our country continues to grapple with the continued decline in oil and gas prices and violent crime fuelled, in part, by youth delinquency, the need to diversify our economy and provide meaningful and sustainable opportunities for our young citizens becomes ever so important.

Mr. Vice-President, currently our food import bill stands at over \$5 billion and that is so primarily because over the last five years the state of agriculture, the agricultural sector can be described as pathetically poor. Despite being allocated a total of over \$5.5 billion and not to mention fabricated statements after statements

right here in this august Chamber by the last administration, simply misinforming and misguiding this population of the true state of agriculture in this country, therefore, the question to be asked is, why after spending \$5.4 billion in agriculture the country's food import bill has not declined? The answer lies in the last Government's inability to speak the truth and manage effectively where the agricultural sector was concerned.

Mr. Vice-President, while it was clear that the former government had no difficulty in spending exorbitant sums of money, any primary school child will tell you that spending is the easiest part of managing. The challenging part is achieving meaningful objectives. And under measures to increase agricultural growth, the former Government made the following promises to us in all facets of life in terms of agriculture.

5.50 p.m.

When you look at their contributions, and you can get them in *Hansard*, back to back, all the budget speeches that went before, when you look at 2010 to 2011, they promised the development of greenhouse and other similar technology-driven agricultural projects. They also promised restructuring of the ADB, the Agricultural Development Bank, to provide increased services to farmers. In 2012 they promised to reduce the Food Import Bill by 50 per cent, to \$2 billion by 2015. We are nowhere close to that. In 2012 they also promised NAMDEVCO to establish a commodity stabilization fund to stabilize both supply and price issues whereby strengthening the agro-processing sector. Because, as we all know Christmas is upon us and everybody wants to make their ponche-de-crème and so on, and let us use one commodity, ginger. Sometimes you could go to the market and pay \$5, \$10 per pound, and then closer to Christmas you pay up

to \$30 and \$40 per pound. No price standardization whatsoever. Same thing with tomato, sometimes you go to the market, you pay \$2 a pound and then sometimes you go and you have to pay \$20 a pound. Absolutely no price stabilization, and nothing was done over the last five years to put some structure in place.

In 2012 the population was also promised the establishment of large and small farms comprising 4,111 acres of Caroni land and 100 acres at Tucker Valley. I still await the success of any of these promises. In 2012/2013 they promised the distribution of the two-acre size plots to former employees of Caroni; 5,000 such plots to be distributed in the next two years; and that was the promise in 2012. They also promised in 2012 the establishment of a food security facility, and you heard them speak about the option and the opportunity to establish agricultural estates in Guyana. A delegation went down there, I do not know what became of that. They also promised the establishment of a national food action plan in 2014.

Mr. Vice-President, the issue here is that spending money alone did not and will not solve any of our country's challenges unless that spending is coupled with the right implementation and the right policies, and one such place to look for those right policies is none other than the People's National Movement manifesto [*Desk thumping*] and that document is now government policy. Every page, every line, there is something in it for the national population. After five years and \$5.5 billion, it is safe to say that the main reason our food import bill stands at over \$5 billion is because the wrong people were managing our agricultural sector. They did not have a clue of what they were doing, or just maybe they very well knew what they were doing.

Mr. Vice-President, over the years this Government has been warned about the mismanagement in the agricultural sector from a number of sources. And no

less than the installed Governor of the Central Bank was speaking in an interview following the biannual release of the Central Bank's Monetary Policy Report, November 12. I would just like to quote one paragraph, and hear what he had to say. And I am quoting from the *Daily Express*, November 13, 2012, and Mr. Rambarran was speaking, no less than their Governor, and I quote:

“But Rambarran observed that State enterprises in the agriculture sector—in particular the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (Namdevco), the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), and the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association (TTABA)—already have governance issues.

‘Whatever is the source of weaker performance or lack of performance is for the Government to handle. My concern is the impact on the agriculture sector. The data we have seen suggest that the sector has not grown over the course of the year. If you look at some of the data which comes out of Namdevco in terms of root crops, we've seen significant contractions in terms of production.

What we'd like to see is a timely resolution on these issues concerning the governance of the State enterprises, particularly the ones in agriculture. We know agriculture is seen as a critical plank in the Government policy in terms of employment generation and diversification and generating enough foreign exchange. I think there needs to be a timely resolution to these matters,' he explained.”

Mr. Vice-President, this is in 2012, and after all the billions of dollars and all the promises, they themselves admitted that the agricultural sector remains stagnant or contracted, and yet still they would come to the Parliament and try to paint a

different story.

Mr. Vice-President, in addition, from 2010 to 2015, and this one I take very personally, because I am also a farmer, you all recall crops being bulldozed, from pineapple in Mausica, to “bodi”, sweet potato and hot pepper in Egypt Trace and Dass Trace, Chaguanas by the HDC, and the bulldozer Minister then? You all recall there was the bulldozing of tomato, “ochro”, pumpkin, plantain and cassava in Chaguaramas by the Chaguaramas Development Authority. Farmers were also driven off their lands like in Fairfield, Princes Town and Gouyave Road in Chaguaramas. There was also victimization when it came to compensation from flood, as it was, in Las Lomas and Cunupia, their own constituencies.

There were also widespread protests from Chaguaramas to Icacos by farmers, supported by a number of NGOs. There had also been the withholding of agricultural lands. And this one, Mr. Vice President, where the UNC Government in the past promised to deliver on the ex-Caroni workers land issue, where is that situation today? Yesterday in this august Chamber we had to listen to some of the ills in the agricultural sector where land is concerned, one of the most important and valuable resources to the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] And here you have, Mr. Vice President, agricultural lands to former Caroni workers being promised in successive budgets, and you could go on *Hansard* from 2010 to 2014 and it was just a promise.

Hon. Senator: Never delivered.

Sen. A. Singh: Never delivered. Some of those Caroni two-acre plot tenants have died, some of these persons who are still awaiting their residential plots have died, and that Government sought to disregard and disrespect some of the same said persons who would have put them there in the first place.

Mr. Vice President, with a food import bill of over \$5 billion coupled with a decline of over 15 per cent over the last five years in real production within the agricultural sector, this represents both the challenge and opportunity for our country. While the challenges are obvious I would like to discuss some of the opportunities this presents. Mr. Vice-President, I started earlier by saying the need for diversification of our economy, this will provide meaningful and sustainable opportunities for our young citizens, our professionals. Some of the professionals who also belong to organizations like the Heliconia Foundation, which this present-day Opposition tried to demonize.

Mr. Vice-President, under this People's National Movement Government and via the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, initiatives will be undertaken to modernize the profession of farming, thereby instilling a degree of sexiness to the field of agriculture. And why I use this terminology—I see my friend, Sen. Dhanayshar Mahabir laughing—but these are the innovations that we speak about. We need to create the environment for participation.

When you look at the agricultural statistics—and I cannot depend on the CSO, thanks to UNC for destroying that institution as well, I have to look to all the county offices, the agricultural organizations for data, and all of them will tell you, Mr. Vice-President, the farming population is going down. We are in troubled times. We have not seen an increase in participation of new farmers, and that is a problem. Because, along with professions of doctors, and lawyers and accountants, and we respect all of them, I would like the day to come when a young person like myself could go home to their parents and say, “mother or father, I would like to become a farmer”. And there is no other time than now under the People's National Movement in Government. [*Desk thumping*]. No

other time.

And that profession is one of patriotism and pride, because at the end of the day it feels good to know that somebody out there has your labour, your time and your effort on their plates for breakfast, lunch or dinner. And that is how important farmers are in this country. And it is this Government led by the Prime Minister, the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, who was also a Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, who has also been involved in the agricultural sector as a farmer, and you would hear the Prime Minister boast of having his farmer's registration card. That is the level of participation by the hon. Prime Minister in this Ministry where I am a proud Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Mr. Vice-President, this situation, it triggers all levels of my emotion, because some may say the agricultural sector consist of a consumer base of 1.3 million, but I am thinking broader. The market actually consists of over seven billion people, and we need to start thinking down those lines. In our manifesto, Mr. Vice-President, we promised the agricultural sector, and thankfully just around \$1.2 billion—and as the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries Sen. the hon. Clarence Rambharat indicated yesterday, it is not how much money that you get, it is how you spend that money, it is how you manage that money, and it is where that money should go where it is most needed. And who needs it? In my humble opinion, the farmers and the fishermen need that money. It is not to be taken up in structure and the governance on the administration, and let me just tell you, all the allocation given to this Ministry the least chunk is given to the actual farmers who help drive the sector. These are the persons that have to be benefiting the most.

Mr. Vice President, I would like to indicate some of our promises, and when we speak to getting young people involved, participation. I refer to the graduate recruitment programme, and this programme, where we have identified each Ministry will be incorporating some 20 persons, graduates, qualified persons, and incorporating them into their structure to make some meaningful contribution. In my research, I turned to the University of the West Indies, and, strange enough you have graduates coming out of these facilities, these institutions, and where are they? One such person I have identified, who did a research paper, it was her undergraduate project and the theme is to identify supermarket opportunities and challenges for fresh fruit and vegetable farmers in Trinidad and Tobago. And this was done by one Giatree Moonilal on March 19, 2012. And an abstract is available on the Internet.

And this young professional has spent some significant time and resource in developing this area of her study in agriculture, and what I am saying, what the Government is saying, persons like this, persons who have some degree of passion in whatever field they are pursuing, should be the ones given priority to be incorporated in the Ministry. For example, this young lady, she could very well be incorporated in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, because of her passion and her expertise in that area. When you go on, you have Keya Thomas, who also did a research paper, Impact on Food Prices on Households in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, here you have potential participants in the area of agriculture, graduating out of the University of the West Indies, St Augustine campus, who have spent some four years in an undergraduate programme, and where are they? Do these persons have to go through a structure and end up, for example, somebody who is

doing agri-business management ending up in accounts, or somebody who is doing accounts ending up in fisheries?

6.05p.m.

The point is, this programme is really geared towards getting that professionalism from the young people, the young professionals and having them incorporated in the Ministry that they could really make a difference and really give an input in terms of what they are pursuing.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to turn to another area, and although the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries spent some time addressing some of the issues where ADB, Agricultural Development Bank, and funding is concerned, I would just share an experience that a close relative of mine would have had under the last administration.

Could you imagine the Agricultural Development Bank, apart from spending \$9 million doing Jacuzzi and all of that, a farmer approaching the Agricultural Development Bank in the last two years for a loan of TT \$100,000 to invest in agriculture inputs, and the first thing the bank would ask that farmer is for collateral. Nothing wrong with that. But the bank asked that farmer for a brand-new tractor valued at \$250,000, for collateral, plus \$40,000 on a fixed deposit, for just \$100,000. And that is the level of disrespect that the Agricultural Development Bank was giving the farming population under the tenure of the last administration.

And why I say this, Mr. Vice-President, it is because the farmers who really need funding, as the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries indicated, the farmers in the rural communities who really need a development project, a development programme, they are not benefiting. So when persons in the

population see the thrust by this Government in honouring and respecting the farming population by carrying the services of the Ministry to the farmers and not having the farmers come to the Ministry for services, that is the vision, that is the legacy and that is the direction any First-World country should be heading.

So I am particularly pleased as the rest of the farming population who have applauded the move by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in collaboration, in terms of moving the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to Central Trinidad and that of Chaguanas, closer to the users of this Ministry. [*Desk thumping*] And it is the approach of this Ministry to carry all resources closer to the people who really require it.

Let me turn to another challenging area, Mr. Vice-President, land tenure. Now, we have spoken to, and I am coming to the taxes and exemptions and all these things in a few minutes. But land tenure, in order to be registered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in this country you have to have land tenure, use of land, a land lease, a rental agreement or anything of the sort to acquire a farmer's registration card to be entitled to all incentives under the Ministry of Food Production, formerly called, now Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

So when you look at land tenure, land, as I indicated, one of the most valuable assets to this country that does not belong to only one or two contractors favoured by the last administration; those lands, Mr. Vice-President, belong to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, all. And yes we have situations where residential requires land, commercial requires land and agriculture, industrial. So what we are saying is that bringing back the thrust of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries back under, and I am not going to go in-depth detail, the hon.

Minister went to length in terms of the structure and bringing back that under one umbrella. But it makes the point that we in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, we need to move fast, we need to move quick in terms of getting that Ministry up and running where staffing is concerned, so that all the development programmes on the agenda of this Government can take shape, because almost all the development programmes and infrastructural development programmes require land.

But in that same breath, Mr. Vice-President, we will not disrespect the farming population and we will not disrespect the agriculturalists who require land and they should be given priority in terms of the good fertile soils, wherever they may lie. So we will be doing that in the coming months, in the coming years and identifying the land suitable for agricultural production, for housing, for other development plans and so on, but that is important because in order to be accessing the incentives you have to have that land tenure. And whereas in the last administration—Government then; Opposition now— came to this Parliament two or three days before the general election to try to mamaguy the population of land tenure and dealing with their issues in terms of regularization, we will not disrespect the population in that manner.

Let me move to some of the infrastructural areas for the development of the agricultural sector. And coincidentally, Mr. Vice-President, in 2013 I was candidate Avinash for the Chaguanas West by-election and, coincidentally, the person I ran against is also in this august Chamber. Why I raise this is because I spoke against an issue. During the Chaguanas West by-election where URP was concerned, URP Agriculture was concerned, and why I say this is because one week after I assumed office as Parliamentary Secretary a file came to my desk on

URP Agriculture, a copy of that file came to my desk, copied to the hon. Minister and the Permanent Secretary. And the headline, URP Agriculture—\$126 million still outstanding to contractors.

But I raise this in the context because, let me recollect very clearly, during the Chaguanas West by-election in which I was a candidate and another hon. Member of this august Chamber was also a candidate, Government then, used \$47million of your money, Mr. Vice-President, and my money and Trinidad and Tobago's money in Felicity alone, Chaguanas West alone, under the URP Programme during the Chaguanas West by-election. And let me tell you—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: And they still lost.

Sen. A. Singh: They still lost. [*Desk thumping*] So, like in Tobago, money is not everything to everybody in this country. [*Desk thumping*] We still have some right- thinking citizens in this country. Mr. Vice-President, let me also add that under that URP Programme where I was the candidate—now Parliamentary Secretary—I have to address the same problem. I know the project very well because I live within walking distance from the area and, up to this day, contractors who were involved in that programme, and one came to my mind because it was always in the media and I am still waiting to see a machine or equipment from that contractor, Paramount Cleaning.

Hon. Senator: Who is that?

Sen. A. Singh: And who is that? Who is that—Paramount Cleaning. I am just going to identify one or two.

During the Chaguanas West by-election, Paramount Cleaning, Mr. Vice-President, claimed close to \$1 million in contract. Anika Gumbs, in

Appropriation (Financial Year 2016)
 Bill, 2015
 Sen. A. Singh (cont'd)

2015.10.21

Chaguanas West, URP Agriculture and, up to this day, I am still waiting to see a machinery that belongs to Paramount Cleaning. No work whatsoever was done in Chaguanas West. Ask the farming population in Felicity; ask the farming population in Chaguanas West, and that was just \$1 million out of \$47 million.

Sen. Rambharat: We are going Saturday to see the road.

Sen. A. Singh: And on Saturday, might I also add, that the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, myself, and the technical team will be in Felicity, will be in central looking at these projects and developments, where taxpayers' money would have to go. And that is the level of corruption that we speak about, where we, the taxpayers, are abused, where the farming population has to suffer.

Let me also add, my first week in the Ministry, a box of agricultural subsidies and incentives were lying there for two years and farmers have to suffer. Farmers have to wait, and these are farmers who have spent their last money via ADB or wherever to mechanize their operation, to put resources into food production for me and you and them and everybody to eat and they have to suffer. Two years a box collecting dust and they are not taken seriously. Disrespected—

Sen. Rambharat: \$19million.

Sen. A. Singh: And you know what is the sum, Mr. Vice-President? The sum is \$19 million in farmers' incentives and subsidies. I am saying this to tell the farming population, who, coincidentally, almost all of them are supporting the People's National Movement in Government now. [*Desk thumping*] Because when you look at Caroni Central which I would have offered my candidacy for—

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

And I welcome, Madam President.

When you look at Caroni Central in the history of that seat, People's

Appropriation (Financial Year 2016)
Bill, 2015
Sen. A. Singh (cont'd)

2015.10.21

National Movement only claimed 4,500 votes thereabout, good or bad, and this time in 2015 the People's National Movement got 7,200 votes, almost doubled, [*Desk thumping*] and I say to those people, thank you. And I say to those people, thank you for awaking, in terms of sending a message to the UNC that they do not own your votes and they do not own you in Central Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] They do not own you.

Madam President: Sen. Singh, you have five more minutes.

Sen. A. Singh: Thank you, Madam President. I am telling you, because it hurts me as a farmer when resources have to go in all these channels. And let me tell you, Madam President, out of this \$126 million still outstanding to contractors I just enquired, I spoke to a few of them and the message they sent to me, the reason why some of them were not paid is because, it is alleged that they did not spend or they did not give the 40 per cent kickback that was required by those who were involved and the administrators of URP Agriculture. High officials, Madam President! And they have to suffer. Some of them have lost their business, lost their house. Sen. Cummings also mentioned earlier, they lost their machinery, equipment. Thank you, to the United National Congress and the People's Partnership.

Madam President, I will say more on that at another occasion. Let me go straight to duty and tax free that is geared towards helping the agricultural sector, and this, I should also take the opportunity to respond to Sen. Bharath. Well, coincidentally, he was also a Minister of Agriculture. So let me also indicate to the hon. Senator that under the last package or the incentive programme you were paid 20 per cent of the cost of a vehicle via subsidy. A brand-new vehicle max up to \$40,000. A three-ton truck for transportation in agriculture up to \$60,000. And

reefers were also used but the reefers are very expensive in terms of cold storage and transporting perishable items.

I called for a quotation from a reputable company, and let me tell the farming population, the green pastures that are ahead from January 01, 2016. Any farmer requiring to buy an approved vehicle for agricultural purposes, let me tell you the savings you will be getting. A vehicle valued at \$310,000 attracts a motor vehicle tax of \$7,455. A value added tax 15 per cent—but I think we are going to bring that down to 12.5, so that is a plus right there— \$40,300 and something and an import duty of \$17,800. When you remove these taxes and duties you have a farmer, in one vehicle for agricultural purposes, saving \$65,000. [*Desk thumping*] And this is the lower of the spectrum.

Sen. Bharath: You have not read the Customs Act and the value added tax. Those are already exempt, my friend. Read it it properly.

Sen. A. Singh: Madam President, I am saying this because I, in my different incarnation as a farmer, purchased a vehicle and only got 20 per cent of the cost.

Sen. Rambharat: Not a Porsche Cayenne.

Sen. A. Singh: Of course, I did not purchase a Porsche Cayenne. But I purchased a vehicle for my agricultural production and I only got 20 per cent of the cost that was taken out of the showroom price and that was before all the taxes were added.

6.20p.m.

What we are telling the farming population is that we are going to remove these taxes, remove these duties and give you, [*Desk thumping*] the farming population, the respect that you deserve. Let me also indicate that Foreshore boat engines—Sen. Bharath—to the fishing population, you will also gain because these engines, and like time, tend to develop new technology, and you will also stand to

benefit.

In terms of the chemical, while I wrap up, Madam President, the hydrous ammonia used as a nitrogen fertilizer attracts a 15 per cent duty. Rodenticides, Madam President, attract a 20 per cent duty. Sulphuric acid, which is used in the manufacturing of fertilizer, attracts a 15 per cent duty. Now all of that will be free.

[Desk thumping]

So, Madam President, as I close, let me tell this farming population and the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, respect you, we respect all citizens and we will be doing whatever we have to do in the best interest of the country and at the end of the day the consumers stand to benefit. So let us do this together, Madam President.

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute. *[Desk thumping]*

Madam President: Sen. Coppin.

Sen. W. Michael Coppin: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to address this honourable House. Madam President, may I congratulate you on your appointment as President of the Senate and wish you all the best in this role.

I first wish to thank Almighty God, for it is only by His grace that we exist, and it is only by His will can we do anything in this life. I wish to thank as well, the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, for the confidence he has reposed in me and I reaffirm my commitment to Trinidad and Tobago that I will discharge my duties to the best of my ability.

Madam President, I must also comment on and commend the contribution of all Senators who contributed to the Appropriation Bill today and yesterday. While I invariably enjoyed some more than others, I think the general tone of the debate was cordial and progressive. I must, like the hon. Sen. Franklin Khan, comment on

the quality and diversity of the Government Bench. I know the hon. Sen. Ameen expressed some doubt about the Government's commitment to youth and gender issues, but I think even she would admit that this bench is reflective of a rainbow nation. [*Desk thumping*]

What we have here is a judicious mix of youth and maturity and, I dare say that it is an undoubtable consequence of the People's National Movement being a national party. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, the People's National Movement was founded on principles of equal opportunity and meritocracy, and rest assured these principles remain deeply entrenched in the heart and the soul of our party. There is no doubt in my mind that our policies and programmes will reflect such.

To confirm what I have just intimated, permit me a short anecdote about a 74-year-old woman I met yesterday in a supermarket in Belmont. She told me she had fallen in love again with her country. I asked her why. She told me it was because she had followed the debate in the Lower House and yesterday in the Senate, and she had observed that this new Government was not afraid to give young people a chance. [*Desk thumping*] Incidentally, she lamented the lack of representation of youth and young women on the Opposition Bench. She lamented that despite being 50 per cent of the national population, women only consist of one-sixth of the Opposition Bench. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Mark: "She tell yuh all dat?"

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Yes. She was a very perceptive, very socially, very politically aware 74-year-old young lady.

Sen. Mark: "De lady eh tell you dat."

Sen. W. M. Coppin: "Tantie" went on to say that as a consequence she did not

Appropriation (Financial Year 2016)
 Bill, 2015
 Sen. W. M. Coppin (cont'd)

2015.10.21

have confidence that the Opposition would properly, or could properly, analyze and critique the budget or any policy for that matter of fact.

Sen. Mark: Poor granny.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Poor granny.

Sen. Mark: Poor granny. Oh God.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Madam President, these are the words of a senior citizen.

Sen. Mark: God help him.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: So, Madam President, when Sen. Sturge comes into this honourable House today and he attempts to demonize the Heliconia Foundation, for which I say—and I am the proud president of that organization—[*Desk thumping*] And I heard Sen. Mark ask the question: Are we associated with the People's National Movement? And I say, yes. [*Desk thumping*] And he should know because the heliconia is a balisier and if he knows what is a balisier—he would know that is the symbol of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

But more than that, Madam President, the Heliconia Foundation, we discriminate against no one. We are a young professional think tank dedicated to advancing and upholding the principles of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] And more importantly, we are dedicated to advancing and uplifting Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam President, one needs to be between the ages of 25 to 39 to join the Heliconia Foundation. I am sorry that Sen. Sturge has crossed the age of 39 apparently, so his application probably was rejected. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Sen. Mark: Okay, President.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: But if he behaves himself and he commits to the

advancement of Trinidad and Tobago we may well make him an honorary member, as Sen. Foster Cummings is, and many others are.

But back to business, Madam President. It is well known that the Senate's role in the Westminster tradition is to represent and take into account the views and the interests and elements of society which may insufficiently be reflected in the composition of the other House. The conventional justification for the existence of a second Chamber is that it acts as a revising Chamber to scrutinize the details of legislation proposed by the Lower House and to allow time for second thoughts, thus acting as a constitutional safeguard against the possible excesses of majority rule and party politics. The function of the second Chamber includes, among other things, to advise on public policy, bringing a range of perspectives to bear that should be broadly representative of society and, in particular, to provide a voice for regions and ethnic minorities and interest groups.

Madam President, in trying to understand my role in the Appropriation Bill today, I sought counsel of my old constitutional law textbooks. I was reminded that in the United Kingdom, by convention and supported by the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949, the House of Lords does not discuss government finance, this being a prerogative of the House of Commons. Madam President, we have a similar tradition here. Section 63 of our Constitution states that a "Money Bill shall not be introduced in the Senate."

And section 64(1) states:

"That where a Money Bill, having been passed by the House of Representatives and sent to the Senate at least one month before the end of the session, is not passed by the Senate without amendment within one month after it is sent to the Senate, the Bill shall, unless the House of

Representatives otherwise resolves, be presented to the President for assent notwithstanding that the Senate has not consented to the Bill.”

This means that the role of the Senate, generally, as it relates to the Appropriation Bill, is limited but vital to ensuring that important issues of revenue and expenditure are fully ventilated by a House of Parliament that represents the diversity of citizens. This is why I raised the point of youth and women being adequately represented in this noble House.

That said, Madam President, I turn to the specifics of the Appropriation Bill, 2016, and first I would like to deal with macroeconomic policy. I must, like most commentators, comment on the Minister of Finance’s maiden budget; such quality in such short space of time. Some have called it the budget of the century. I concur, Madam President.

As an economist, it made me proud. It made me proud because it demonstrated to me that this Government gets it. This Government understands the fundamentals of good macroeconomic policy. This Government understands that when you have five years of negative and flat growth, you do not just stop spending. You just do not adopt a policy of austerity.

I was taken aback by the alarmist remarks of Sen. Mark yesterday in this House—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Hysterical.

Sen. W. M. Coppin:—that this Government had adopted a policy of austerity. Madam President, a commitment to cutting waste and inefficiency is not austerity. [*Desk thumping*] A commitment to doing away with corruption and nepotism is not austerity. [*Desk thumping*] A commitment to future generations is not austerity. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Tell him.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Even in the face of wild spending by the past UNC Government, an empty Treasury and maxed-out credit pledged with the funds that ought to rightly have been used to pursue sustainable development, such as the Green Fund, this Government did not just come and cut spending. That would be a recipe for disaster. In fact, this is a \$63 billion budget.

Last year's budget, I am informed, was \$61.8 billion. In fiscal 2014, \$62.8 billion; fiscal 2013, \$58.8 billion. So what austerity? In fact, Madam President, I was also taken aback when Sen. Vasant Bharath came to this noble House this morning and said that this was the largest budget ever seen in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. So it appears to me that one hand—the left hand—does not know what the right hand is doing. Or, as Sen. Clarence Rambharat said yesterday, the right finger does not know what the other finger is doing. So you have two persons—two hon. Senators—from the exact same party saying different things, diametrically opposed.

It is not a Government of austerity; it is a smart budget; it is a budget that is meant to take Trinidad and Tobago back on track. Conventional sound economics tells us that counter-cyclical fiscal policy, that is to say, a policy of deficit budgets in time of recession, can be beneficial if the money is expended on right things. These right things are investments with a good rate of return—capital investments, Madam President. On the other hand, if a government adopts a pro-cyclical economic policy, that is to say, it cuts when the economy is declining, it risks deepening the recession. In such instances, the economy is deprived of the multiplier effect. Inventories pile up. More people become unemployed, and as the saying goes, Madam President, “Crapaud smoke yuh pipe”.

This Government, however, gets it. This Government understands that successive deficits without a plan to return the country to a balanced budget is unsustainable, and I was heartened by the Finance Minister's commitment that this Government would return this country to fiscal balance by the year 2018, if Almighty God wills it.

What we witnessed in the last five years was simply bad, bad, bad economics. The last Government's economic policy was to spend, spend, spend on recurrent expenditure and spend, spend, spend on developmental projects, both out of the Consolidated Fund, and borrow, borrow and borrow, and pledge without thinking about future generations. This is a recipe for disaster and it is no wonder why we are in the state we are in today. They came, they saw, they squandered. They came, they saw, they plundered. Theirs was not a Government working for you. Theirs was a government working against you. [*Desk thumping*] Minister after Minister in the Lower House commented in the debate about the wanton waste and corruption they found in their Ministries and the people of Trinidad and Tobago held their noses. Madam President, I am sure that much more will be revealed in the coming weeks so I leave it where it is.

Madam President, today I wish to speak primarily as an Attorney-at-Law on the Government's stated legislative agenda as stated by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister, Stuart Young. I want to start off, however, by commenting on an article reported in the newspaper that disturbed me immensely. *Sunday Express*, October 14, story by Anna Ramdass reporting, and I quote, with your leave:

“Opposition Chief Whip Dr. Roodal Moonilal has threatened that the Opposition will withhold its support for key legislation should Government

members continue being arrogant and disrespectful.”

6.35 p.m.

The Chief Whip is reported as saying:

“You all have what is called an amendment making majority. Any bill that requires serious change in the society, serious change in our economic system, serious reform to”—our—“Constitution, guess whose support you”—going to—“need. God.”

The article continues to quote the hon. Member for Oropouche East:

“When you come for local government reform should we stand and say you in the Government, deal with it,”

Further, the hon. Member for Oropouche East is quoted as stating and I quote:

“...this will also apply when Government brings legislation on financial system reform...”

Madam President, shame.

When we put these threats against the backdrop of the People’s National Movement voting record in the 2010—2015 period in which we were in Opposition and which we supported 62 out of 87 Bills proposed by the UNC Government. That is to say, 71 per cent of all Bills proposed by the UNC. It indicates to the population which party truly cares about this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, if we look specifically at the PNM’s voting record in the Appropriation Bills in the last five years, we are on record as supporting two of the budgets. We are also on record as supporting five out of eight finance supplementary Bills and finance supplementation and variation Bills; we voted for

country. So when the Opposition says that they will withhold their support from the duly democratically elected Government on key pieces of legislation if we continue exposing the waste and corruption of the last five years, they are saying that they will reject the will of the people; they are saying they will put party first. I say this is an attack on Trinidad and Tobago and I say this is a shame.

If history has taught us anything about the PNM under hon. Dr. Keith Rowley it is that we will not shake from our responsibility to this country, we will not back down from a fight; we do what is right; we are convinced of the rectitude of our actions, if corruption needs to be exposed, we will expose it. [*Desk thumping*] Because, Madam President, when the PNM sits down and analyzes its legislation, when we sit down and decide whether or not we will support a Bill, the PNM does not do what is solely in the PNM's interest, but rather, and most importantly, we do what is in the national interest.

Madam President, this Government's legislative agenda, as articulated in the appropriation Bill, is vast and wide-reaching. In short, the Opposition withheld and now threatens to withhold its support for:

1. The Appropriation Bill, 2016 with its commitment to improving the lives of young people through GATE and HELP and the Graduate Recruitment Programme and the Rent to Own Programme, and the Home Improvement Subsidy to name a few.
2. The Opposition now threatens to withhold its support from the fight against corruption through the reform of the Integrity Commission and reforming the Integrity in Public Life Act.
3. The Opposition now threatens to withhold its support from giving the Judiciary financial autonomy for the first time in its history.

4. The Opposition now threatens to derail all efforts at campaign finance reform.
5. The Opposition threatens whistle-blowing legislation.
6. The Opposition threatens the reform of the Industrial Relations Act, Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, and other outdated labour legislation.
7. The Opposition threatens procurement reform.
8. The Opposition threatens local government reform.
9. The Opposition threatens the improvement of our financial regulation by the reform of the Insurance Bill and the Credit Union Bill and other pieces of legislation that govern the Securities Exchange Commission, the Financial Intelligence Unit and the Central Bank, and a wide range of other initiatives that would improve the lives of the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam President, permit me to speak a bit more about these planned reforms. One, the Integrity Commission and the Integrity in Public Life Act. This Government has committed itself to reforming the Integrity Commission. The Integrity Commission is key to fighting the scourge of corruption that has descended upon our beloved country and reform of the Integrity in Public Life Act is long overdue.

Trinidad and Tobago became a party to the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption in April 1998 and, in June 2001, a party to MESICIC, that is the Mechanism for Follow-up on the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption. This inter-governmental body established within the framework of the OAS supports states in the implementation of the convention.

Having read the comprehensive report produced by MESICIC, which I will refer to as the OAS report which was submitted to the last Government in 2012, it is clear that the last Government failed Trinidad and Tobago. They failed this country because they sat down and did absolutely nothing to implement the recommendations on tackling corruption. This report recommended that Trinidad and Tobago—and I paraphrase:

- Consider providing the Integrity Commission with the competence to improve administrative sanctions for breaches of the Integrity in Public Life Act;
- Consider reviewing the adequacy of the sanctions in place for failure to comply with an investigation carried out by the Integrity Commission;
- Consider enacting regulations for the Integrity in Public Life Act;
- Provide the Integrity Commission with the budgetary and human resources needed for the proper performance of its function;
- Consider implementing a legislative framework to consider the examinations of public bodies of their practices and procedures in order to facilitate the discovery of corrupt practices.

Madam President, three years later, we have seen no movement towards fulfilling any of these recommendations and it, again, falls on the People's National Movement Government to save the day.

Campaign finance reform. The hon. Stuart Young spoke about commencing campaign finance reform efforts in January next year with a conference where the Government will invite international speakers and those already who have that type of legislation in their jurisdiction to present and to get us on a path to campaign finance reform. This Government has embarked on a new project to deal with

campaign finance reform, and this is listed as a line Item entitled “Drafting of Campaign Finance Legislation” and has a budget of \$1 million in this year’s budget. This can be found on page 71 of the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the Financial Year 2016*.

There is no denying that the Representation of the People Act is outdated and cannot meet the demands of an elections in a modern democratic state. By threatening to withhold its support for the Appropriation Bill, the Opposition is saying to the population, “We do not want campaign finance reform”. But this would be consistent of the overall approach of the UNC as they paid lip service to campaign finance in their five years in office, and I say shame.

Whistle-blowing legislation, Madam President, the scourge of corruption exists in Trinidad and Tobago because there appears to be no consequence to wrongdoing. According to the Whistleblower Protection Frameworks, Compendium of Best Practices and Guiding Principles for Legislation Study prepared by the OECD:

“Whistleblower protection is essential to encourage the reporting of misconduct, fraud and corruption. The risk of corruption is significantly heightened in environments where the reporting of wrongdoing is not supported or protected Protecting public sector whistleblowers facilitates the reporting of passive bribery, as well as the misuse of public funds, waste, fraud and other forms of corruption.”

Madam President, the statistics that I have gathered from the aforementioned OAS report indicate that from 2002 to 2012, the number of reports made to the Anti-Corruption Investigation Bureau, ACIB, was 628; while the number of persons charged, 143 and the number of persons convicted, 11. This is alarming.

During the last administration, the Thirteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises on the administration and operations of the ACIB recommended that whistle-blower legislation be enacted. For those who do not know, the Joint Select Committee was made up of both sides of this House. The said Joint Select Committee Report disclosed that 32 reports have been dismissed by the courts on the grounds of death of the complainant or witness, want of prosecution or most interestingly, prosecution witnesses unwilling to proceed in the matter.

So, Madam President, it is clear that protection for witnesses is a key element of the success at courts and ultimately, our fight against corruption. I am informed that this Government already has drafted whistle-blowing legislation, and will bring it very early in this term, and it is my hope that the Opposition will put aside partisan interest and support a Bill that will redound to the benefit of this country.

Financial autonomy for the Judiciary. For the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, a Government has committed itself to financial autonomy of the Judiciary. Why is this important? Permit me to refer to the Chief Justice, Ivor Archie, at the opening of the 2014/2015 Law Term and I quote:

“At present, the Judiciary is financed under the same model as Ministries and Government departments. This means that estimates are submitted to the Ministry of Finance as line items, which are then authorized by Parliament and managed by the Ministry of Finance. However, this model presents a variety of constraints for the Judiciary with regard to

- (i) carrying out its constitutionally mandated functions,
- (ii) implementing decisions with the efficiency and effectiveness needed,

and

(iii) maintaining the separation of powers doctrine, upon which our constitution is premised.”

The hon. Chief Justice goes on:

“One of the most important deficiencies in the present financing model is that the Judiciary by and large is given consideration simply as another Executive agency. In times of financial stringency therefore there is always the risk that the Judiciary’s expenditures will be trimmed at the discretion of the Executive just as it is free to trim the expenditures and functions of its own Ministries and Government Departments. The easiest target is the entity not...in the room.”

That is to say the Judiciary.

Madam President, like a record stuck on replay, the hon. Chief Justice had cause to repeat the same sentiment in the opening of this year’s 2015/2016 Law Term when he stated and I quote:

“...one of our key constraints for the 2014/2015 fiscal year, has been our inability to obtain the necessary financial resources to implement critical ...projects. Experience has taught us that it is difficult to keep the momentum on construction projects and responsibly commit resources when:

- (i) funding is not available during the time frame that the project is expected to be completed.
- (ii) funding cannot be assured during and at the time of the beginning of the year.
- (iii) there is a long lead time between requested and obtaining funding.”

There is no denying that the proper administration of justice, the rule of law and the separation of powers demand a financially autonomous Judiciary. So the PNM is on the right track when it proposes to give the Judiciary the financial autonomy prayed for so long by the Judiciary. Madam President, the UNC in Opposition now says to the population that they are prepared to vote against the autonomous Judiciary and I say, again, shame.

Attorney's fees: Madam President, I do not wish to go into this issue in any great length as it was covered extensively by the hon. Attorney General, Faris Al-Rawi and the hon. Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General, hon. Stuart Young in his contribution then in the other House, and today as well. But as an attorney, I feel compelled to. It is no exaggeration to say that a dark fog has descended across the legal profession. While the total figures have not come in, I would like to point out a number of figures that have jumped out at me. It is public record that the Ministry of the Attorney General spent a total of \$445 million on fees to attorneys in the last five years.

The hon. Attorney General reported in the Lower House that the sum of moneys spent by 60 state enterprises is \$292 million and further, that of the four out of 22 Ministries that have reported, \$166 million in legal fees were expended. This gives us roughly a total of \$900 million spent by the last Government in only five years.

6.50p.m.

Madam President, from the statistics that I have in my own possession, attorneys' fees as a percentage of the total allocation of recurrent expenditure to the Attorney General's Office, grew from 28 per cent in 2008 to 40 per cent in 2011, and now stands at a whopping 44 per cent in 2015. Forensic investigation for the

period 2010 to 2015 amounted to roughly \$221million. This is shocking.

The fees for forensic investigations are absolutely shocking, when one considers that we have an anti-corruption investigation bureau within the office of the Attorney General, which has been neglected and appears to be incapable of successfully prosecuting anyone. This means before anyone goes to court and without anyone “getting lock-up”, as we say in Trinidad and Tobago, millions of taxpayers’ dollars have already been expended.

The fees expended by the last Government are also alarming when we remind ourselves of the state of legal aid in this country. While a select few of attorneys were grossly and unjustly enriched, the poor man’s access to justice was being severely compromised. As you know, the Legal Aid and the Advice Act was amended in May 2012 to increase the fees paid to legal aid attorneys. However, these amendments do not appear to be sufficient. The hon. Chief Justice at the opening of 2013/2014, this is, after the amendment, stated:

“Despite the large numbers of Attorneys graduating from the Law School every year there appears to be a shortage of practising attorneys at the Criminal Bar...Often, the Court and the prosecution may be ready to proceed but the defendant is unrepresented. Despite increases in the fees payable on legal aid briefs, there are apparently still many attorneys who regard a substantial legal aid practice as not financially viable.”

In other words, Madam President, while the last Government was filling the pockets of their friends, we still have not come up with a solution that would ensure the legal aid attorneys are paid at a level that would ensure proper legal representation to those who cannot afford it. I would like to highlight the fact that this Government has increased the estimate of expenditure for legal aid to

\$33million up from \$22million in financial year 2015; this must be applauded.

Returning to the point about the quantum of fees, legal fees, paid in the last five years, it is noteworthy that the hon. Attorney General has expanded his point of reference, and has looked at the entire public service and state enterprises; this is a legitimate approach.

Madam President, I am dismayed at the press release issued by the UNC, and I see it was penned by the hon. Sen. Sturge in response to the Attorney General's exposé. It was reported in the *Trinidad Guardian*, October 13, 2015. It seems consistent with the former Attorney General Anand Ramlogan's skewed approach in saying if the matter is complex, let the attorneys charge what they want. This is too loose a policy and does not accord with the international trend within the legal profession to have fixed fees and ceiling fees determined before work is done. It is clear that we are going to have to legislate and regulate the method of contracting out legal work in the public service and, more specifically, the method of assessing what are reasonable fees for work done.

The Civil Proceedings Act 1998 regulates cost by expressly stating what the prescribed costs are for certain types of actions, and it expressed the detailed circumstances and methods to be used when costs are to be assessed. We have also regulated fees for non-contentious matters in the Legal Profession Act. However, where there is no regulation we must depend on the Legal Profession Act's code of ethics. For example, section 31(1) of the code states:

“An attorney-at-law is entitled to reasonable compensation”—I will say reasonable compensation—“for his service but should avoid charges which either overestimate or undervalue the service rendered.”

Section 31(2) states:

“The ability of the client to pay cannot justify a charge in excess of the value of the service rendered...”

Section 31(3):

“An attorney-at-law should avoid controversies with clients regarding compensation for his services as far as is compatible with self-respect and his right to receive compensation for his services.”

So, Madam President, it appears that there has been wanton disrespect and breaches of the Legal Profession Code and I think that needs to be addressed.

The hon. Stuart Young came into this august House today and he outlined the Government's plans. I think that they will, in fact, go a long way in ensuring that we have some sort of regulated fees in our profession as it relates to the State. Allowing attorneys to determine what reasonable compensation is, appears to give them too much room to cheat the State. I am heartened by the Attorney General's stated intention to have this problem solved by having more work done by attorneys employed within the State; this approach must be applauded.

The hon. Attorney General reported in his contribution that there are 202 vacant contract positions in the Attorney General's Office and 198—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Thank you, Madam President—and there are 198 vacancies in the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Every year hundreds of persons graduate from Hugh Wooding Law School and law schools in the United Kingdom, get called to the Bar, and then simply cannot find employment. If we can fill these vacancies with younger attorneys, they could be put to work on less complex matters thereby freeing up more senior attorneys to engage in more complex ones. In addition to providing greater employment for our citizens, fixed salaries would allow us to

have a certainty as to what our wage bill will be and allow us to budget accordingly.

My own experience with the Attorney General's Office is that the staff appears to be overworked. We now find out that is because they are under-staffed. We have to cut out the waste and build capacity within the State. It is the only way to ensure that we have a proper functioning legal machinery that can pursue and defend the nation's interest.

In closing, Madam President, I would like to commend the Government's decision to merge the Attorney General's Office with the Ministry of Legal Affairs. We will now spend approximately \$443 million as opposed to \$481 million spent in the last fiscal year, if we combine the expenditures in the two Ministries, a saving of \$38million. In this time of economic downturn this is praiseworthy. There will, no doubt, be further positive consequences of re-merging these two Ministries as they were in the past, including the benefits of a more integrated system that better serves the administration of justice.

Madam President, as the Government boldly embarks on rocky pathways towards economic redemption, we know that sacrifices must be made. As a nation, we have weathered many storms, some economic, some political, some social but, through it all, we have endured. As a people, we have shown our resilience and determination, and as a people we now demand change—a change in our laws, a change in our spending habits and a change in the way our public institutions are managed. The People's National Movement has heeded that call.

I have no doubt that our country will stand the test of time; that we are here standing strong is a true testament of our resolve. So, Madam President, we say to the people: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid. Together we

Appropriation (Financial Year 2016)
 Bill, 2015
 Sen. W. M. Coppin (cont'd)

2015.10.21

struggle, together we would build, and together we will steer our beloved country out of these challenging waters. May God continue to bless our great nation.” I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Let me extend my congratulations to Sen. Coppin on his maiden contribution in the Senate.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, if you allow me to say that I hope this House realizes that we have batting right down to No. 15. [*Laughter*]

Before I move the Motion on Adjournment, I just want to make a correction from this morning where I requested the leave of this House to extend the time for the appointment of Members of Committees, and I said to be extended to Friday, November 12, 2015; that should really read, Thursday, November 12, 2015. So let the record so reflect.

Madam President, I now beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Thursday, October 22, 2015 at 1.30 p.m., during that time we would hopefully wrap up this debate. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.00p.m.