

SENATE*Friday, October 21, 2016*

The Senate met at 10.30 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MADAM. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President: Hon. Members, the debate on second reading of the following Bill, which was in progress when the Senate adjourned on Thursday, October 20, 2016, will be resumed. A Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on September 30, 2017.

Those Senators who have spoken on this Bill are: the hon. Colm Imbert, Sen. Wade Mark, Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir, Sen. Dr. Lester Henry, Sen. H.R. Ian Roach, Sen. the Hon. Clarence Rambharat, Sen. Taurel Shrikissoon, Sen. Allyson Baksh, Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon, Sen. Nigel De Freitas and Sen. Daniel Solomon.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2016

[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.***The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):**

[*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. May I start by congratulating the Minister of Finance and his team from the Ministry, for a budget that was, contrary to what Sen. Mark said that it was a budget for the rich, it was a budget that was fair and equitable. It was a budget that was fair and focused to the future. [*Desk thumping*]

Just a few statistics, global growth is predicted to be 3.1 per cent. GDP of

Latin America and the Caribbean is expected to decline by 4 per cent, and the Caribbean alone, in terms of GDP is expected to decline by 3 per cent. Trinidad and Tobago's economy, we know it has been weakened by low prices and low output in the energy sector, significantly affecting government revenue streams, and the entire economy as a whole.

Government revenue, we know declined by 21 per cent to \$44.9 billion, and the non-energy sector, in particular, suffered its own contractions. In particular, construction by 7 per cent, manufacturing by 5.7 per cent, distribution by 6 per cent and services is anticipated to decline by 1.2 per cent. Services is the largest non-energy sector, but despite all of these contractions, I want to say that the macroeconomic fundamentals of the economy remains strong, and I need not detail those. The Government has made all necessary decisions to take this country forward, and we are ready and we are working.

With regard to trade, it is a fact that both our energy and our non-energy exports have fallen, but I will deal particularly with the non-energy exports. And it is that from January to December 2015, total non-energy exports stood at US \$2.38 billion, a drop of 3.7 per cent. Trade in goods, Madam President, largely dominates our exports, but services is what is important at this time as well as goods.

So services as we know contributed to 61 per cent of GDP, in 2015. However, the export value was only \$1.5 billion, just 6 per cent of GDP. So, therefore, we see this as an opportunity, this is nowhere close where it should be. We see this as an opportunity for our exports especially given our resource limitations.

Trade and services is an excellent opportunity to increase exports, to attract foreign investment and to create jobs as well. So, the Ministry of Trade and

Industry is, in fact, preparing a national trade services policy now, that is right, and what this policy would do is to provide a comprehensive framework for overall national development of the domestic services sector. What it would include is the strengthening of the appropriate legislation and regulations to guide the different subsectors within the services sector as a whole. The key areas identified are: information and communications technology, financial services, tourism, creative industries, energy, maritime services, but there are some others that we are looking at the feasibility of them at this time.

Some other subsectors including health and wellness, where the overall global value is US \$160 billion, so a lot of opportunities there. Medical tourism, with a global value of \$50 billion as well, great opportunity there as well. But the question is at a time like this, how do we improve our trade performance? And it is very imperative that we ramp up our trade and goods and services. We need to improve our revenue streams and acquire foreign exchange, create jobs and make our economy less vulnerable to the external shocks, the volatility of the international commodity markets.

So to improve trade, there are a couple of things that we need to do. Widen the range of goods and services which we export. Improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of the trade process itself, and exploit existing markets and create new market access opportunities as well.

So let me talk a little bit about the existing markets and the new markets that we are looking at, and that we are working on, and that are key to 2017. The Trinidad and Tobago Partial Scope Agreement, that has already been proclaimed. What is the next step? The Ministry of Trade and Industry is working on preparing what is called a guide to the implementation of the agreement. As well as, we are

coordinating with Panama for a joint administration commission meeting that will be held in 2017, where we are going to work out the built-in agenda, and how we proceed to implement the agreement.

Chile: arising out of a meeting with our Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley and President Bachelet of Chile, and I think that was in Guyana on the margins of a Heads of Government Meeting, there was a discussion and an agreement between those high-level persons that we will move towards a negotiation of a trade agreement with Chile. So both sides are speaking and they are ready. We are at the point where we are ready to do exploratory discussions. The objective is to expand our trade with Chile in both energy and energy products.

Interestingly, we do quite a bit of trade with Chile, \$1.9 billion, but in terms of our exports and our imports, \$81.6 million, which gives us a trade surplus of \$1.8 billion in our favour; trouble is, 90 per cent of that is energy. So we need to improve on the non-energy sector as well, and Chile has some interesting exports that we can get into Trinidad and Tobago as well. But with this agreement, it means that our energy products going into Chile as well, would go in there at a reduced tariff rate; very, very important. Again, the population size, 17.6 million, so it is an excellent market, and we are prepared to negotiate as well an IPPA and a double taxation agreement to spur investments with each other as well.

Cuba: again, Prime Minister Rowley and President Castro met on the margins of the ACS Meeting in Cuba earlier this year, and the discussions were around that the both countries will increase their cooperation. We have always had an excellent relationship with Cuba. Now, we are going to work to build that alliance, particularly in the commercial area. There are enormous prospects for our manufacturers. We have been tapping at Cuba's doors for a long time, and we are

ready now that the market is opening to go full speed into Cuba.

So, a delegation headed by myself and coming along with me as well is the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. We are going to the Havana trade fair at the end of this month, with a contingent of about 75 persons, 29 businesses and 13 of them will be exhibiting at the fair as well. This is the largest mission that we have ever had out of this country. [*Desk thumping*] And ranging with a number of goods, chemicals, food and beverage, banking, cosmetics, paper products as well. But energy, what we are hoping to have is significant discussions in the area of energy in terms of cooperation to provide energy services. So that along with the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would be the Chairman of NGC, Mr. Gerry Brooks, the Chairman of Petrotrin as well. We believe that there is a lot of collaboration and benefits that could come out of those discussions.

Again, with Venezuela, our focus on Venezuela, again, our Prime Minister leads and we take the mantle and we follow. So Prime Minister Rowley met with President Maduro here in Trinidad, and again, there were discussions on strengthening our relationship and deepening matters of mutual interest, including foreign policy, energy and trade as well.

In May of this year, several framework contract agreements were signed with the Venezuelan Department of International Trade, and our Trinidad and Tobago manufacturers, and we began to export to Venezuela 12 items, and this is concerning a \$50 million revolving loan fund that President Maduro had announced. So to date, three shipments have been dispatched, but what we need to do now is to expand on the products and to expand on the range of manufacturers as well.

Also there is great opportunity down the road in that we are expected to

access gas from Venezuela, from the Dragon Field, and subsequently, from all of those cross-border fields which we share, the Loran-Manatee, the Manakin-Cocuina, the Kapok-Dorado as well, and this is an excellent opportunity. We will be owing Venezuela money. So it means that we can then work out this mechanism for the exchange of energy products and our manufacturing goods; tremendous benefit to Trinidad and Tobago.

Another key country that we have been liaising with and that we have focused on as well in this 2017 is the European Union, and the question on your lips must be, where does Brexit leave us, Caricom and Trinidad and Tobago? We know that there was a vote by the UK to leave the European Union and that has resulted in some uncertainty and speculation. We are positive, we are confident about our closer relations with the UK and with the European Union, and certainly with the latter, we welcome the presence of the Ambassador of the European Union. In Trinidad, we have been used to having a Chargé d'Affaires, the fact that we have an Ambassador is recognition of the importance that that country places in Trinidad and Tobago and in the region as well.

The benefit of the EPA, that CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement, we are going to utilize more and more which is access to new markets, reduction in all our non-tariff barriers for exports, access to development corporations, and again, development of the services sector. So we will continue to implement all of our obligations under this EPA, as we move forward in terms of capacity building, in terms of legislative amendments in terms of institutional strengthening.

So some of the work done with the European Union in 2016, let me tell you what it is. ExporTT, they did a project called Fit for Europe, and which was aimed

at increasing the level of exports to Europe as well, both goods and services. So the goods trade mission took place in July of this year, where three local companies, National Cannery, National Flour Mills and Trinidad Chocolate, participated in 36 meetings in France, in the UK and I think the Netherlands, and this courtesy—with the support of the Tenth EDF and also, I think the CDD.

Again, the other agreements that we have through Caricom, with the Dominican Republic, for instance, and Costa Rica, we are going to give effect to both of those. In the Dominican Republic in particular, we have been looking at market access for some of our agricultural products, our cassava, our sweet potatoes as well, also glass packaging, that is something that we are working on right now.

10.45 a.m.

So what else do we have to do? We have to look at the widening of the range of goods and services, and there are several mechanisms and initiatives through which we can do that. One of them is the Aid for Trade Strategy, which is new, and it is a WTO initiative. We are formalizing that approach. It has to go to Cabinet, but there is great benefit because it involves the use of donor funding to assist in private sector development. So, I say donor funding, I am talking about from the World Bank, the IDB, the European Union, Caribbean Export Development Agency as well. So there are a list of projects to which we want to get donor funding, and I would just give you an idea of what they are:

- The development and implementation of a national quality policy by Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards. I think we will be having the help of the CDB in this regard.
- The registration of a geographical indication for cocoa in collaboration

with UWI's Cocoa Research Centre and the Intellectual Property Office.

- There is also going to be an establishment of a services-data infrastructure mechanism to collect services data.

Those are just a few of the projects under the Aid for Trade Strategy.

Another mechanism is the National Export Strategy, which the Ministry is working on at this time and that has three broad areas:

1. the strengthening of export capacity and competitiveness;
2. enhancing the local trade and environment; and
3. promoting exports.

And yet another mechanism for widening the goods and services that we are to export is the Eximbank. I think it was Sen. Shrikissoon who commended us yesterday for the US \$10 million loan facility, which the Eximbank created this year to assist exporters in purchasing raw materials for manufacturing and export. Eximbank is looking at also expanding its trade discounting facilities as well. We are also contemplating a new line of credit, which is particularly only for medium-sized businesses for purchasing of equipment and machinery and so on. We have to focus on the medium-sized business, but we expect to get a strategic plan for Eximbank by the end of November, and we are going to work forward from there.

Let me talk a little bit about the work of exporTT, just to recognize that there were 33 exporter training programmes in 2016, 756 exporters participated from 209 companies. The kinds of programmes dealt with intellectual property, shipping services, getting started with exports and so on. Madam President, 17 companies received assistance through a food and safety modernization act programme, and that is with regard to getting food and beverages into the US. Thirteen firms accessed and benefited from our core financing facility. There were market surveys

conducted as well, trade missions held and one end buyer's mission as well.

As I am talking about achievements, another mechanism is also the achievements of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of standards who have a tremendous role in terms of product development and product quality as well, thereby increasing and facilitating exports.

What are they responsible for? Codes and standards, codes and standards to ensure the goods that we produce, the services as well, are of international quality that our manufacturers produce high-value products as well, which can compete in the global marketplace. In addition, several programmes were held and 45 persons were involved in conformity assessment programmes as well. Four labs were accredited including Angostura. Surveillance assessments were done on Trinidad Cement Limited as well. Six new standards were adopted, including the labelling of electrical appliances and, of course, the Trinidad and Tobago Electrical Wiring Code. They are now working with—now that the methodology regulations have been completed, they are now proceeding to verify weighing devices at the ports of Port of Spain and Point Lisas, as well in keeping with our Solar Safety of Life at Sea Treaty, and they are continuing to do tremendous work as well.

Now, there are other national strategies which will help us to widen the range of export services and goods for export, and those national strategies would be a trade mission strategy, looking at a coordinated approach to trade missions, a trade negotiation strategy for energy services and a national trade facilitation committee, which is already established by the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 2016.

Somebody criticized us for the contributions which we made to the Chamber. I think it would have been Sen. Solomon, and to the Manufacturers

Appropriation (Financial Year 2017)
Bill, 2016 (cont'd)
Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

2016.10.21

Association.

Hon. Member: Sen. Mark.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Sen. Mark? Are you sure?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: All right. I want to say that we were proud to partner with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association in hosting TIC 2016, which attracted more than 10,000 attendees, [*Desk thumping*] 175 local companies and 55 international firms from the region, from Asia, from Europe as well. Unbelievable.

Madam President, I must speak a little bit about diversification. That is why we are here, because for far too long all of our diversification efforts have really rung hollow, so much so that the non-energy sector has remained relatively unchanged for decades. So, our Government, after extensive research, looking at the comparative advantages and the products that we have produced and, of course, looking at the opportunities for trade and investment and overall economic activity came up with these areas for diversification, which several Ministries have responsibility for. So that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would have spoken to agriculture, our Ministry of Tourism has responsibility for tourism as well, but the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we feel that we are a catalyst for diversification, but we have direct responsibility for maritime and for the creative industry sector.

So, I will talk about the maritime sector. What was established in 2016 is a framework for the development of the maritime sector. Also we established a standing committee for the development of the maritime sector, which is under the chair of the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to the left,

hon. Franklin Khan. What the work of the committee is, is to implement the framework. So that the standing committee has met twice, and we have made recommendations to Cabinet on a range of initiatives for the short and medium term in particular, we started on. So that you can expect, the public can expect the roll-out of several initiatives starting with mariners, with two to be built in Tobago, one in Trinidad, and then there are several subsectors earmarked for development, transshipment and cold stacking. The Ministry of Works and Transport has the responsibility to get back to the committee within a month giving clear guidelines for the legal, institutional and the administrative framework that would take these subsectors forward.

Also, in the case of bunkering, only 16 per cent of the ships that traverse our waters, all of those energy ships, actually engage in bunkering activity in Trinidad. So that is an excellent opportunity as well. So that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is expected to respond to us in one month to assess the economic viability of expanding that local bunkering industry.

The Ministry of Works and Transport has a crucial job to do in terms of the Gulf of Paria spatial plan, which is a plan of our internal waters but, in particular, the Gulf and, of course, the Galleons Passage as well. So that is an assignment for the Ministry of Works and Transport. But there is another area that we feel that there is significant benefit to be gained, the area of dry docking and ship repair. So excitement is contagious, because already we have two proposals for expansion of existing businesses within the industry for consideration as well, and we are happy to facilitate to ensure that these expansion activities do in fact take place.

I would tell you why it is so lucrative, and it is because we only attend to 20 per cent of the requests which we get for shipping and dry-docking services, and

this is an excellent earner of foreign exchange, creation of jobs and so on. So that alongside all of that, there is much work to do again. What we foresee is an apprenticeship programme as well. UTT, under a past PNM Government created the Bachelor's and Master's programmes in maritime services, but we need another level of apprenticeship training for both practical and theoretical, because if you are expanding the ship-repair and dry-docking sectors, you do need substantial welders, fabricators, people to do painting, sandblasting and you require additional machinists, electricians as well. So all of those young people, not only young, but people in the Chaguaramas/Carenage areas, in particular, have a lot to look forward to with these training opportunities.

Yachting: we are very pleased with the Minister of Finance for the proposal to make foreign yacht-repair services [*Desk thumping*] a VAT-exempt service. I can tell you that the standing committee did tremendous work in pushing this proposal forward along with the stakeholders as well. I would tell you, the yachting industry has been suffering a bit. Sometime in 2000, we dealt with 2,500 yachts, and that is now down to 1,004, a tremendous decline. But there are about 180 companies there, small and micro companies, employing about 1,700 persons. So we feel that there is tremendous opportunity there.

We know what the problems are. We have examined them, it is the crime, and the Ministry of National Security, and the coast guard have been extremely supportive in putting on extra surveillance in the area, as well as all of the bureaucratic systems for entry and exit we have dealt with, and also the poor inefficient service at the ports. We have dealt with that as well.

So, Cabinet has approved the single harmonized form. Formerly, when a yachtie came in, you spent about two hours with 13 forms. Now, 15 minutes, one

form, and you are out. In addition, the length of stay. Formerly you only got a three-month stay. But let us face it, if you are coming for yachting repairs, repairs will take at about six months, sometimes beyond that. So what we have agreed on is that the length of stay to be granted in the initial stages by immigration division will be six months, and then for renewals thereafter. So there is no more three-month stay. As well, the Ministry has concluded its yachting policy in consultation with the stakeholders, and that is going to Cabinet as well. We have to make Trinidad a premier destination for yacht-repair services.

The creative sector: I would tell you what, we are very dissatisfied with the organization and the work of CreativeTT in 2015, because they spent almost \$9 million on operational expenses; \$1.3 million in one year on the board. There were four boards, one main board and three sub-boards, to do what? To spend \$5 million on a development programme. It makes no sense spending \$9 million to do programmes of \$5 million. What did they do with the \$5 million? They just spent it on sponsorship. So that certainly did not impact development.

However, 2016, CreativeTT became much more focused. We believe the sector has tremendous potential to generate revenue streams, earn foreign exchange and create employment as well. So we are restructuring CreativeTT. We have an excellent board in place, and we are consulting with stakeholders and we are very focused on building capacity in that sector for export. That is where it has to do.

The music sector: we have strengthened and we continue to do programmes and facilitate several capacity building and training programmes in song writing, production, mixing, intellectual property valuation and music publishing as well. We have had what is called an open call for proposals. Overall 300 persons have benefited from this music programme. So, they are doing their strategic plan and

we are moving forward.

With the fashion sector, you would have read about this local production cooperative. So that FashionTT in collaboration with UTT—UTT bought the machinery—and with the help of the EU as well, they have come up with this fashion production cooperative, which the primary objective is to increase the local production of fashion designers. You cannot find a garment factory—and the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development as well—in Trinidad. Gone are the days of Elite and Susan Anderson—

Sen. Khan: And Kay. .

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: That is right. And Kay as well. So here we, they are almost ready to launch as well. There has also been a fashion production workshop where 50 persons participated—seamstresses, designers, business persons—all with the aim of improving garment production standards. There is also a fashion value-chain investment programme that is going on. I cannot give you the details.

I think that there has been great strengthening of the film sector. We are very pleased with the progress made by the local film producers in 2017, well not 2017, in 2016. We are going to seek to partner with an international player to help us develop the industry, and I think that we may have some large international films being done in Trinidad. At the end of it, we want to be left with a local movie production house.

11.00 a.m.

Madam President, so Truth Entertainment—I do not know if the young people know them more than I do, but they are going to be here in November. They did the film *Dallas Buyers Club* which won several Academy Awards. So

they will be here for discussions with CreativeTT and the Ministry. [*Interruption*]
The young person is the president? [*Laughter*]

Let me talk a little bit about our investment performance, which is not where we want it all. It is that the growth and development of our economy depends highly on streams of quality foreign direct investment. But where has the FDI come from? It has come into the energy sector. I think the inflows into the energy sector was about 85 per cent, that is the figure that I saw. So there is an urgent need to not only promote domestic and foreign investment in the non-energy sector, but we really have to get foreign direct investment into the non-energy sector. But the only way you can do that is when you have built an effective investment promotion agency. In our case it is invesTT.

Remember, we are competing with the rest of the world in attracting the same foreign direct investments, so we have got to be ready and we have to be global. But invesTT is in urgent need of restructuring and revitalizing. We have an excellent board; we are working with the IDB and this is what we are doing. We are going to be attracting investments, or hoping to—we are working on it—that will be in line with our economic diversification. For instance, invesTT also has a responsibility given to them by Cabinet in terms of tenanting the Tamana Intech Park. So the Ministry of Trade and Industry is working with invesTT towards a lead generation programme to attract companies into Tamana Intech Park, which as you know has been zoned for ICTs and BPOs and data processing centres and so on, high value manufacturing.

But two things are required: an overarching investment promotion strategy and also a strategy for invesTT as well. So with regard to the overarching investment promotion strategy, again the Ministry's investment directorate will be

working along with investTT and with the help, hopefully, of the IDB as well on this investment promotion strategy. So we will have roll-out of our investment priorities and activities for the five years embedded in that strategy. Within that strategy some of the things—I cannot detail all—but of course you want clear investment policy, you want to update your investment legislative framework, develop clear marketing strategies as well, harmonize all of your IPPAs and your double taxation treaties, again realign investTT, review all of our incentive programmes and develop something called a “special economic zones policy, “ which is before the Cabinet because it is that we must replace or do something radical about that failed free zones regime which is existing now. It is a failure.

This policy will address all of the challenges and gaps in our free zones regime. Imagine, a company which participates in our free zone regime has tax concessions in perpetuity, so that there are no revenue streams coming into the Government. What use is that to us? We have come up with this very exciting policy with several zones. I do not have the time to speak to it now, but the objective will be to increase and diversify exports and investments in our economic zones as well.

Madam President, I want to just tell you a little bit about our industrial spaces, because if you do not have industrial spaces how could you produce goods and services? I am pleased to announce that finally Tamana Intech Park is almost to completion. I am doing the walkover next week Friday. In fact all of the civil engineering work is completed; the electrification is almost done. Madam President, 74 acres, 21 lots available for occupation at Tamana Intech Park.

Very early in 2016, or it must have been late 2015, we completed the e Teck Industrial Park in Point Fortin. E TecK has been hard at work, and the business

persons are so very pleased. They have upgraded the industrial parks, the existing parks in O'Meara, Plaisance Park, Frederick Settlement and in Trincity. I took a drive through—excellent. And, of course, Cabinet has approved the design and construction of a new 20-acre park in Moruga for agro-processing and mixed use. Of course, Sen. Shrikissoon did commend us for that yesterday. Again, this is all to aid with diversification in the areas of agro-processing and agri-business as well.

I have the time, so I can talk a little bit about investments that you can expect from the National Flour Mills over the next two years. One hundred million dollars from their internal funding to upgrade its feed mill, to modernize its dry mix operation and to expand the warehousing and so on. But what are the objectives? Exports—increase our feed exports, improve our competitiveness and to adhere to international standards. I am very pleased about the work that is to be done and the money that will be filtered within.

Madam President, just a quick thing. We support the Ministry of Finance's proposal for divestment of the Teck industrial parks, which I think has a value ranging between \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion. You would be surprised, we have already landed a letter—certainly on my desk and copied to others—from the tenant association of the industrial parks applauding this initiative and giving indications that they wish to be part of this divestment.

Let us look a little bit at our regulatory environment and our enabling environment as well. I have to talk about SEW and TTBizLink. The forty-seventh transactional service was launched, so it is now 47 e-services used by 4,000 companies and 7,200 users every month. During fiscal 2016, there was a roll-out of new services, e-goods declaration modules, e-maritime modules as well, and lastly—I think it was only last week—the e-mobile inspection service, eliminating

the need for paper-based import declarations by agencies like the TTBS, plant quarantine from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Food and Drugs, Ministry of Health as well.

TTBizLink/SEW is expanding under the US \$25million loan which we took from the IDB. Coming out of that, what do we expect, three components: enhancing and expanding the services of TTBizLink so they reflect international best practice. Component two, enhancing the interoperability of TTBizLink. Interoperability is so key so that our customs and our port operations and other agencies are all operating in sync. We will not operate in silos. This Government will not operate in silos. And again, component three, modernizing the legislative and institutional framework for the governance of our organizations. So we are talking about the Trade Ordinance legislation—I think it is as old as I am, 1958—we are going to be modernizing that again, the Customs Act, the Food and Drugs Act as well.

Our policy environment—there are a number of persons in the gallery—
[*Interruption*]

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

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. There are a number of persons in the gallery, young, professional persons and I really applaud them, they are working on our policies in the division. One of them is the national consumer policy which is before the Cabinet as well. We are hoping to redo the Act and create this new Consumer Protection and Empowerment Act.

Let me just tell you a little bit about our Consumer Affairs Division, who have worked hard. They have done 196 lectures across the country. They have been reporting on price movements of food items, of chicken, live chicken. They

are going out to all the depots as well, price movements in the hardware industry as well. All of it is online, but quarterly because of the cost. We do the movement of goods in the newspapers as well. They are resolving complaints.

The other policies which these very young professionals are working on is the national services policy, the competition policy, the e-commerce policy and a national quality policy. That national quality infrastructural policy, I spoke about it in the beginning, it is extremely important. This is being done in conjunction with the CDB. Again, it is to increase market access for our goods and services and enhance the health and safety of the national community, increase consumer confidence as well and improve trade facilitation as well.

Sen. Shrikissoon aired his concerns about the several indices, the Global Competitiveness Index and the World Bank Doing Business Report. We cannot be pleased about it as well. There are particular areas that we are working on, getting credit because there is this considerable gap, a \$3 billion credit gap where a lot of manufacturers, for instance, cannot access banking facilities simply because of the kinds of security. So under this system what would be encouraged is the use of accounts receivables and machinery and equipment, agricultural products as collateral. Enforcing contracts, we are working on that as well. Dealing with construction permits—we are going to work with the Ministry of Planning and Development to automate the services offered by the Town and Country Planning Division.

Madam President, just a little bit about governance. All of this we cannot do unless our agencies are well run and there is effective governance, effective stakeholder engagement and institutional strengthening, and we have been doing that. Good governance cannot be ignored, and I am very pleased with all of those

persons who have come forward to serve on the 11 boards under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. So that the Ministry will review and rationalize, along with the boards, all of these state agencies and institutions to make sure that they are effective.

Stakeholder engagement continues. I myself have made it a priority, and I have been to the north, south, east and west of Trinidad and Tobago, so that I can understand the diversification agenda. I can look at the operation, I can ascertain first-hand how businesses operate and what challenges they have as well.

The Ministry happily has just finished its strategic planning, but apart from working on its sectoral strategy the importance is the institutional strategy as well. So we are strengthening the Ministry of Trade and Industry. We have a lot of young professionals with us. They are doing extremely good work, so that we are really working on the institution, the Ministry and all of the agencies under us as well. We are very, very pleased about the work that is being done in conjunction with our stakeholders.

I want to thank you, Madam President.

Sen. David Small: Thank you very much, Madam President. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to join in this debate. As I begin today, I am thankful. I am always humbled by the opportunity to speak in this place. I am privileged to have the opportunity to be here; I do not take it lightly at all. It is a heavy responsibility on me to be able to come here and speak and be able to articulate on issues, and I take that responsibility very seriously. I am privileged and I am humbled to have the opportunity.

We are here to talk about the budget. As I said when we had the session earlier this year when we were doing the mid-year review, I have no envy for the

Minister of Finance for the choices he has to make. I think that where we are, we are in a very uncomfortable place. I think the differences between what I would do and what he would do is because I am—according to the system we have here—a Senator without portfolio. So because I do not have a portfolio, I do not understand some of those challenges, but that is fine.

I think that we are in a blessed country, but some of us take a lot for granted. I have a thesis about the fact that a lot of us would have had the opportunity to benefit from various government incentives and programmes, and we have kind of gotten used to that. And to the extent that some of those things have to be scaled back or probably removed, people are starting to say but why, but they are not willing to accept the economic reality of Trinidad and Tobago in 2016 at \$50 oil. I just checked, WTI is \$50.80 cents.

Madam President, I am a simple person as most Members would be aware. I always remember when I was growing up as a young chap—one of our colleagues yesterday indicated she was celebrating her thirtieth birthday. I recently celebrated my birthday a couple weeks ago. I am a couple decades ahead of her, just for the record, but that is fine. But I remember my mother always reminded me—my mother is a saint. She is the guiding rock in my life. She always said, “We will make do with what we have. Make do with what we have”; and depending on what we have, we cut and we contrive to see how we could keep ourselves together. That has always stuck with me. I can function in almost any scenario, and I will give you a graphic example.

I remember when I started—I look back and I see my former civil service colleagues here. When I joined the civil service as a temporary Clerk I my salary was the grand total of \$1,293 before tax. After deductions I took home \$947. And I

found a way to get a bank loan to finance my education, because my family just could not do it for me. So I have a perspective about things that perhaps is shaped in part by my experiences.

11.15 a.m.

And just to—I have one thing I want to say before I dive into the meat of my contribution, Madam President. Too often we complain about everything in this country and sometimes when things work it is important to, at least, I would advise that perhaps some things are working.

Madam President, I have a very close family member who was ill and had to spend a couple of weeks in Mount Hope hospital. And I want to put on the public record that there was an issue that I think they still need some work to do, the NCHRA, has some work to do with the admissions process and the bed assignment process which eventually took 12 hours, but they need to work on that.

But the care that my family member received for over two weeks in the hospital, you go to a place and you look around for something to complain about. I have nothing to complain about. [*Desk thumping*] And as someone asked me yesterday, perhaps, Senator, it is because they know who you are. I said well, I was in a pair of shorts and a slippers and I did not make any announcement, I turned up at admissions and we just walked in. So, you know, that is how I am. I do not go about announcing things and I think that often we say, the system is not perfect, but there are parts of it that work and all we should say is, okay, let us try to find out the things that are working good, let us see how we can replicate that in other parts of the system.

Madam President, I have a comment I want to make and I want us to focus on this. We always look at the budget numbers and we talk about oil revenue and

non-oil revenue and people want to separate them. And I respectfully disagree. What is called non-oil revenue would not exist without oil revenue? They are interwoven, interlinked. Any entity that contributes to what is called non-oil revenue depends on oil revenue to get foreign exchange. It depends on oil revenue for us to have cheap electricity. It demands on oil revenue for us to have subsidies on fuels. So that it is oil and non-oil.

I hear you and I understand the categorization, but the categorization does not take into context these nuances about how interconnected the system we have, the economic system is. Oil and gas, we live and die by the oil and gas market here in Trinidad and Tobago. So I understand the categorization, but people and citizens I am sharing with you that in my respectful view, it is one and the same. Because if we did not have oil revenue, a thriving oil and gas sector, certainly several thousand high-paying jobs would not exist in the sector. Those who purchase luxury goods, you know, there would be a whole series of knock-on effects. So that the system is interconnected and interwoven.

Madam President, there are a couple of conversations taking place about the oil price and the assumption for the oil price. Perhaps because of my experience, Madam President, of having to be part of the team or being the person to run the numbers and try to generate an assumption to send to the Ministry of Finance for which at the end of the day the respective Minister of Finance would decide what number it would use, most often or almost exactly what the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries would have sent.

I just did some checking, Madam President, according to the EIA the United States Energy Information Administration, their outlook for prices for 2017 is \$51. According to OPEC, their outlook for prices for 2017 is \$51.43. According to

Goldman Sachs their forecast for prices for 2017 is \$53. So perhaps with an assumption of \$48, perhaps the Minister may have gotten it right, perhaps. And here is where I do a back check. The price of WTI from October 1 to September 30—October 1 last year to September 30 averaged just about \$42. At the beginning of the year the hon. Minister of Finance did a budget based on \$45. In the world of assumptions and the world of forecasting, if you forecast \$45 and it works out to \$42. That is pretty good, it is pretty decent. Most people would take that every single time, and I want to share about that. Because when we make assumptions, we make assumptions based on a particular set of information and circumstances that we have at that point in time. So let me share a bit of history, Madam President.

There is something called Atlantic LNG. When Train One of that plant was being done, the negotiations were being done around the contracting, the price of natural gas in North America to which 60 per cent of their output was going, the price of natural gas to North America was \$1.60, and the forecast for going forward was \$1.80, in the \$2 range. So that some people asked, why did you give a project a 10-year tax holiday? It is not that somebody decided willy-nilly to give a 10-year tax holiday. The outlook for the markets suggested that price would be—nobody could have forecast, Madam President, by the time the plant actually started running in 1999 the price would be \$4, and in the next year it would be \$8, and the next year it would be \$9 and \$10. Nobody could have forecast that at that point in time when the contracts were signed.

So, I am always saying that decisions are taken with the best information at the point in time. That is all you could work with and you put in the contract and that is the way you have to work it. What needs to happen though, now that we

have had some of these learnings so if we ever have to do something like that and give a tax holiday, you can simply give a tax holiday, but to the extent that the project becomes fully amortized during that tax holiday period, that tax holiday should go away because you have recovered the investment. It is things like that that we need to put into our structures, into our thinking.

Madam President, the outlook for oil prices is fairly, fairly stable, but not spectacular. Oil prices over the past several months are trading in a very narrow band, roughly between \$40 to \$50 a barrel for the past few months and this reflects a couple of things, one of which is the ability of the shale producers. As soon as the price ticks over \$44, \$45 some of them decide that they want to ramp up production and that tends to push the price back down. And it is because it is a phenomenon. For the first time in the history of the oil market, the oil market is a true open market. It is operating purely on the basis of supply and demand.

OPEC made a decision to withdraw from the market and that has allowed the market to operate free, free of influence. And I think that one of the things that we need to understand is there is something that is called a contango in the market, Madam President. I am not sure if everyone is familiar with the term, I will share with the *Hansard*. The contango in the market has to do with the fact that prices, spot prices for crude oil today are lower than prices in the future, in forecasted prices in the future. That tends to suggest that there is an oversupply in the market. So that is what contango means.

In a normal market, the price now would be higher and the price future out would be lower because the future is uncertain. So you attach a discount to the uncertainty for the future price. You have a situation now where prices now are much lower than the future price. So all that sends, the normal signal that is sent to

people is that the market currently is oversupplied and that oversupply is not necessarily going to go away in the short term, in spite of OPEC making the announcement, the actual numbers that I have seen there has not been any reduction as yet.

Madam President, I also want to talk one more thing about oil and the importance of the oil price in Trinidad and Tobago. It is important for us to accept also that Trinidad and Tobago is really, in terms of our energy sector revenue, we get a revenue from the natural gas market. And I have some numbers I want to share. The oil production has been down. Madam President, oil production in 2005—and when I say production we have to be careful. We talk about production, but I want to focus on exports because we have to remember that Petrotrin produces a lot of oil, but that oil is used in the refinery. What we get from exports is significantly less. So that exports, barrels per day in 2005 was 72,000-odd. Gross earnings from that on the average WTI price per year would have been \$25 billion.

In 2015, gross crude oil exports were 22,000 barrels per day which would have given us a gross revenue based on WTI average price for 2015 of \$6.9 billion. It is a massive difference. It is massive. What this suggests to us is that, while price is still something that we should look at, the real issue for us is production, volumes. That is where the bulk of our attention should be going, focusing on getting the volumes up. Once we get the volumes up, price starts to become less of an issue. So let us stop focusing on the price too much. Right now where we are at exporting 22,000 barrels a day, oil is an almost insignificant contributor to the national budget.

So that I understand because we have a history of focusing on the oil price all along, where we are with our current production, with our current production

and it is of the Galeota Mix and the BHP crude that goes as export, the numbers show that for last year, they would have generated a gross revenue of \$6.9 billion, and then a whole bunch of stuff has to come out of that before the Government gets [*Crosstalk*] Yeah. So this is the reality now of our oil business. So really and truly the bulk of our energy revenues is from the gas sector, and this is where we need to spent a lot of time and some energy. And I have some comments on those issues in a couple of minutes, Madam President, if you would permit me?

And I want to talk specifically about oil. Like many others I have been following the various commentaries of post-budget about where we are and what we should do and we should have more bid rounds. And I continue to say, I struggle to understand the plan. If there is a plan inside the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the technocrats have it, please share.

Several years ago the current Chairman of Petrotrin, Mr. Andrew Jupiter when he was the Permanent Secretary did an analysis and presented it at a conference. He did analysis that says, this is the history of drilling in Trinidad and Tobago on average, I think, he worked out the numbers that our success rate was about six in 10. And on a basis of six in 10 and based on an estimated production from each of those wells, he developed a schedule that says, on that basis for us to be able to sustain our current production volumes going forward we needed to be able to drill X amount of exploration wells in order to get that 60 per cent rate of success. And it is not rocket science.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries should have a methodical plan to say, listen in order to be able for us to increase our production, these are the amounts of activity that needs to take place. We need to have X based on our history of exploration success, the average is what the average is. After you have

the average, in order to get, to work out what the average production is per well, to be able to say, okay, in order to get the numbers to what we want it to do, we need this amount of wells drilled. If we need these amount of drillers drill, how much acreage do we have? And let us start from that programme to decide, not just willy-nilly one or two bid rounds a year. That does not work. It needs to be methodical. We have been in this industry for over 100 years, we should have this down pretty—I could sit and in five minutes and map it out, but they cannot afford my fees. So I would not go that way.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Your prices stand out in the market?

Sen. D. Small: Madam Minister, I am a humble guy. I am a humble guy, but according to—I am a bit expensive. [*Laughter*] But these are real things and it requires planning and unfortunately, I worked in the Ministry's planning area for many years. I see Mr. Karim there in the—some of my former colleagues, people I know and people who are very good at planning, so I know the capacity exists. I am struggling to understand, where is the plan? That is all I am saying. Where is it? Because I do not think it requires—we could sit down and do this in a couple of days and have it properly organized and say, this is the plan and let us work it out, and let the geologists decide what acreage are ones that would most attract—have the discussions with industry and start the ball rolling. I do not understand the inertia. The inertia is bothering me.

Madam President, as I move on—I have many, many things I want to get through and I promise not to talk about some other things, Madam President. I do not want to be disruptive today. I want to be focused. As I say focus, I believe the focus has been wrong for many years and this is with the benefit of hindsight. For many years when oil revenue was high and the Government's revenue coffers were

relatively fat, no one seemed concerned about the actual size of the pie. We were seeming to get what we wanted and we were happy with it. As I have stated here on more than one occasion. When prices were high in the international LNG and gas markets for the past few years, the gross revenue earned by Atlantic LNG alone exceeded the national budget, and exceeded it by some distance from one entity and it is because we focused on what we were getting, but we are not understanding, but wait, you know it is like you have a pizza and a pizza has 12 slices or eight slices and somebody has a large piece in front of you, you get one slice. You say, “aye that looking nice”, anchovies or whatever on it, you are happy with that. But the other 11 slices they are going to eat it because we are not focusing on the size of the pie, we are focusing on what we think we are getting as a fair share.

And, Madam President, let me be clear, I do not blame any LNG Atlantic partners, they are there doing the job, getting to maximize the returns to their shareholders. That is what they are being paid to do. I have no concern about that. Because that is their job. All I am saying is, perhaps we have not done the job that we should have done for our shareholders who are the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We have not done our job, and that is my respectful position that I put to the table today.

11.30 a.m.

Here is what, Madam President, now that prices have collapsed, now we are all starting to peel back all the various layers and trying to reveal how the taxation system has not really been as efficient as we thought it was, and we started to find all sorts of problems, and if we had done that before we may not be experiencing this problem now. So, now it is to our perpetual shame as one of the oldest

producing provinces that we have not been able to fix these problems in a shorter time.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: And also there is an opportunity in crisis.

Sen. D. Small: There is always an opportunity, Madam President. Madam Minister, forgive me. All right? And here is what, Madam President, it is important to understand this, the oil and gas business in Trinidad and Tobago is a \$100-billion business, and I say that without fear of contradiction. Anyone who wants to contradict me, let us have a discussion, I will share the numbers, the calculations under the assurances, I give the hon. Members on the other side the assurance I will share my calculation.

According to my estimates, even in 2015 with the depressed prices the gross revenues generated by the oil and gas sector were just about \$100 billion; the previous year was about \$150 billion, in 2013 it was like TT \$170 billion gross revenues. I am not saying that you just apply a calculation, but it is important to understand, if we sit here and we have a business that is generating \$160 billion, one industry in the country, and then we get a share and our share is 18, perhaps we need to understand that something is not right with the math, or the system that we have in place. While we may be getting 18 or 19 and be happy with it, but somebody else is getting out of 160 they are getting 142, that does not seem to compute for me. It does not compute. We are failing ourselves. So, we need to accept and understand the size of the pie, understand the revenue generation potential of the energy business, and then work out a strategy to make sure that our citizens maximize and earn the benefits from that. And I know it is not going to be easy, but here is what, put me in the room, and I do not need to say a word, I will just be there for intimidation.

Natural gas: natural gas reserves continue to decline, that was what is expected because we have not been able to prove off any additional reserves. I am one of those who is cautiously optimistic that the up-stream work that is going on now will be successful, we have several initiatives on their way, the Minister of Finance in his budget speech enumerated several of them. I am particularly excited about the potential for the dragon field connection with Venezuela, that is really, really close, infrastructure, costs are minimal. That could really turn the tide here in a sustainable basis, and it is important.

Because, for too long, Madam President, we find ourselves in a situation where we have a large supplier—and I have to be careful with my words—not holding the Government to ransom, I would not say that. But, let me say this, at another time when we found ourselves in that situation in the early '90s the government of the day decided that we needed to diversify the pool of natural gas suppliers, because the Government found itself in a position where every time we wanted to do something there was this monopoly power in the room, this big gorilla in the room and you found it difficult.

This brought British Gas and EOG to Trinidad and Tobago to help spread that power, and I think that the dragon field and some of those other things are the things we need to work on, because as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and somebody who understands this business, I have a difficulty with any CEO of any company signalling to the Government that if we do not do this, then perhaps we may not do this. I have a huge massive difficulty. I do not accept that. The last time I checked we are a sovereign state, you are a CEO. And understand this, I do not blame the CEO, I know him well, he is my friend, but he is getting instructions from other places, and all he is doing is giving the instructions he has been getting

to give, and there is nothing wrong with that. It is up to us to push back. Sit in the room and say, we hear you, we understand you, and we are willing to facilitate what you need to do, but here is what we need, and that is a failing, because often I have been in the room, so we go into the room and we are not sure what we want. We are not sure what we want.

So, we need to work out what it is we want and then go in the room and say, okay, I hear you, we are willing to facilitate this, but here is what we need. But I have a problem with a CEO of any company challenging, publicly, the Government. No one is saying anything, and, Madam President, I do not mean to be controversial, forgive me. But I am passionate about some of these things, because I have had the privilege of being a civil servant and travelled to many other places, interacted with my civil service colleagues in other places, and that is not something that could ever slip out of the tongue of the head CEO of any of those companies in those countries. It could not even—the concept could not come to their brain in some of the places that I have been. So, I hear it, and I am saying “What! Nobody ain’t saying anything, is only Smallee is a mad man”, but let me leave that.

Madam President, I will not talk about my economics, because I remember seeing in the papers someone saying there is a lot of armchaireconomists. I am not an economist and I try to stay out of those areas that I am not fully au courant with. But I found a piece of research and I always say that perhaps while everything is not transferable it could jog your thinking. There is a guy called Alan Blinder—I will share it with the *Hansard*—he is a Princetown university economist, he is a former reserve member of the US Federal Reserve Board, a presidential economic advisor in the United States. He is highly, highly respected around the world, and

he said, essentially, that when you have a downturn in the economy the best way to combat the downturn is to provide support and money to the lower income households.

I actually have his paper, I will share the reference, and there is another paper by Douglas Elmendorf and Jason Furman, who actually say that they support that. When economies are experiencing a downturn what you do is you target your financial reward toward the lower end, because what you do you drive and then you build the demand up. Rather than give those who already have and you hope that it will trickle down, which it never does, you give to those who do not and support them to help them to become entrepreneurs to help them to be able to support the economy, but I am not an economist. I am just sharing their thinking.

So, Madam President, the issue for me is that when we think about the deficit situation in Trinidad and Tobago, I was reading my *Financial Times* this morning and I am seeing that Saudi Arabia yesterday issued its first international bond in its history, it has never done an international bond. Our Minister of Finance recently went and did a nice bond offering and he got the princely sum of \$1 billion, tremendous for us. Saudi Arabia did its first bond yesterday. They were trying to raise \$16billion, they got offers for almost \$70 billion. They only took \$16billion, but it tells you that when a country that has nearly \$800 billion in foreign reserves, they recognize that in past fiscal year they ran a deficit of \$99billion, so that \$800 billion sounds like a lot, but if he keeps running that deficit for a few years your \$800billion goes away very quickly, particularly at these oil prices.

So, those are things that we have to keep in mind that while everything is not transferable, countries that are, what I might consider, in a better financial position

than us are looking harder at the numbers, Saudi Arabia has made major massive cuts across the board to its public, because in Saudi Arabia, a place I have been to, the State is responsible for about three quarters of all the employment in the country. So, when they say they are going to make a 25 per cent cut in salaries and in jobs, it is massive, it shakes up the whole system. But, let me move on.

Sen. Khan: And they do not work.

Sen. D. Small: Well, I hear you and I accept that. Madam President, why must the Government do it all? One of my pet peeves. Where are our corporate sponsors? Why must the State contribute to every single cultural event in the country? Where are our true entrepreneurs? Why must the State provide business opportunities and contracts for many businesses just to survive? If you are running a business and you do not get a State or Government contract you die, then you are not really running a business. You are really not running a business, and I will come to some research on that, and is research I have placed on the table here more than once. Why does everyone expect the State to provide everything for free? Where is our patriotism? How many of us can say what have we contributed to Trinidad and Tobago. What have we done? What have we given back? What have we given back?

I am a simple fella, Madam President, with the greatest of respect. I am hypertensive, so I am liable to get medication from CDAP. I go to my doctor and I get the prescription, and I go to my pharmacist and I insist on paying for it. Because I believe that there are other people in the society who could not afford to do what I do, so I decide—and I pay for my medication, because I say that is my one way of giving a little back. A lot of my giving back here is my time [*Laughter*] but if one of every 10 citizens decide, listen, the things that I am getting from the

State for free perhaps I can afford that and leave that for somebody else who is really needy. My good neighbour here and I would tell you that we would be in a particular supermarket close to where we live, and we will go to the supermarket and you struggle, you see people on the edge. They are at the supermarket till and every item they are checking the price, a bottle of oil this big the girl says, no, take it back, she send the little child to get a smaller bottle, and they are counting every item, and checking the money in their hand. We do not understand how many people in this country are holding on, on the edge, they are holding on. [*Desk thumping*] I mean, I know there is this poverty study, I have not seen it so I cannot comment on it, I am only giving you my real life remit of experiences of what I have seen, and lots of people are struggling.

Madam President, the state enterprise system is broken. I think Trevor Farrell wrote a document and everyone talked about it, to broken institutions and elites—tremendous, tremendous piece of work. But, we have still have a challenge, because there seems to be—there is a malaise affecting the state enterprise sector, state institutions. What people do not seem to understand, they have a responsibility to report to the Ministry, they have a responsibility to report to the Parliament, they seem to feel as if they could continue to work however they want to work, and we have seen it here.

We sat here and looked on the Order Paper and financial results are coming from two 2008 and 2009 and we are in 2016, and that is just poor dereliction of duty, but yet nobody is held to account. That is the problem. Everybody gets away with it, nobody, not even a slap on the hand. [*Slaps hand*] Nothing. And that is the reason why they continue to do it and they will continue to do it. I have my own style of dealing with that, Madam President, for all those under my purview in

another part of this place. But, I will leave that alone.

Madam President, we are living on borrowed funds, so I understand the Minister of Finance's challenges. But, it is like building the proverbial house on a foundation of sand. We are living on borrowed funds. We have to be able to find a way to creatively adjust our lifestyles, adjust our expectations, adjust everything closer to the sustainable revenue numbers, as pointed out by my colleague Sen. Shrikissoon yesterday. I remember when the IEA, International Energy Agency, a couple years ago said we were entering the golden age of natural gas. I remember some other publication said, we are probably also—a lot of countries are experiencing the golden curse of oil, because having oil has actually turned out to be a curse for many countries. What has happened is that you end up with a set of systemic problems because you are dependent on oil revenues, and oil revenues would save the day for everything, and then the weaknesses in the system they become invisible purely on the basis that you have a lot of oil money coming in. When the oil money starts to collapse, you have a challenge.

Sen. Khan: Check—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Small: I hear you, and I am not saying it is complete, but in many places it is.

I want to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, I have agitated in this place, Madam President, several times for the tax-free saving bonds because of the ongoing banditry in terms of the fees that banks charge in this country. I looked at the Central Bank schedule of the difference between deposit fees and lending fees, and I mean it is atrocious. It is atrocious that the gap is 8 per cent and 9 per cent. But, if you want to go to the bank to borrow \$20,000 to fix a little something in your house they want you to sign away your house, your car, everything, they want

10 times the value. It is atrocious, but we are sitting here and we are like the fatted calf and they are just having a feast, and no one is complaining, so, as somebody told me this morning, nobody is taking you on because you does talk and everybody forgets about that and they move on. They keep making their money. But I will continue to talk. The banditry continues, the spread between deposit and interest rates is atrocious.

So, I am happy and I hope that this will cause this effort by the current administration to institute the tax-free saving bonds will cause a migration of significant amounts of that capital that is sitting there, earning negative returns, because the banks hitting me \$25 a month, \$18 a month, your money only going one way, down. As my good colleague the coordinator on the Independent Bench, Sen. Mahabir says, he is sure that in every bank in the head office there is a floor with guys, their whole remit is to devise new ways of getting fees from customers. That is all they do, decide how can we get a fee and hide it within the system to rip customers off.

Sen. Mahabir: The head schemers.

Sen. D. Small: The head schemers. [*Laughs*]

11.45 a.m.

Madam President, quickly—I am running out of time. I have so many issues. The subsidy—my views on the fuel subsidy are clear. I support the move to have that subsidy scaled back and removed but I do not agree with the approach, and I am not enamoured of the style of, we hear about changes to that process out of the back pocket of the Minister. I have argued, and I will put—my position on that is clear. We should have a plan. The Government should say, “Listen, we are going to remove the subsidy over this period of time and every six months or every nine

months we will review it and at that point in time, make it predictable for people.” Make it predictable. When you make it predictable it becomes less of a problem. When you hit people with things out of the back pocket, everybody will say, “rrrrr, we did not expect that, rrrrr, we have inventory”, all kinds of things. In too many other places I have had the benefit of too much reading. I have had the benefit of too much experience that when you make it predictable it becomes more palatable, because people are mentally attuned to it. And it is not a complaint, it is just my view on it.

The subsidy that we are not touching is the electricity subsidy, and again, I am not on that side of the bench, but Trinidad and Tobago has—I think I calculated the rate given; the latest exchange rate. The domestic rate for electricity in Trinidad and Tobago is US 5.5 cents a kilowatt per hour. That amounts to the lowest in the world. There are about two countries who have it lower. Okay? And the average citizen does not have a grasp on how cheap electricity is. They have no concept of how cheap electricity is in this country.

Madam President: Sen. Small, you have five for minutes.

Sen. D. Small: Thank you very much, Madam President. And I think that there is a way to tackle this, and here is my thought. I understand the move to protect the people “an dem” who have low usage, but you should penalize those who have high usage. So let us say, for example, you take someone who is—as a domestic customer who is taking, let us say, 6,000 units and more a month. Six thousand units work out to almost \$3,000 a month per billing cycle. If you can pay \$3,000 in your billing cycle, you could afford to pay a surcharge—a flat surcharge of \$500 or \$800 or whatever. Because we have to find a way to help people to understand. If you do not put some pain on people, they do not understand how damaging this

is.

I have calculated it, Madam President, and the spread between what NGC charges T&TEC for the gas and the price that NGC would use that gas for in other business, my—what I would say—conservative estimate is that the subsidy on electricity is at least \$700 million a year and it could run to as high as \$2 billion a year, and it is because it is not in our face. We are not talking about it and there are ways you can do it. But I think that we are in a situation now where you cannot ignore it, in my respectful opinion.

Madam President, I have a couple of things. White-collar crime does not exist. I have said that many more times. It simply does not exist. And in order to help the Minister of Finance, he should close down the SEC; he should shut down the Anti-Corruption Investigation Bureau—and shut them down because they are not producing any convictions, any arrests, anything. I do not know what they are doing—white-collar crime.

FCB IPO, HCU, Clico, not a man has appeared before a magistrate or any enquiry to be able to face anything. These are things that could have sunk our economy, and we just leave it to be, and people are living the wonderful life. So why bother having an Anti-Corruption Investigation Bureau? Shut it down. Put them to work in Homicide. I understand they have some challenges with Homicide staff. Move them to Homicide. Shut it down. Yes? Because it does not make sense. We are afraid, because of people's positions, to prosecute those who have done wrong. They have done wrong and we are afraid to do it. I do not know why, but I am not on that side of the table, so I can say that.

Madam President, I have one more thing I want to close with and it is very important for me. Madam President, I saw in the newspaper this morning the Met

Appropriation (Financial Year 2017)
Bill, 2016 (cont'd)
Sen. D. Small (cont'd)

2016.10.21

office said that we are experiencing some very hot days. This is an area of mine, Madam President. We have to—*[Interruption]* It is 36.2. The temperature in New York City yesterday and in Washington DC was 84 degrees Celsius. If you check the date—today's, you know—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Senator: Fahrenheit.

Sen. D. Small: Fahrenheit, forgive me—my train of thought. When you go to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website, September 2016 was the hottest month in the history of recorded data. Before that, the previous hottest month was August 2016. Before that, the previous hottest month was July 2016, and so it went. From May 2015 to now, we are on an unprecedented run where every succeeding month is the hottest month in the recorded history of mankind. Okay? We do not under—

There is something called the climate departure date, Madam President. It is a study by the University of Hawaii and they have put it on the table. Trinidad and Tobago's climate departure date is the year 2032. It will never be that year, but here is what. It is coming, and the climate departure says—all it says is that the hottest—at that date your atmosphere would have warmed to the point where what previously was ever your highest temperature will be your coolest temperature going forward. And in this current run of temperatures, as it is now, even if the temperatures drop off for October, November and December, 2016 would be the hottest year ever in recorded history. And I say that in the context of, we signed the Sustainable Development Goals. We had a debate here on several issues. Goal 13 talks to take urgent action to deal with climate change and its impact. I am yet to see anything.

There was zero mentioned in the budget. I did not probably expect in the

budget, but somewhere along the line I would like to be able to understand what is the plan. What can we do? And here is why it is important, Madam President, as I wrap up. Climate change, the biggest and most significant impact is something called sea-level rise. We do not have the luxury in Trinidad and Tobago of picking up in our cars and driving inland to a higher location in a couple miles, because if we do that, we drive to the ocean.

So, Madam President, as I begin to wrap up, I think that the—

Madam President: You have to end wrapping up. [*Laughter*]

Sen. D. Small: Okay. Madam President, thank you very much for the opportunity and with that, I close my contribution. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*].

Madam President: Sen. Stewart. [*Desk thumping*] Hon. Senators, Sen. Stewart has asked for leave and I have granted it, pursuant to Standing Order 41(11)—42(11), sorry.

Sen. Nadine Stewart: Thank you, Madam President. It gives me great pleasure to join the debate at this time on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Bill, 2016, and to make another contribution in this Chamber as a young woman, as a Senator on the Government Bench and as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President—

Sen. Khan: As a Tobagonian.

Sen. N. Stewart: And as a Tobagonian, as Minister Khan added. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I want to pause to just thank Almighty God for His continued blessings upon my life, blessings and favour as I continue to serve with distinction and class as desired by Him. Madam President, once again, I would also like to express profound gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister, to the People's National Movement and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And I want to specially

mention, Madam President, the people of Tobago for having the confidence in me, for all the love, encouragement and support as I continue to grow on this journey.

Madam President, I extend congratulations to all Senators that have contributed thus far to this Bill, on both the Opposition and the Independent Benches, as only from these benches, Madam President, I can say that critical discussions ensued and salient points put forward. Because, you see, a budget means several things to several people and it is interpreted differently by different people. So, therefore, I am not surprised by some of the utterings coming from the Members of the Opposition.

Hon. Senator: Utterances.

Sen. N. Stewart: Madam President, I listened to the contribution of Sen. Mark—well, I tried to listen through all the screaming and the ranting and the waving—and I just want to touch on two things that he spoke about. First, Sen. Mark mentioned that in spite of the challenges that we are faced with, that the Government puts \$500,000 to repair the official Prime Minister's residence in Tobago, and he is predicting that it will go from \$500,000 to \$5 million, alluding to cost overruns on a project that should not be a priority. But, Madam President, it is the hon. Prime Minister himself who indicated that this sum is for the demolition and removal of an unsound structure and other incidentals associated with the planning stages for future construction, as it is the Government's intention to build suitable accommodation for the holder of the Office of Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago on the island of Tobago.

But, Madam President, you know the Opposition, in their usual obstructionist ways, they—both on social media and in the other place, they have “seeked” to criticize the Government for this move. They are making it very clear

for the Tobagonian population to see that those in Opposition would want to class us in Tobago as secondary-class citizens. And I need to ask my colleagues opposite: is it not Trinidad and Tobago? Is it not two islands, one country, Madam President? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, and the residence is intended for the office holder and not any one individual. And I would like to remind this House that—I think it was in the lead-up to the 2010 general election, the hue and cry from the Opposition forces. It was the then late Prime Minister, Patrick Manning—God rest his soul—he was building a vanity house for himself at the public's expense, coming from the Opposition then. They talked about Manning palace this, and Manning palace that, Madam President, and they were speaking about the official residence of the Prime Minister, the Diplomatic Centre.

But, Madam President, you would not believe, no sooner had the UNC and the People's Partnership taken office, it is aunty, uncle, “nenen”, bag boy, bag girl, [*Desk thumping*] everybody moved into the residence. Parties, functions, everything they had there and it was not a criticism then, Madam President. But as a Tobagonian, the people of Tobago, we congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister for this initiative and we urge them to have this project completed in the shortest time possible. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, Sen. Mark also—he may want to check his maths again, because he stated that they, on that side, represent the masses. They represent the majority of the population, and this Government maybe represents 1 per cent. But, Madam President, I am not sure if Sen. Mark went to school in July/August, but by us being in Government it is a clear indication that we, on this side, represent the majority. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I now address Sen. Solomon who, unfortunately—

Sen. Mark: “Yuh finish wit me?”

Sen. N. Stewart:—is not in the Chamber. I cannot “bodder wit” you too much, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Leave the rest for me.

Sen. N. Stewart: Madam President, it is with a great sense of sadness that I address some of the most unfortunate statements made by Sen. Solomon in his budget contribution last night. Because from last night, just up until I got up, I have been inundated with texts and calls and messages from people of Tobago who are aghast at the words of the hon. Member with respect to young persons engaging in the sale of “bene balls” and juice and “toolum”. Madam President, one of the young ladies who operates a very successful outlet at the port in Scarborough, has asked: why would a Senator seek to berate what represents a significant part of our culture in Tobago and someone’s livelihood? [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, people travel from all over the world to come to Tobago and they cannot leave without getting these delicacies, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*].

And I want to state, for the record, that this PNM Government, we are proud and happy for all those persons who have made thriving business out of these very items and we will not encourage this type of shaming. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Do not be distracted. Do not be distracted by empty vessels.

Sen. N. Stewart: Madam President, what was surprising to me again is that Sen. Solomon expressed, in all his eloquence, for tourism in this country specifically on the island of Tobago, his eyes have suddenly opened. They have suddenly opened,

because Sen. Solomon, he now has the time. He has just found the time to give us all the advice on tourism, when he could not give it to his Minister, Minister Hadeed, of the then tourism Ministry, and all the other Ministers under the People's Partnership Government. But he is now an advocate and he is now an adviser to the Minister of Tourism and to this Government. But, Madam President, I will speak to tourism later on in my contribution.

You see, it is very easy for the Members of the Opposition to cast aspersions and it is very easy for them to make empty rhetorical statements. But one has to understand, our country is faced with a current economic crisis. We are here, but where did we come from? Did Trinidad and Tobago just wake up one morning and realize we are in this position?

12.00 noon.

Madam President, our country's current difficulty was aggravated by negligence for legitimate financial management during an era when oil costs went into freefall and worldwide economies were confronted with challenges. So our situation in Trinidad and Tobago, it is not unique and we fully recognize the implications of all this for our Government's revenue, our country's overall fiscal situation and our balance of payment situation.

So, Madam President, how are we to survive, how are we to respond to these change in economic circumstances? We could adopt one of two approaches. First approach, we could take the irresponsible approach and give the impression as if everything is okay and do nothing in response to our current situation, and down the road we end up in even greater difficulties; or we could take the responsible approach and carefully analyze our economic situation and do the things that are necessary to respond effectively to our current situation and see improvement in

the future. And, Madam President, I am happy to be a part of an administration with a Minister of Finance who has chosen the latter option, and it is in context that this current Appropriation Bill must be viewed.

It is at this point I wish to express sincere congratulations to the Minister of Finance and his team at the Ministry [*Desk thumping*] for what I would describe as a strategic, a well-structured, a comprehensive, a realistic and an honest budget. And I specifically say honest because I think the days of hiding the truth and making the situation seem better than it really is, that typically characterized our friends are now behind us. We are now at a place where we can seriously begin to address our national economic challenges in a forthright and mature manner as we continue our national journey of recovery and restoration.

The Minister of Finance presented the national budget 2017 with an emphasis on macroeconomic stability, private sector competitiveness, agricultural modernization and enhancing natural resource management. This budget, it is not just a collection of numbers as printed in the budget estimates book, but also a reflection of the values and aspirations of the Government's Vision 2030 goals and the nation at large.

Madam President, as one of the Senators in this House from Tobago, I wish to crave your indulgence to give specific focus to Tobago in my contribution to this debate, and I do so not because of any insular reasons or my profound love for Tobago, but because very often specific issues and idiosyncrasies are either lost, they are not well ventilated or well understood in national discussions. It is important that Tobago issues are well understood as Tobago will continue to have a critical role to play in national development.

The budgetary allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly for fiscal 2017

is \$2.354 billion, of which \$2.045 billion was allocated for recurrent expenditure, \$289 million for capital expenditure and \$20 million for the Unemployment Relief Programme. For fiscal 2017, the Tobago House of Assembly requested a total of \$5.39 billion of which \$3.2 billion was requested for recurrent expenditure and \$2.04 billion was requested for capital expenditure. Now this is not an ideal or a perfect allocation, but we in Tobago, we fully understand our country's economic situation, and although we were not a part of the economic mismanagement that took place in this country under the last administration, we stand ready to do our part in rebuilding this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, notwithstanding the reduction in the allocation, I am confident and comfortable that the Tobago House of Assembly is well able and equipped to do more with less. The Tobago House of Assembly has managed well in the past and we remain confident in their abilities and are prepared to do our part. The situation in our country today, it demands that we all work together and share the burden, not some. It is in this particular context I hold the firm view that the budgetary allocation to the Assembly is both reasonable and it is fair.

Additionally, the budget allocation to the Assembly is consistent with the recommendations of the Dispute Resolution Commission, which stipulates that the Assembly be allocated between 4.03 per cent and 6.9 per cent of the national budget. Indeed, for the second year straight since the PNM Government took office, the allocation to the Assembly is 4.4 per cent of the national budget and this allocation, therefore, represents a break from the previous pattern of successful central governments to just allocate the Assembly the bare minimum of 4.03 per cent and nothing more. Madam President, not only the money allocation is noteworthy to mention, but the fact that we are seeing a genuine relationship

between the Tobago House of Assembly and the central government. [*Desk thumping*]

Beyond the direct budgetary allocation, Tobago will also benefit from the expenditures of Government Ministries in Tobago in fulfilment of their statutory authority as outlined in the Sixth Schedule of the THA Act 40 of 1996, and these expenditures, they are geared primarily towards improving the water situation in Tobago, improving the security architecture and public safety on the island, and improving the reliability of the electricity supply on the island.

To illustrate, under the Ministry of Public Utilities provision is made for improving the water situation through the following projects: desilt and rehabilitate the Hillsborough dam; a project to upgrade transmission networks in Tobago; a special project for the development of an integrated water security programme for Tobago; and Tobago wells development projects. These projects will be particularly important to Tobago in light of the recent water problems being encountered and the limited rainfall we have been receiving in the rainy season. Over the past few years, Tobago has seen an unusually low rainfall during the rainy season, coupled with the debilitating effects of extremely harsh dry seasons, and notwithstanding the drilling of wells and the laying of new pipelines replaced the ageing and leaking ones, there still has been some measure of hardship by residents on the island.

Madam President, this to some extent had a negative effect on our tourism as well due to the rationing of water on several parts of the island, but I am happy that the Minister of Finance has indicated that ground breaking work will begin in fiscal 2016 on a desalination plant that will significantly boost Tobago's water capacity thus alleviating the shortfall. What this means, is that 84-year-old Mrs.

Walcott from Store Bay Local Road, she will no longer have to depend on her son who lives in Belle Gardens to bring her a few buckets of water—Store Bay Local Road is in the west, Belle Gardens is in the east—to do the simplest thing such as cook and bathe.

I want Mrs. Walcott and the people of Tobago to know that this Government did not forget you or about you. These are real people whose lives will be positively impacted by this development. Added to that, there is a provision in the Ministry of National Security for the improvement of the security architecture and public safety in Tobago.

Madam President, the village of Roxborough, my home town, we have waited years for the construction of a new police station, and when the last PNM Government demitted office in 2010 I am informed that the contracts for these two police stations, one in Roxborough and the other in Old Grange, were already awarded and construction was set to commence. But after five years and three months of being in office, the People Partnership, they put out in their 2015 manifesto dedicating a paltry two sentences to speak about security on the island of Tobago.

And while they boasted of building several police stations in places like Oropouche, Brasso, Cumuto and all over Trinidad, what they did they do for Tobago? Not one police station was built, and this particular project has been a significant source of frustration to the people of Tobago and the subject of many broken promises. But I am pleased to announce that this responsible PNM Government will undertake the building of the long overdue Roxborough and Old Grange Police Stations in early 2017. Again, through the collaborative efforts of the THA, the Ministry of National Security and UDeCOTT, the construction of

these police stations will commence in the first quarter. Additionally, the Ministry of National Security will begin to actively pursue reconstruction of the Roxborough Fire Station.

Several other Ministries inclusive of the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs undertakes expenditure in Tobago, and what is clearly evident is that the financial resources to Tobago extend well above the parliamentary appropriations to the Assembly. Madam President, a detailed examination of the budgetary allocation to Tobago will also suggest that although the allocation has been reduced, there is still support for some of Tobago's most urgent development needs as articulated in the comprehensive economic development plan. For instance, provision is made for the continued expansion and improvement of Tobago's housing stock with allocations for the development of several housing estates in Tobago, as well as allocations to the Home Improvement Grant and Home Improvement Subsidy Programme.

Madam President, provision is made for stimulating entrepreneurship in Tobago through allocation for the continued development of the Cove Industrial Estate and Business Park, as well as support for the Business Development Programme and the Business Development Grant programme in the Division of Finance and Enterprise Development. And since the inception of the business loan programme in 2003, loans to the tune of \$30 million have been afforded to over 300 Tobagonians to establish and expand their businesses on the island.

Likewise, since the establishment of the Business Development Grant programme, grants to the tune of \$13 million have been given to over 750 Tobagonians to establish and expand their businesses. Added to that, there is

further support in the budget for the development of the human resource capacity in Tobago and that is through the Financial Assistance Programme of the Assembly, which assists Tobagonians pursuing tertiary education financially; and, as a direct result of this programme the portion of the labour force in Tobago with tertiary education has now risen from 5 per cent in 2001 to about 20 per cent today.

So, Madam President, again, I am confident that notwithstanding the reduction in the allocation, the Assembly is still fairly well positioned to continue to deliver to the people of Tobago, to ensure the continued improvement in the quality of lives of Tobagonians. I am also assured that when Tobago is returned to the safe hands of the People's National Movement in the next Tobago House of Assembly election, [*Desk thumping*] due in 2017, the people of Tobago can expect continued improvement in the standard of living they now enjoy. What is required is continued prudence and a clear strategy of doing more with less.

Madam President, there are a number of other measures in the budget that will directly benefit the people of Tobago, and please permit me to highlight a few of them. The proposals to exempt or give rebate to persons whose regular electricity bill is \$300 and lower will certainly benefit a significant number of Tobagonians especially those in the rural areas allowing them to have more disposal incomes; the agro-processing tax relief, this will also be beneficial to Tobago as the agro-processing sector is one of the major sectors that the Assembly has been trying to promote in its entrepreneurial drive; and indeed, earlier this year the Assembly opened two multiprocessor units at Cove which are specially aimed at providing factory space for agro-processors in Tobago to establish and expand their businesses.

So therefore, the proposal to grant tax relief to agro-processors is quite

refreshing and much appreciated, and will advance persons in Tobago, encouraging entrepreneurship and growth in the sector.

12.15 p.m.

Likewise, Madam President, there is a proposal to establish the entrepreneurial talent grant. That is also appreciated because I know that given the interest in entrepreneurship that I have seen in Tobago over the years, a number of Tobago-based entrepreneurs and prospective entrepreneurs will have a good chance of applying for and winning this grant. And as I speak, the Andy's Cherry Nectar, a local brand in Tobago, they are having their opening ceremony at the Cove occupying one of the MPUs and their production targets both local, regional and international markets and has the potential for foreign exchange

So, Madam President, the budget is not at all bad as some people are trying to make us believe. It is the President of the Tobago Division of the Chamber of Commerce in response to the budget, he said that it is adequate to run the affairs of Tobago. Other stakeholders are saying that it is reasonable and it is indeed fair.

Madam President, I move to the discussion on tourism in Tobago and we can say that things are looking up and looking good for tourism in Tobago. Critical to our overall diversification efforts is the development of the tourism sector with particular emphasis on Tobago. The tourism sector, which was negatively affected by the global financial crisis, is now showing signs of recovery. The recent numbers for the sector in Tobago suggest that the potential for growth remains high. Additionally even more locals from Trinidad are flocking Destination Tobago as it offers exceptional yet affordable holiday experience.

And, Madam President, just this past weekend, the annual Blue Food Festival concluded in Bloody Bay, Tobago, to much acclaim which a number of

persons, both international and local, converging on the island for this event. The Tobago Blue Food Festival was regarded sometime back in May as one of the world's best festivals by CNN. The festival attracts thousands of patrons who come to sample local dasheen products. Added to that, Tobago was identified by CNN, again, was one of the fastest-growing destinations in the Caribbean, and also the Caribbean as a region being the fastest-growing destination in the world. The island of Tobago, over the years, many organizations have recognized Tobago citing places such as Pigeon Point Beach which was named one of the best all-day beaches in Tobago.

But, Madam President, notwithstanding recent positive signs, the tourism sector on the island still faces significant challenges that require urgent attention and this administration is fully committed to working with the Assembly in addressing these issues. The current condition of the ANR Robinson International Airport terminal continues to present notable challenges for domestic and international passengers. And given its potential to earn valuable foreign exchange, the tourism sector is too important to Tobago, and to the national economy for us to allow growth to this sector to be stymied by inadequate airport facilities.

And that is why this Government has committed to the construction of a spanking new world-class terminal that is an important bridge between our unitary state benefiting the needs of all citizens and visitors alike, thereby giving this country a competitive edge in the international tourism market. It will also ensure that our citizens can travel between the two islands in a comfortable and dignified environment. And, Madam President, we are not talking about patchwork or "mamagism", you know, with "ah barricade here and ah another one there", fooling us to believe that something significant is occurring. We are speaking

about a commitment to construct a modern terminal that meets international standards and also meet the needs of the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I am also heartened by the continued commitment of the Government for the establishment of the Sandals resort in Tobago to aid in further tourism development on the island. Sandals, Madam President, it is known for its large luxurious resorts and it is expected to house 750 rooms in each of the Tobago hotels. And a result of this magnitude with a renowned brand like Sandals would definitely yield benefits to the people of Tobago. And it is no exaggeration to say that Sandals today is one of the most powerful resorts in the Caribbean.

I also wanted to mention in response to Sen. Solomon, again, that wherever Sandals goes, the airline will go so we would not have the problem with flights not coming from North America. And with a catalyst like Sandals, there is a sure boost to our tourism sector. With this prospect, Tobago is poised to make a significant contribution to GDP because of the type of potential tourism has for income development. This also means that all the existing resorts and hotels in Tobago, they would now be obliged to upgrade their own product to meet the competitiveness of Sandals and would now have a valid incentive to do so.

Tourism in Tobago suffered from what I would refer to as a triple threat and it may have been stagnant for three reasons: low occupancy, marketing and airlift. And you cannot revitalize unless you have a catalyst and Sandals brings all three things to the table. With Sandals on stream, low occupancy will be resolved and airlift, again, coming particularly out of North America would be improved. The power of the Sandals brand itself takes care of the marketing aspect of Tobago as a tourist destination.

Madam President, an article published on September 21st in the *Trinidad*

Express:

“Grenada Prime Minister Dr. Keith Mitchell...trumpeted the role of Sandals Resorts—which opened in St George’s in 2014—in fuelling his country’s economy toward topping the growth charts in the Caribbean for 2015.”

And I quote:

“Mitchell, speaking from the Prime Minister’s residence in St George’s, a short distance from the resort, said the establishment’s reach of economic benefits extends...”—well—“beyond direct employment and has positively impacted the agriculture sector, Grenada’s big earner next to tourism.”

Madam President, Dr. Mitchell indicated that Sandals resort in Grenada has had a significant impact on its economy since it opened its doors in 2014.

In another interview with some of our local reporters who travelled to Grenada with stakeholders from Tobago, including members of the hoteliers associations, the Tobago Chamber and the local media on a replay of CNC3’s Business Watch, Dr. Mitchell did admit that in the early stages, stakeholders in Grenada had some issues with Sandals coming to the island. It was during that very meeting that Dr. Mitchell highlighted that Sandals, as a brand, with its international connection, understands that it cannot do anything in any country that sends a negative message because it will have a negative impact on the Sandals brand. He further mentioned that if they did not have a Sandals in Grenada, their tourism product would not be where it is today.

So every effort would be made to ensure that the Sandals chain commits to maximizing the employment of local personnel, both during the planning and construction phase, as well in the operation of the completed resort. So, Madam President, we should welcome the idea of Sandals with open arms as this prospect

will assist in diversifying our economy to become a sustainable competitive industry like other Caribbean islands.

Madam President, I move now to the discussion on internal self-government for Tobago and I really applaud the people of Tobago who came out to the consultations to treat with this matter and also the forum of political leaders—heads of all the political parties in Tobago for carrying out their duties in a collaborative and consultative manner. The discussion climaxed on October 3rd and I was happy to be in attendance where the public was given one final chance to voice their views on the draft Bill for Tobago's autonomy.

A draft Bill was prepared following various discussions with different sectors across Tobago: lawyers, activists, community groups and organizations. It is my understanding that next Thursday, this Bill would be debated at the Tobago Legislative Chamber after which it would be forwarded to the Cabinet. The conversation will continue between Trinidad and Tobago and it is my hope that this will be done in a respectful way and the wishes and ideals of Tobagonians will be accepted.

So, Madam President, as I seek to end my discourse, I would like to reaffirm the entire nation and in particular the people of Tobago, that insofar as you have placed your confidence in this Government to effectively manage the affairs of State, we will not betray that confidence. We now have a tremendous opportunity in Trinidad and Tobago in that we have a Government that has demonstrated its caring, a government with a vision, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago can only benefit from and despite the challenges, we should not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by doom and gloom.

And, Madam President, through you to those on the other side, I would like

to remind them that during your dismal term of office and despite the many promises you made, you failed the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] This Government is saying: the electricity upgrade on the island that you did not do, this Government will; the robust and efficient water delivery system that you did not do, this Government will; desilting of the Hillsborough Dam that you did not do, this Government will; autonomy for the people of Tobago that you failed to deliver, this Government will and all other unfulfilled promises that you gave to the people of Tobago, insomuch as they fall in line with the Government's policy, we will do it.

Madam President, our work here matters. It is going to affect a family, a husband, a wife, a sister, a brother and a child and what we want them to remember for decades to come is the positive effects that this budget has had on their lives and how it richly impacted the nation.

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

Madam President: At this juncture, we will take the lunch break, so that we will suspend until 1.30 p.m. So we are now suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.27 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Sen. Paul Richards: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and colleagues for this opportunity to contribute to the Bill, which is entitled: a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30th, 2017.

It is indeed an honour. You know, thinking back after this budget presentation, and thinking that, you know, this is probably the 30th or so budget

presentation that I paid attention to since coming of age in my 20s, and looking at budgets and wondering, you know, from then to now, how and if budget presentations have changed, and the impact that they have on the population. I remember back in the day, as the young say, “budget was ah big thing”, you know, “yuh excited, yuh know how much—TV and yuh turn on radio, gather rong de radio and yuh listen” to whatever the Finance Minister had to say, because well, we were a young Republic and we still are a young country, independent nation and it meant different things to what it means now.

Well, you know, and this is not throwing any shade at any particular Finance Minister, but I think budget presentations now have lost that sort of interest in the population. You know, it is a projection of revenues and expenditures, of course, it is important, let us not negate that fact. It is important for the Government of the day to articulate their vision and their projections and expenditures in revenues to the population in an official manner. But in many ways, over the last 10/15 years, it has turned into, in addition to that, a theatrical, political presentation, and that is also important in terms of our culture.

But most Trinbagonians really, when you think about it, they want to know what is going up? What is going down? What we have to pay more for? In recent times, is gas going to raise? Is diesel going to raise, cigarettes, rum, taxes? What rebates we are getting, et cetera. But to me at this point when we look at the limited resources in the position we find ourselves in economically, it is not really about how much each Ministry gets.

When you look around the world we are still a very blessed country, though we are in difficult economic times. When we look around the Caribbean, we are still a very blessed country. The fortunate thing is that we have become

accustomed to living a particular lifestyle. We are still living as if oil is \$125 a barrel, though the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have articulated over and over again that it is not business as usual. We have to tighten our belts, but when you look around Trinidad and Tobago, do you see belts tightening?

The port still has the deluge of cars coming in that disappear in a month, another shipment comes in. You know, we are still flying to New York and Miami. We are still buying up a storm online. We are still liming, drinking, you know, which is fine, but are we really paying attention to what we can afford? Or are we comfortable living on borrowed money? Because the reality of it is that we are earning less than half in terms of our oil revenue than we earned, say six years ago, seven years ago, and that is the stark reality. If we ran a household like that and we continue those spending habits with that revenue, what position will we find ourselves in?

So to me it is not about this Ministry got \$9 billion last year and it only got \$7 billion this year. It is about the State and the population understanding it is a different time, and we have to have a different approach to governance and to how we spend money. It is about accountability, prudence, efficiency, innovation, new ideas, new approaches, and that is where, to me, we are going to make a big difference in Trinidad and Tobago.

Each Ministry, each sector including the private sector, has to have a different approach. If we—and one of my colleagues indicated yesterday, Barbados is a much smaller economy than ours, but they are showing up so much more significantly higher on the competitiveness indices and the human capital indices. Why is that? What are they doing that we are not doing? What different approaches have they been able to take that we are not? Are we still victims of the

Dutch Syndrome, where we still feel that, “well, de oil price going to raise next week miraculously and we going to be all right”? Or are we starting to dig in our heels and use this opportunity to be innovative?

I want to commend the Minister, you know, for his—and the Government by extension, for achieving the almost \$11 billion reduction in projected 2015—2016, which is commendable. [*Desk thumping*] We are always talk about the deficits, and focusing on the deficits is important, but when we have that kind of efficiency, it must be underscored, because it sends a signal to all of us that we can do more with less, but I still think we could do a lot more.

We still continue to have, as we say in Trinidad and Tobago parlance “champagne taste and mauby pocket”. Not that mauby is “ah bad ting”, mauby is a good thing, but mauby costs a lot less than champagne. Added to that, champagne is imported. Mauby can be grown locally, and that is the kind of difference in thinking. We have to reorganize and reframe out mindsets. Long ago “salfish an pigtail an ting was poor people food”. Now, go and see “wah ah pong ah salfish cost”, and it ends up on highfalutin menus, presented in different ways. We have to use what we have.

I am heartened to hear the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries talk about the fact that we are focusing on getting 80 per cent local in the School Nutrition Programme, because that is where we need to go. An old scientist friend of mine, a nutritionist, once told me, “There is a reason why we grow mangoes here and not apples, because mangoes probably better for us here, and not apples”.

We come from an era where it was big shot to import grapes. “We use to hah to wait for grapes, or if we cyar get grapes in the austere times of the NAR, when we cutting, an we vex, because we cyar live like big shot and eat grapes.” But now,

we could eat pommecythere. We could eat chenette. We could eat mango. We do not have to be spending that kind of money to import foodstuffs like that. In many cases, the imports do not do us any good healthwise. That is the kind of change we need to do.

There are four parts of this fiscal package that I really want to focus on, because the great thing about it, I think, is that the Independent Bench has such a variety of competencies that people are handling different areas, and also Government and Opposition are chiming in with their significant contributions.

Just an overview of total expenditure \$53.47 billion; revenue \$47.41 billion; deficit \$6.4 billion; education \$7.22 billion, 2016 it was \$9.76 billion; national security \$7.26 billion, in 2016, \$10.81 billion; obvious reductions in allocations because of the economic situation we find ourselves in; health \$6.25 billion; public utilities \$3.293 billion; works and transport \$2.087 billion; rural development \$1.92 billion; agriculture \$766 million; housing \$664 million. When you look at it, as I said before, it is not about how much each Ministry gets, because quite frankly, \$7.22 billion can run some whole countries in the world.

Mr. Young: Especially on eBay.

Sen. P. Richards: Especially on eBay, according to, Minister Stuart —\$7.26 billion for national security can run some entire economies, but we are worrying about a \$2 billion cut and \$1 billion cut, when we can do so much more. We have spent in some instances, \$11 billion in education and \$11 billion in national security. Have we seen a commensurate reduction in crime for those levels of spending? Have we seen the education system serving the country when we spend that much? No. It is not necessary about how much you spend. It is about how you use the money, how you account for it, and is it serving the needs of the population

in each particular sector?

I am going to focus on education and national security because I have said, I think they are both two ends of a critical continuum in any society. Educate a population or an individual, they are less likely to end up on the other side of the continuum which is the criminal justice system. It is interesting that these two sectors have gotten the largest shares of the budget. If we do more in education, I am sure over the years we can put less to national security because we will be making available less individuals who are vulnerable to the criminal element, and also I will underscore a critical element which is social intervention in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, let me just quote a bit from the Education Act of Trinidad and Tobago. Section 3 and this part I beg your leave to just read a bit for accuracy:

“The powers conferred on the Minister by this Act shall
be exercised so as to ensure—

- (a) the promotion of the education of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the establishment of institutions devoted to that purpose by means of which he shall thereby contribute towards the development of the human resources, physical mental, moral and spiritual of the community;
- (b) the establishment of a system of education designed to provide adequately for the planning and development of an educational service related to the changing needs of the community;”

And we are changing, rapidly in these times:

“(c) the effective execution of the education policy of the Government.”

There is also section 4(2), and I will quote also again:

“(2) In addition to the several duties imposed on the Minister...

(a) devising a system of education calculated as far as possible to ensure that educational and vocational abilities, aptitudes and interests of the children find adequate expression and opportunity for development;”

And finally a part that still confounds me a bit because I do not know what it really means in this context:

(d) assisting needy pupils so as to enable them to participate in the facilities offered by the education system.”

I really do not know what “a needy child” means in this context. Is it a special needs child? Is it an economically deprived child? And how does that fit into any modern education system? How is our education system serving our country? Is it serving our country? Is it preparing critical thinkers? Is it preparing leaders? It is preparing persons with character in Trinidad and Tobago, who will contribute to our development in a fast-changing world, a very competitive world at that, where they must compete not only locally and regionally, but globally? I really do not think so. I think a lot of it is focused on passing exams, getting certificates and getting a job. We are not producing the kind of critical thinking that we should in society by our education system.

Generally, 18,000 or so pupils write the SEA examination. A little over 16,000 register in secondary schools—gap. I said it in my last contribution, where are those children? Why are we not tracking them, if they are falling through the system? Also, those who register and attend secondary schools, of the sixteen-or-so thousand or just under 16,000, there are 2,500—3,000 who are falling below

baseline performance levels. So two and three are five, out of 18,000. It is almost one-sixth of a critical age that continue to fall through the cracks. But we are still worrying about whether we are spending \$7 billion or \$9 billion, and they are not serving those, and the gangs and the criminal elements are waiting happily to snap them up, because society is not preparing them for productive, legal enterprise in Trinidad and Tobago, and we are not addressing that. Is this system competitive regionally and globally? Why is the system not performing optimally?

Well, there are several models that we can emulate that have done well, consistently topping the education indices around the world. Every year for the past 10 years, there is a particular system that really does well, and that is Finland. There are some elements in that Finnish system that really we need to take a clear, close look at, and we do not need to import carte blanche, because we have our own culture here, but certainly we can learn from it and understand why they continue to top the global indices in education, and systems that we can apply in Trinidad and Tobago to our system, because we are blessed to have free early childhood care education, free primary education, free secondary education, and by and large, free tertiary education, though some necessary cuts have been made, and some conditionalities have been applied to that because there was a lot of wastage in that tertiary education system.

1.45 p.m.

One of the elements of the Finnish system that makes it so productive is rigorous entry requirements for the teaching profession. Teaching is revered. You see like how we like to say “doctor is big shot” and “lawyer is big shot”, in Finland, you are a teacher, you are on top of the table, because they understand the importance of educators in the system of national development. So whilst doctors

and lawyers are important, they revere teachers, and they have very high accountability benchmark for teachers, high entry requirements for teachers.

“...the teaching profession; comprehensive and egalitarian public funding...and teaching encouragingly for the purpose that students learn, rather than punitively for the purpose that they meet the requirements of high-stakes external tests.”—over and over.

“Another important aspect of Finland’s success is that students who are right at the top, who teachers feel might not be being extended adequately, benefit from the emphasis on special education support...”

Now, we talk about special education in Trinidad and Tobago, but I do not see us really getting a clear understanding of what a proper special education system means, in terms of those who are struggling with learning disabilities, those who have challenges, cognitively and emotionally and those who are considered the exceptional students who are at the top end of the percentile ranking, who can do better, who are the future scientists, et cetera, who can contribute to innovation in Trinidad and Tobago, and by extension the world.

A comprehensive special education system takes care of those who are struggling and challenged, but also it facilitates those who are exceptional learners who can do better, who are at the top level, because those also need special kinds of education systems.

The Finland system also makes use of vocational opportunities available in upper secondary schools, which is also critical in terms of us understanding, like Germany, that technical and vocational endeavours are important in building an economy. It is not only about doctors and lawyers. The machinists, the entrepreneurs are also equally as important to build a holistic economy. Other

reasons—and that, just to quote properly, is from Dr. Andrew Scott. It is dated February 9, 2015 Theage.com. It is an online publication on education that is very respected.

Other reasons for Finland schools performing better is:

“Better standardized tests

Finish students only take one standardized test during their entire primary and secondary schooling.”—life.

One, not every three months, because what testing does, it encourages teachers to teach to the test, and not to the students’ abilities and each student is unique. So, we have gotten caught up in this—it is quite frankly—an elitist system of exclusion rather than inclusion where we test every three months, we test every year, and there is a curriculum built around that testing model. We lose the essence of what education or training is about, which is producing critical thinkers. Which is saying, if I have this problem, what steps am I using as a learner to solve this problem which can be applied to the wider society in every sector, as opposed to “two and two is four, four and four is eight”, and learning content for regurgitation, which is what excessive testing does.

There are:

“Critics”—that—“claim constant testing doesn’t make students any smarter but instead creates a ‘teaching to the test’ environment in schools. Karen Magee, the president of the largest teachers union in New York, went so far as to urge parents to boycott standardized tests...”

—because it has been proven over and over to not work. It does not produce the kind of individual or student you really want. It ends up producing a society or critical thinkers who can more positively contribute do development, and deal with

the different kind of context and environment in a fast-changing world.

Also, something we should all be very understanding of, Finnish students have more time for play, because play engenders creativity.

“Students in Finland spend relatively little time on homework, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). A 2014 study of 15-year-olds around the world by the OECD said that on average, Finnish students spend 2.8 hours a week on homework. This contrasts noticeably from the 6.1 hours American students spend per week.”
 —on homework. The US is at about 15 on the World Education Indices and Finland is constantly at number one.

“Finns place a lot of value on free time and play. By law, teachers must give students a 15-minute break for every 45 minutes of instruction.”

Because if you think you all are zoned out in here as adults, and you have stronger cognitive powers and powers of concentration—and I know you zone out because I zone out sometimes after half an hour—you could imagine for a child whose attention span is less, yet we subject children, against what the science has proven, to two hours of instruction, 90 minutes of constant instruction. After 30 minutes they are gone mentally, but we are not building that science into the education system to maximize learning.

“...in the US where kids typically get less than half an hour of recess every day...

College is free”

Fortunately we have that paradigm in Trinidad and Tobago.

“In Finland, not only are bachelor degree programs completely free...so are master and doctoral programs.”

Fortunately, we have some level of that still in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is commendable that the three last successive governments have continued to place emphasis on some level of funding for tertiary level institutions, though it obviously had to be conditional at this stage, with our challenged economic situation. And, also:

“4. Elevated teaching profession”

It is critical that we value teachers, we place higher value on teachers at all levels, invest money in their training, but also hold them more accountable, because in several jurisdictions, teaching is one of the most highly paid professions, but teachers are held highly accountable for performance.

In Trinidad and Tobago, it is interesting, about four years ago, I had the opportunity to participate in some research with my professors at Andrews. We went to 10 schools: four denominational schools and six government-administered schools. The sad thing about it is when we went to the—and the schools knew we were coming, because we planned about a month in advance to conduct this research. It was on math anxiety and the impact math anxiety has on students' performance in math. The four denominational schools we went to, we walked into the classroom, the students got up: “Good afternoon.” They were very polite. The teachers were there, and the students participated brilliantly.

Sadly, when we went to the government schools, of the six schools, four teachers were absent. The teachers had no idea where they were, and the students were left unsupervised, and this is four years ago, and we wonder why the government-administered schools continue to underperform compared to the denominational schools.

In terms of elevating the teaching profession, while they are paid more, they

are held more accountable. You cannot tell me, as we see if we disaggregate the scores of some education divisions in Trinidad and Tobago in some schools that entire classes are performing under baseline levels and the students are at fault.

There is a model the US and the UK have adopted. If the student did not learn, the teacher did not teach effectively. If the student does not learn, the teacher did not teach effectively or the curriculum needs to be amended. If entire schools or more than 40 and 50 per cent of students are doing badly, it is not the student or students. It is the system or the teacher who is not teaching effectively, yet we continue to focus on only student performance and not teacher training and teacher performance in Trinidad and Tobago. That needs to be addressed.

“In Finland, teaching is one of the most revered professions with a relatively high barrier to entry.”

The average teacher in the US makes about \$41,000 a year compared to \$43,000 almost \$44,000 in Finland, and that is why they are held highly more accountable in terms of who enters the profession and how they perform and how accountable they are. [*UWI Open Campus students enter the Chamber*] We would like to welcome lots of students—and I am sure there are teachers—to this honourable Senate from UWI Open Campus. Let us welcome them with a round of applause. [*Applause*] Mr. Vice-President, I am sorry, that should have been your job.

So, I also want to, in addition to the international research, come back to Trinidad and Tobago, because we have done a lot of work in terms of our education system in Trinidad and Tobago. The current President of TTUTA, Mr. Sinanan, has been so kind as to furnish me with some information that TTUTA has been advocating for quite a while in terms of studies also done by the OECD.

“The top five education systems in the world according to the OECD

(Canada, Japan, Korea, Estonia, and Hong Kong)—and Finland—“are all characterised by education systems that place a high premium on equity. It also shows that when more autonomy is granted to schools to define and elaborate their curricula and assessment systems...”

So, it is not a bogged-down system that one size fits all. Each division is different, each school is different. Although there is a general overriding curriculum as provided by the Ministry, there must be room to make some amendments to suit a particular context. Also, from TTUTA:

“Changing Education from the Ground Up.

This model continues to allow education”—in Trinidad and Tobago—“to be a formula of segregation and division. While this formula may be ideally suited to the neoliberal capitalist economic model, unfortunately the fallout includes the exclusion and marginalization of large segments of the society. Those who graduate from our schools with certificates of hopelessness and despair unleash their anger via social unrest and civil disobedience, for this is the avenue through which societal revenge can be exacted.

An education system that forces persons to fit the model rather than enabling the model to adjust to the needs of the people cannot conceivably claim to serve the needs of the whole society. If the objective of education is the development of the total human capital, the concept of educational success must be redefined within the concept of the uniqueness of learners.”

Every child is different. The system cannot be a one model fits all. It does not work. Also:

“Educating for the world we want”

What kind of world do we want in Trinidad and Tobago? Have we asked ourselves

that? Have we asked ourselves, who we are as a country? What our ideals are? What we are striving for? We all hear of the American dream, and we have a clear idea of what that American dream is, but what is a Trinbagonian dream? Who are we as a people? What do we stand for? Is our system facilitating that?

“The right to education is the key to the realization of the full spectrum of human rights and to the attainment of social justice globally. Quality education provides people with both the knowledge and capacity that are needed to question, conceptualize and solve problems that occur both locally”—regionally—“and globally and actively contribute to the sustainable and democratic development of societies.”

Is our education system providing that? Are we still worried about whether the Minister allocates \$7 billion or \$10 billion or are we using the \$7 billion allocated in the right way? Are we evolving? That is the real question. And also, finally, from TTUTA:

“Our education system continues to be driven by a curriculum that discourages innovative and critical thinking—analysing, evaluating and creating, and instead focuses on students mastering the art of merely remembering and understanding.”

A point I made earlier on. Also:

“Striving for educational equity

“Equitable education not only ensures that all are given the means to blossom to their full potential, but that it will prepare graduates to meaningfully engage in the democratic process and have an equal claim to the fruits of subsequent economic activity. Equity demands that there are improved opportunities for those with the least. Because of their diminished

social capital, such persons must be given some priority owing to their limited opportunity as well as limits of opportunity. It is well known that in both the primary and secondary levels of schooling, the socially advantaged have over the years seen the need to cement their superior positions in the social hierarchy through extra resources such as private lessons.”

—which I have a pet peeve with, quite frankly, because I have spoken to a couple parents, and I understand it is against the law—I can be corrected if I am wrong or against policy—for teachers to be offering lessons to students they teach in schools, yet it is happening unchecked. It is unethical and it is immoral, because it opens the door for exploitation.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, it means I can teach less in class, offer you extra lessons and make money; that is not what the system is designed for. Something is definitely wrong with that, and the education Ministry needs to take a cogent look at that and stop that practice immediately.

I also want to ask a question. I do not know if it is true, because I have spoken to some principals and there have been concerns expressed about a lack of the continuation of the Textbook Evaluation Committee, whereby, as I understand it, and I can be wrong—please correct me if I am wrong—principals now have the opportunity to choose the textbooks they want in any particular discipline. So if we have, for example, physics, we can have 15 different physics books teaching the same curriculum. I do not know if that is true, but it has been brought as a concern to me, and it is not best practice in education anywhere in the world. So if that is happening, it needs to be addressed urgently.

In terms of the equity of the system and the way it contributes to the social

inequity and criminality, quite frankly, I want to quote from noted social scientist and criminologist, Prof. Ramesh Deosaran, in his book *Inequality, Crime & Education in Trinidad and Tobago: Removing the Masks*. This is First-World primary research that applies to our situation in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is not the first of its kind. We have Prof. Selwyn Ryan doing similar studies that have basically yielded the same conclusions in many instances. Many of the focuses are from inequality to crime:

Given the feverish competition for educational and occupational status in this country now, like Merton, we begin by briefly referring to the work of Emile Durkheim who examined the implications between aspirations and frustrations. More precisely...

The structural strain theory could help explain deviance in Trinidad and Tobago, where there are those who are dispossessed or from the low socio-economic groups who feel the systems are not serving them adequately, who time and time again have gone through generation after generation of the education system not serving them adequately. So they end up on the lower end of the percentile ranking. Their self-esteem is totally destroyed after they pass through that system, and the one option they feel they have is the issue of turning to illegality, because they end up in a gang who gives them self-esteem, a sense of belonging, a sense of misguided purpose. So their moral compass becomes totally corrupted because the system, in their minds, have failed them.

We are not doing anything to address that—and that must be addressed, because we could pump \$20 million into national security every year, if there are those in society who feel that it is not serving them we will have to keep increasing that

number every year exponentially, until it becomes unsustainable. It is already unsustainable as it is.

We need, through our education and socialization systems to put systems in place to catch those falling through the cracks as much as possible. In every society you are going to find those who are deviant, no matter what, but certainly 3,000 to 5,000 of our primary and secondary school students who are falling through the cracks are too much of a wide cadre of options for the criminal elements in Trinidad and Tobago. That needs to be urgently addressed.

Inequalities by district and zoning is another topic he covers. Two-parent versus single-parent systems, race—which we do not like to talk about in Trinidad and Tobago—and stratification. Does race make a difference? The table shows—and sometimes we wish we had television monitors to bring up tables in this honourable House to make points even clearer—and I quote:

“47% of students of African descent went into university three years after secondary school, as much as 72% of East Indian descent did so...”—and 49% were of mixed pupils.”

Are you are seeing a trend? Another table shows:

“30% of students of African descent ended up ‘studying only’ three years after leaving Form Five, 61% of those of East Indian descent...”—attended, and a—“comparative proportion for the Mixed group was 37%.”

Overall, this implies that as far as the traditional professions are concerned, it is very likely that a higher proportion of East Indians will proceed to such professions than Africans,...”—based simply on educational endeavours.

These kinds of social stratification systems are supported by the type of education system we have in Trinidad and Tobago.

Also there is the big issue that has been spoken about over and over again in terms of prestige school versus government school, denominational school versus government-administered school, and what we have done, if anything at all, to close that gap and to simply just make our government schools better. It is not important.

You understand why parents clamour for their children to end up in the so-called “prestige schools”, because they want a better future for their children, and time and time again they know that if their child or their children end up in these schools, they are going to more than likely get a better education and have a better chance in life. So it becomes a literal rat race to get your child into these schools. The percentile level is so high, coupled with the principal’s choice, et cetera, et cetera, the alleged zoning issue, that it really does not make sense after a while, because those schools can only hold so many.

What we need to do is find out—and research has been done, over and over again—what these schools are doing that can be applied to the government secondary school. It is not beyond us. But we do not seem to want or have the will to make the changes that we need. We have consultation after consultation, in administration after administration—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. Paul Richards: Really? Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. —that do not seem to be applied in any way. Let me move quickly to the issue of national security. I cannot believe that time flew by so quickly.

Our criminal justice system is really cause for pause and great concern. Court backlogs, inefficient policing and poor law enforcement, weak restorative justice systems and programmes. The US Justice Department United Nations

Office of Drugs and Crime in 2009—and the trend continues over the years—in terms of homicides per 100,000 persons, and this is 2009, “Country-Source: United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime: Uganda, Kampala, 15.3; Botswana, 16.1; Colombia, Bogota, 17.4; Haiti, 24.1; Jamaica, Kingston, 26.8; Bahamas, Nassau, 28.5; Panama, Panama City, 34.6; Trinidad and Tobago—drumroll please—47, topping the list, and this is 2009. The trend has just continued to escalate. This is not the kind of industry we want to top. We want to top competitiveness index, not this.

The tragic thing about it is that there are several things that work and do not work. The problem in Trinidad and Tobago is that we keep focusing on what does not seem to work in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is tragic in terms of policing. White-collar crime, as my colleagues have said over and over does not seem to exist in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to just quote a bit of Edwin H. Sutherland’s criminological study, *White Colour Criminality in 1940* and *White Colour Crime in 1949*:

The behaviour of persons of respectability and upper socio-economic class frequently exhibits all essential attributes of crime, but it is only very rarely dealt with as such. This situation emerges, Sutherland claims, from a tendency for our systems of criminal justice in societies to favour certain economically and politically powerful groups and to disfavour others, notably the poor and the unskilled who comprise the bulk of the visible, physical criminal public population; a crime that is an obvious element but is forgotten.

These crimes are often committed but no criminal sanctions occur because it is white-collar crime. It may escape prosecution and harsh sentences because there has been no general public perception of such behaviour as criminal, or, as he goes

on to say, the ones who perpetrate the crime are the friends and family and well-wishers of the elite in society who in some instances—I am impugning no negativity to the justice system—their friends “is de big shots”, and we do not place value on prosecuting white-collar crime in Trinidad and Tobago, because it does not exist. We are a model nation, and that to me is extremely tragic.

Until we deal with that, hon. Minister Imbert can give \$40 billion to National Security, “we eh making no progress”. Until we deal with white-collar crime efficiently and convincingly, you could put \$50 billion into national security, we will still have a rise in the murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago, and that we need to get through our heads, until we get serious about it. “Because everybody know who de big man is, everyone know who is Mr.Big, as dey say. Everybody knows who is supposedly selling the drugs on de blocks. It easier to rounds up de little black boys in Enterprise and other areas”, and the real centre of the criminal enterprise continues with impunity in Trinidad and Tobago, because as Mr. Sutherland said, their friends and family and well-wishers are members of the elite class in this country.

It is tragic, it is true and we need to take a hard look at ourselves if we really want to make an impact on crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. Unfortunately, we do not seem to have the willpower to do it. Our challenges in Trinidad and Tobago are not really, sadly, about budget and economic downturn, as it is about ingenuity. It is not as much about poverty as it should be about patriotism. It is not about a lack of ability and resources, as it is about a need for leadership vision and sustainability across the board. Not only from the Government, in the private sector and everywhere else.

This is our moment in Trinidad and Tobago. We are at a crossroad in this

country. We cannot keep kicking the can down the road. We can choose to continue with our adversarial political agendas, where one side is trying to stay in power and the other side is trying to attain power at all cost, without coming together, or we can come together and do like our national watchwords say: Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve.

There is an old saying that there are times when we make history and there are times when history will make us. We need to decide if history will make us or we will make history in the interest of the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to close by quoting—and I am not a good singer at all—and pay tribute to a calypsonian who has just passed, and a song that has gripped me since I was about 14 or 15 years old. His name is King Austin, he recently passed on at 73 years old. The song is called “Progress” written by Winsford “Joker” Devine and it says:

Today as I look around in the world—we all know the song—I see footprints of man laid in the sands of time. I see pieces of our imagination, fruitless ambition. Where will it end? What will we do?

What are we going to do at this time? Is it that we are going to be as the calypso says “plain to see”?

Universally this land is not as bountiful as it was. And if this what we are doing now is progress, how long will it last?

Are we going to leave a better Trinidad and Tobago for this generation? They are the ones that we are working for now and that is what we need to realize. We are not working for ourselves. We are working for them.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Members, permit me to join with Sen. Richards in

welcoming the students from the UWI Open Campus. [*Desk thumping*] I hope your experience today is both enlightening and inspiring.

Sen. Sinanan. Let me just also say, hon. Members, that Sen. Sinanan has been granted leave under Standing Order 42(11).

Sen. Rohan Sinanan: Mr. Vice-President, distinguished Members of this honourable House, it is a distinguished honour to address the House for the first time, and it is equally a great privilege to make a contribution in a debate which is of significant public importance and interest.

Mr. Vice-President, I think you see the amount of people came out to see me speak today. [*Laughter*] So let me say, welcome to you all.

For the layman the annual budget is as much about accountability by the Government for its revenue and spending, as it is about the vision the Government has for our beloved country to ensure the prosperity of all the people. It is accepted that we are weathering economic choppy waters, and the hope of the nation is that as we keep our heads above water, we maintain our goals of getting safely to financial shores.

We can survive the rough economic climate if we are prepared to recalibrate our position and use our inherent collective strength, vitality, creativity, acumen and unity of purpose to chart our course and arrive safely at the destination of national well-being for all our citizens. This must be a joint effort. Little will be gained by pointing fingers about the past squandermania of the last regime, because let the truth be told, the obscene wastage of money and blatant corruption of the last Government is a tragic breach of public trust that will haunt them for decades. [*Desk thumping*]

2.15 p.m.

In fact, Mr. Vice-President, their first nightmare came to pass when they were rejected at the polls in 2015. Their nightmare continues as on November 28, 2016, again, they will lose the local government election. [*Desk thumping*] And their nightmare will not go away because the PNM will also win general election yet again and we will say, great is the PNM and it shall prevail. [*Desk thumping*]

The lack of vision by the former regime, their short-sightedness to put policies in place to soften the blow of the economic punches and the use of taxpayers' money to make themselves and a limited group of persons fit for life placed a very heavy burden on my Government to turn the ship around or else face financial ruins.

Mr. Vice-President, what some may term as harsh economic measures are really means of pulling in the reins to save the country from falling off an economic cliff left there by the last regime. We must face our economic realities head-on and stop living lavish lifestyles that our pocket cannot afford. Whether we have the money or not, there is no excuse for wanton wastage in times of plenty.

And so, Mr. Vice-President, even when economic tides turn in our favour it cannot be back to business as usual. We must use this time to dig deep and start a culture of thriftiness, saving and wise spending. Money does not grow on trees and neither is it buried in the ground. I know some people may feel that you can go by some former Ministers and you might get some buried, but— [*Crosstalk*] Yeah. Okay. We can get money, however, from an enhanced and dedicated agricultural reform sector which has been spoken about already and

we can get money from the proper use of our lands and seas and their natural resources without putting all the pressure on our oil and natural gas reserves.

Mr. Vice-President, we have to build a stronger economy now so we will have something worthwhile to hand over to the next generation. Well, our country now is in the hands of competent men and women who know the task at hand and who are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices to get the country back on track. This regime provides a new hope for the nation and when there is faith and hope and love for God and country, trust me, there will be prosperity.

A recent powerful beam of hope that shone brightly in our country about two weeks ago was the compassionate act of 19-year-old Lillian Williams who, without knowing that she was being recorded, showed her full understanding of the Christian principles, “whatsoever you do to the best of my brother that you do unto me”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, as a Hindu we have similar teachings. Hinduism teaches us that service to humanity is service to God. The Bhagavad Gita teaches us to do good in thought, word and deed; this is the law of karma and the law of dharma. All other religions have similar teachings. The fact that this story of human compassion, humility and kindness was able to override so many of the negativities that we face on a daily basis means that we are, deep down, good and caring people who want to do what is best for our fellow men.

Mr. Vice-President, if there is any time that our nation needs us to get together and put all our shoulders to the wheel it is now because we will never have another opportunity to set things right. We have a forthright leader, the Prime Minister, who recognizes the need to promote the virtues of integrity,

honesty and compassion. We have a Prime Minister in Dr. Rowley who is not afraid to do what is right even if it calls for the ultimate sacrifice. We are proud of our Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, who with this team rid the country of a regime that was taking us downhill fast.

Mr. Vice-President, the thrust of my contribution is to show the citizenry that my Government, led by Dr. Rowley, knows what it is doing because we have to put our country back on track to become a First-World nation. You know, we have lost five years from the initial timeline during the period 2010 to 2015 when the last regime was in power, taking good care of themselves and their friends. And so, we have a lot of catching up to do. The good news is that the PNM is a courageous party that has withstood the test of time. It is a great institution that is mindful of the needs of all the people, from all walks of life, from all the nooks and crannies of the two islands of Trinidad and Tobago, and we will not leave anyone out in the cold or, to be more precise and local, out in the rain without shelter.

Mr. Vice-President, the economic policies and measures in the budget must be able to do at least three things: provide opportunities for all law-abiding citizens to maximize their potential; two, to energize the population with innovative ideas; and, three, set realistic timelines for stated promises.

Mr. Vice-President, the budget of 2017 has addressed these matters by ensuring that plans are afoot for comprehensive infrastructure reform for the local government process and more efficient and effective and reliable generation of public utilities. For a relatively small country with a population of nearly 1.3million people and just about as many vehicles on the road, people

still feel alienated and disenfranchised based on where they live and which party they support; such a situation is unacceptable for a nation that boasts of its rich cultural heritage, ethnic diversity and a brilliance in academic and non-academic field.

Mr. Vice-President, we are running out of excuses and an overall lack of cohesive development. It was the PNM Government that placed focus on the construction industry in order to create jobs and provide suitable location for Ministries, public entities and state service providers. It will be the PNM that will transform our country and make it flourish once more so that all citizens can reap the reward. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, true national development is shown when the basic amenities are available to all the people wherever they reside. This is the promise that I speak to in my contribution: the building of ports, highways, overpass and bridges coupled with reliable inter-island transportation. This will literally make any place in Trinidad and Tobago easily accessible and to get from one place to the next financially affordable.

The plan of this Government is not simply about simply improving roadways and accessibility, the general policy is to continue with massive diversification so that the cities and towns and more so Port of Spain are not the only bustling place of economic and business activities. Think about it, picture a country where there are activities all over the place, not just in a few selected pockets.

I am sure we all know the trauma faced by travellers when there is an emergency or threat of some kind of danger and it becomes necessary to leave

the capital city of Port of Spain. The gridlock is horrifying and the hours spent on the road in bumper to bumper of stationary traffic is unbearable. The answer to this recurrent trauma whenever there is an urgent need to leave Port of Spain can be solved with the commitment and well-thought-out plan of relocation and the creation of sub-offices of some of the essential services, so that it is no longer necessary to get business done only in the capital city. The day must soon be over when the people of Cedros, Point Fortin, Guayaguayare, Toco, Mayaro, Manzanilla, Biche, Carenage in Trinidad and the people of Tobago have to travel very faraway places to get basic items and to conduct important business transactions.

The point that I am making is when we jump-start activities and stimulate growth throughout the country, the entire nation benefits; and when the entire nation benefits we get closer to fulfilling our true potential.

Mr. Vice-President, transformation of the economy requires, in the first instance, the stabilization of Government's fiscal position and restructuring of its expenditure profile particularly as it relates to the composition of recurrent expenditure and the focus of capital expenditure programme.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of recurrent expenditure, the issue of transfers and subsidies must be revisited; in particular, subsidies and transfers to the state enterprises and statutory boards. These state enterprises such as WASA, T&TEC and TTPost are all statutory boards which must be revisited and the operational expenditure restructured to become cost efficient and reduce their dependency on the Treasury. This will involve the restructuring of the enterprise and its institutions so that there is more cost-efficient delivery of the

particular services.

In the case of its capital expenditure programme, the government focus in 2017 will be on the completion of existing projects and on new projects that facilitate and stimulate the economy's transformational objectives. Government spending in 2017 on its capital expenditure programme is estimated at \$5.1 billion; of this sum \$802.7 million has been allocated to the Ministry of Works and Transport, \$529.2million to the Ministry of Public Utilities and \$289.6million to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Mr. Vice-President, none of this money will be stolen. [*Desk thumping*] These funds will be spent on projects aimed at strengthening the economic transformation process while bringing significant benefits to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, with your permission, I would like to bring to the attention of this honourable House some of the projects on which these funds will be expended. The projects include in fiscal 2017 an overall allocation of \$239.4 million will be provided to reduce the impact of flooding and address the most critical aspect of coastal erosion, instability and flooding incidents along the coastlines of Trinidad.

The sum of \$42.9 million will be provided for the Critical Coastal Protection Programme implementation under the Ministry of Works and Transport. The projects that will be implemented in fiscal 2017 include: the South Cocos Bay Shoreline Stabilization work which will involve the construction of 800 linear metres of rubble mounted on the south of the Nariva River, Manzanilla; the Cap-de-Ville shoreline stabilization work which will

include the construction of 500 linear metres; the comprehensive national coastline monitoring programme required for the design and monitoring of coastal structures.

Work will also continue on projects under the national programme for the upgrades of drains, drainage channels and with an allocation of \$38 million. The major projects will include: the rehabilitation of sidewalls and realignment of outfall drains in the Diego Martin and Maraval rivers; construction and reinforced concrete walls and paving will also be undertaken in the following watercourses: the Covine ravine in Diego Martin; Upper Morne Coco Road, Maraval; Bournes Road ravine in St.James; Tunapuna river in Tunapuna; Bel Air Avenue main drain in Chase Village; Tewarie main drain in Freeport; Bagna Trace drain in Chase Village. And of this \$38 million, none will be stolen. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] It is coming again.

Mr. Vice-President, an investment of \$8 million will be also be made for the advancement of projects under the major river cleaning programme. Work will commence on the construction of the reinforced concrete wall and paving of the Soldado River to reduce the impact of flooding in the Claxton Bay/Gasparillo area; rehabilitation work also will be undertaken on the Felicity pump house and gate and commencement of the rehabilitation and construction of the gates at Bamboo No. 1 and No. 2. Mr. Vice-President, of the \$8 million, none will be stolen. [*Desk thumping*]

Under roads and bridges, improving and expansion of the network of roads and bridges increases connectivity between urban and rural areas. Increased routes to town and villages contribute to reducing traffic congestion

and, as a result of better traffic management practices, increase economic potential of once remote areas through increased access to potential customers.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, the sum of \$440.5million will be allocated in 2017 PSIP for the upgrade and the expansion of roads and bridges network throughout Trinidad and Tobago. And again, Mr. Vice-President, none will be stolen.

The road construction. Major road rehabilitation project will focus on road construction and rehabilitation projects throughout the country, including implementation of a traffic management measure provision for alternative access routes; reinstatement of the stabilization and failed slopes and improve the existing road infrastructure with an allocation of \$165million. Again, none of this will be stolen.

Key projects targeted in fiscal 2017 include the widening of lanes on the Solomon Hochoy Highway, west and eastbound lanes from the Chaguanas Flyover to Chase Village Flyover, including an overpass widening near Mulchan Seuchan Road. Widening of lanes on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, westbound lane from Maloney to Golden Grove and eastbound lane from Maloney to Mausica. Reconstruction and repairs to bridges in Freeport, Todds Road, Cunapo Southern Main Road, Dades Road, Chatam Erin Road, Caigual Road, Galera Road and Guaico Tamana Road.

Rehabilitation of roads in Arouca/Maloney, Barataria/San Juan, Caroni Central, Diego Martin Central, North and West, Point Fortin, Laventille East/Morvant and Chaguanas West. Repairs to major landslips in Couva, Laventille East/Morvant, Toco/Sangre Grande and Princes Town.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

An allocation of \$85 million for the Port of Spain East-West Corridor transportation project will continue for the following activities: commencement of the widening of Wrightson Road from Colville Street to Ana Street; commencement of the widening of the eastbound carriageway of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to four lanes; construction of an overpass at the Southern Main Road, Churchill Roosevelt Highway. And, Madam President, from that \$85 million, in case you were not here, none will be stolen. [*Desk thumping*]

Under the Bridges Reconstruction Programme, the sum of \$70 million will be allocated for construction work on bridges located at Talparo, Valencia Road, Camden Road, Papourie Road, Eastern Main Road, Guanapo and Toco Main Road. The Landslip Repair Programme will be allocated \$45 million for the rehabilitation of landslips in Talparo, Montenegro, Naparima Mayaro Road, Morne Diablo, Quarry Road and Papourie Road.

Madam President, let me deal now with the biggest scandal perpetrated the population by the People's Partnership aka UNC Government. The Point Fortin Highway can best be described as an inherent mess from the last regime. Money was wasted, proper procurement policies were violated and the project became a feeding trough for many who viewed the project as means of becoming multi-millionaires as they scuttered away money to their private bank accounts. Well, all that foolishness has stopped, thanks to our Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley.

According to the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation, there are legal avenues being actively pursued to recover whatever money from those who perpetrated that wanton act of corruption. So for those who were looking forward to the completion of the Point Fortin Highway the good news is that you will have

your highway. However, it will be completed above board and without any corruption. Your drive along the completed highway must not bring back memories of corrupt activities of the last regime, but the fulfilled promise of good things by the PNM Government. And for those who pocketed taxpayers money and stole from the national purse just know that yours is not the highway to heaven.

Madam President, the Wallerfield to Manzanilla Highway: this will lead to the development of the entire east coast and open up that area to economic activities. It will improve the efficiencies for the oil companies and many other service companies to physically access the operation located in Mayaro. This will lead to a phenomenal upgrade of the infrastructure in the entire eastern section of the country.

The Valencia to Toco Highway: Madam President, this project is very close to my heart because I am a born and bred boy from Sangre Grande. I grew up in this north-eastern part of the country hearing about future plans to build factories and warehouse from Valencia to Toco. The dream back then was that this section of Trinidad, with its close geographic links to Tobago, would be a hub of business and agricultural activities and provide employment for hundreds of thousands of people who live in the nearby area. That dream, Madam President, never materialized until the rebirth of the commitment by the Government, led by Dr. Keith Rowley, to build a highway to Toco and to construct a ferry port in Toco. We underestimate the large number of people this project will benefit including those who will now have another ferry option to travel to Tobago.

Madam President, I turn now to the Moruga port and I termed this a new hope. For some time we have been hearing about the plight of the fishermen of Moruga and the road traffic congestions faced by residents of Moruga. Nobody

must be termed as “living behind God back”, because that suggests that such people are not entitled to and are deprived of the benefits and privilege enjoyed by the rest of the citizenry.

Madam President, allow me to quote from the *Guardian* newspaper article, dated Sunday, January 26, 2014, written by Radhica Sookraj. Remember we were not in power then. Headline:

“Where is our \$200 million fishing port?”

Walter Anthony who was interviewed said—“We feel neglected because for too long we waiting for proper facilities”—and—“we getting...promises.

Krishna Boodoo said during high tides, waves beat into the shed, bringing water into the locker area.”

And Robert Boodram said—“Robert Boodram, a resident of Gran Chemin said residents needed proper roads and a health centre that would function on a 24-hour basis.”

I quote from another article published in the Sunday *Express* newspaper, dated May 08, 2014, again, and written by Mark Fraser. Headline:

“Mooring of boats on to Moruga bridge weakening supports The last ‘spring bridge’ in Trinidad.

This is an opportune time for the lack of facilities for fishermen in the area to be addressed by those in authority. Moruga is emerging as the mecca of Trinidad for historical, archaeological, cultural and eco-touristic activities. The people of Moruga surely deserve to have basic working facilities to complement their daily lives.”

Madam President, despite the plight of the people of Moruga the last Government, the People’s Partnership Government, did absolutely nothing to help

those Moruga residents begging for assistance. Well, Moruga people, the PNM is here, hope has arrived. [*Desk thumping*] The decision to build a fishing port in Moruga is long overdue. The historic significance of that part of the island is lost on those who refuse to take the time to know the value of our history. Moruga is filled with potential and is yet another part of the country that has been neglected over time. Well, all that stop now and the people of Moruga can look forward to noticeable growth and development as the Moruga Main Road, other related access roads will be upgraded to facilitate the increase in activities.

Madam President, the licensing office: [*Crosstalk*] as I mentioned earlier, when dealing with comprehensive infrastructure we have to keep in mind the need for diversification and provisions of essential services. One of those services is the licensing of vehicles and bringing in mind the nearly onemillion vehicles that congest our national roadway. It is imperative that the licensing office is equipped to handle the volume of work it faces on a daily basis.

Madam President, the list of complaints about the inefficiencies at the licensing office throughout this country is long and winding. And so, the relocation of the office from Wrightson Road in Port of Spain to Caroni is a step in the right direction. The central location will ensure easy access for all, but beyond the relocation there is a commitment to use information technology to provide a much better service to consumers and to create more accurate and reliable record-keeping. The stories of corruption at the licensing office could burn anyone's ears off, and more often than not, those who complain about the corruption activities are also part of it.

Madam President, no one should be paying more than the standard fees for service delivered at the licensing office. There should be no paying of bribes and

inducement to get officers to do their job in a fair and competent fashion. The days of flashing dollars to get curry favour or jump the queue must end. Misbehaviour in public office is an offence and those who overstep their authority or abuse their power will feel the full brunt of the law under this Government.

The mandate of this Government is to provide an efficient, cost-effective and reliable—

Sen. Mark:—Saddam Hosein?

Hon. Senator: “Doh worry with them.”

Sen. R. Sinanan: “Forget dem, nah, forget dem; dem on campaign mood now.”

The mandate of this Government is to provide an efficient, cost-effective and reliable electricity service to the citizens of this country. There will be a constant upgrade of existing substations and construction of new substations. This will facilitate the increase in the demand for household and business electricity. For fiscal 2017, T&TEC will continue with the programme of lighting of parks and recreation grounds which has a positive impact on community facilities, long hours of socializing and recreational activities.

In this regard, the Minister of Public Utilities will continue to collaborate with municipal corporations and other organizations to identify parks and recreation grounds for illumination to meet the demand required by the communities. And, Madam President, before I go further, let me make it abundantly clear that my Government, the PNM, will not sanction any decision by anybody to shut off lights when people are using grounds to promote religious and community activities.

So, Madam President, whether it is Ramleela, steelband, cricket, football or a bazaar, the use of recreational parks to promote community activities and provide

an outlet for youths to show their talent, these activities must be conducted in a safe and secure environment and, Madam President, no sum of money is too great to spend in order to guarantee the safety and comfort of law-abiding citizens.

Now, Madam President, let me touch on a matter of the municipal police. It is no secret that there is a crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago that has been with us for some time. While no particular regime can be blamed for the prevalence of crime activities, any Government in charge must take the responsibility of addressing the problem in an effective way. One measure is to provide support to the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service through the employment of more municipal police. Municipal police officers must be the eyes and ears of the service and must play an important role in community policing. In this regard broader responsibilities and more resources will be given to the municipal police so that they can perform at a higher standard. Crime prevention is a critical part of fighting crime, and so we will be strengthening the arms of the anti-crime initiative.

Madam President, in conclusion, let me say our country has a blueprint for success with this Government and Dr. Keith Rowley and his—at the helm. Unfortunately, we too quickly lose hope in times of distress and too easily surrender our will when we should be putting measures in place to overcome the challenges. Instead of digging deep and finding the solutions to our problems we prefer to sit and complain. This approach is just not good enough for a nation that is blessed with abundance in natural resources and a bright and vibrant citizenry.

Madam President, we have let the politics and the politician cloud our vision for the country we can become and the nation we must strive to be. The good news is that the budget 2017 is a blueprint for transformation and growth thereby

shaping a brighter future.

2.45 p.m.

The fact is that we are in the low end of the economic cycle and we must ride through this rough time, implementing policies that will ensure our economic rise. If we do not step up and meet the extent and demand placed upon us we will put our future, the future of our nation, at risk. Now more than ever we must adhere to the watchwords of our nation: discipline, production and tolerance. These words, and their particular meaning, were given to us by the late Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, on the eve of our independence on August 30, 1962 when he addressed the citizens at a youth rally at the Queen's Park Oval.

And, Madam President, I do not know how many people know this. It was the late Dr. Eric Williams who, 50 years ago, in 1966, in full recognition of the Hindu community of Trinidad and Tobago, declared Divali a public holiday. [*Desk thumping*] We must firstly believe that together we aspire and together we achieve. We must surround ourselves with the red, black and white colours of our flag, which together represent the vitality of our land in its entirety and people and the strength of unity in our purpose.

Madam President, on behalf of me and my family, I take this opportunity to wish the Hindu community and, by extension, the entire country, Shubh Divali. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: May I congratulate Sen. Sinanan on his maiden contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Ameen. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Khadija Ameen: Thank you very much, Madam President. I rise to make my contribution on this debate on budget 2016/2017 and before I go into responding to

some of what the Members on the other side have said, as we are joined by students of the Open Campus of the University West Indies in the public gallery, I want to bring the attention of my colleagues of Parliament to the front page of the *Newsday* today: “Beetham Scholar”. And it announces that:

“The people of Beetham Gardens - whose community has long been maligned as a place of rampant crime, poverty and hopelessness - today can feel justifiably proud after one of their own, Ajamu Crosby rose above all these stigmas to achieve excellence in the”—CAPE—“and earn an Additional Scholarship in Natural Science.” [*Desk thumping*]

Additionally, Madam President, I want to pay tribute to his proud single-parent mother, Juliana Crosby-Oladele. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, it is my humble opinion that the budget of the present Government failed in many ways to address the reality of Trinidad and Tobago on a global scale as well as totally ignoring the plight of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. In my contribution, I will seek to address the plight of young people as this Government continues to strangle wholesome opportunities that leave them vulnerable to crime and violence, and some of that was touched on by Independent Sen. Paul Richards—the neglect of the education of our children, our most essential human capital development.

And, of course, with the announcement by the Prime Minister yesterday of the date for local government elections being November 28th, I want to say that the UNC is ready. And today I take opportunity to examine the failure of this Government to carry out reform of local government as promised. [*Desk thumping*]
I also wish to address the further neglect of local government as a whole, and that coupled with the failure of the Ministry of Works and Transport that continues to

lead to flooding, loss of property and distress to so many citizens and hundreds of thousands of dollars in loss of property.

Madam President, I hope to examine some of the Government's proposed taxation measures, namely the increase in VAT on those previously zero-rated items; the "online tax" and I trust that the questions I ask today, that perhaps the Minister, in his winding-up, will be able to address them.

Madam President, the People's Partnership Government recognized and embraced the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. Children are amongst the most vulnerable in our society. They are the most precious, and they represent all of our hopes as a nation for our future. The budget illustrated this Government's negligence of the well-being of our children, of our nation, with the reckless cutbacks in funding.

Madam President, there were dramatic cuts in salaries, both in primary schools and secondary schools. The workers that operated on contract—employees in the administrative offices of schools—their contracts have not been renewed, and I call on the Government to answer as to why hundreds of administrative clerks from primary and secondary schools have effectively been fired where the need still exists and schools are now asking parents to make a contribution towards paying the salaries to keep on those clerks. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, this Government has made dramatic cuts in the school feeding programme. The school feeding programme was cut by \$84 million this year, compared to last year's allocation. In 2015, the comparison between the amount allocated this year to what was allocated in 2015 is close to \$100 million. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries yesterday offered that the Government has slashed funding nutritious meals to our nation's children by

explaining that, you know, there are plans to increase local content in meals. I know he is still pretty much new. He is not the Minister responsible for school feeding, but I want to inform him that the People's Partnership boosted local content in meals in schools to an all-time high, of 70 per cent in 2010 to 2015.

[Desk thumping]

Madam President, this Government must be fair and must continue to build on the good things that were done, as all governments should continue to seek the interest of the citizen first. Granted that they have chosen to spend the first year of their term in office campaigning and bashing the People's Partnership, punishing the citizens where good strides have been made because of the achievements of the People's Partnership Government. *[Desk thumping]*

They have gone to the extent of cutting the use of laptops in schools where children look forward to getting that laptop. And, Madam President, I doubt there is any Member of the other side who are parents who have children today—school-age children—who could tell me that their children do not have laptops and do not have iPads. *[Desk thumping]* Why must the poorer children in our country be punished for the progress made by the People's Partnership? *[Desk thumping]*

Madam President, the use of technology in education has grown leaps and bounds. The People's Partnership had this country on a road to having every child in a secondary school owning their own laptop. *[Desk thumping]* There was the need to continue to upgrade the infrastructure that was started in the schools, to continue to train the teachers and auxiliary staff and to increase the Wi-Fi coverage at all schools. Instead, students have been given an incentive to “break biche”, jump on a bus where they may hope to get free Wi-Fi if they travel from San Fernando to Port of Spain. *[Desk thumping]*

Madam President, the objective of developing nations like ours, when it comes to education, should be to increase the number of children with access to technology and access to the Internet which is in line with the Millennium Development Goals that this very Senate agreed to adopt. We know that it has been proposed that laptops are now being kept in schools. And, of course, this brings another concern, because there has also been a huge reduction in the budget for security in schools. [*Desk thumping*]

We are at a time, a worrying time, when guns and violence and the activities in the areas surrounding some schools which are considered to be in at-risk areas, but also inside the schools—and there are some schools that had up to eight armed officers from what I understand. What is going to be the position with security in schools and the safety of our children? It is irresponsible and reckless for this Government to decrease the funding for security in schools and by doing this, this Government has endangered the lives of thousands of ambitious, defenceless students, leaving them more vulnerable to becoming innocent victims of violence.

Madam President, the protection of our children should be of paramount importance when we look at the long-term development of our nation. I sat as a Member of the Joint Select Committee on the Family and Children Division Bill and while several recommendations were made and it was discussed and passed in Parliament, I would like to see the Government take the protection of children beyond just talk. I would like to see that the Government is serious about the implementation of the Family and Children Division court and the provision of facilities in every district; in the Magistrates' Court as prescribed, as discussed, at the committee, even if it is on a phased basis.

And since the pilot project that was currently at NIPDEC court is coming to

an end—at Cipriani Boulevard, I want to pay tribute to those persons, those judges and other staff members, who worked as part of that pilot, and I trust that their hard work and their recommendations will not go in vain, and that the Government could, at some point, give a feedback as to when and how the implementation of the Family and Children Division Bill will come.

Madam President, the issue of young people, the youth of our nation, opportunities, and how lack of opportunities tie into crime, violence and gang activities was referred to by Sen. Paul Richards earlier today. This PNM Government has left the youth of our nation fearful, vulnerable and neglected. Today, in the *Guardian* newspaper, there is an article, and I just want to read the first line. This is from the *Guardian* today, Friday, October 21st, an article written by Miss Radhica Sookraj:

“Traumatised after seeing their father, Adele Gilbert, shot dead by police, Eli and Elijah Gilbert sat trembling on the steps of their San Fernando home yesterday, while relatives hurled obscenities at the police.”

Madam President, the uproar and the reaction from citizens concerning this situation has caused a video of that incident, and the subsequent handling by the police of the body of Mr. Gilbert, by picking him up by his limbs and throwing him in the back of a police vehicle, has led to the video going viral on social media. Madam President, while I am all for taking a hard stand where it is required when it comes to implementing the law, the police is not above the law. [*Desk thumping*]

3.00 p.m.

Madam President, incidentally, about three months ago, one of the Ministers of National Security—there are about three still, right?

Hon. Senator: Yes.

Sen. K. Ameen: But Mr. Dillon was speaking at a function and he indicated that the police should, and I quote, “harass individuals and make their lives untenable”, and he was speaking about individuals who have been disruptive or had run afoul of the law. I want to know if the Minister, Minister Dillon, the hon. Minister of National Security, condones the heartless action by the police yesterday. It also begs the bigger question: is there a hit squad in the police service; is this something that the Minister is aware of and is allowing to happen?

Madam President, I said before that the police must not operate above the law, and the police cannot gain the respect of the youth of our nation and the citizens at large if they continue with actions like that, [*Desk thumping*] where they could shoot a man and lift his body like a dog and get into a fight with a woman, apparently a relative. And in this vein, I think we ought to have an independent investigation into that incident, because [*Desk thumping*] while I understand the incident is being investigated by the San Fernando police—himself unto himself—my query is to whether the PCA would have the resources one, and secondly there are different types of investigations and, of course, most of those investigations require the very police of that division to take the reports and submit if they are doing a coroner’s report and so on.

So, the question as to the fairness of that investigation would come up, and I pay tribute to those police officers who continue to protect and serve this nation, and that is why I was in full support of the first time ever there being a proposal by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, former Prime Minister, to have a \$1 million arrangement for any police officer who dies in the line of duty. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, part of the reason for this fear in our nation has to do with

the fact that this Government still has no plan for crime. One year later, three Ministers later, millions of dollars spent on national security and you still have the highest number of murders in over two decades. [*Desk thumping*] Clearly, this Government has no clue and we coupled the obvious cluelessness when it comes to crime to the lack of opportunities, and I tie it back in to the massive cuts made in the budget allocation in the areas of education, lack of opportunities for young people leave them vulnerable to gang activities, to violence, to drugs, to chaos and to a lifestyle that goes nowhere fast, and some of the areas where young people who were not necessarily academically inclined would have gone into the technical and vocational studies.

Currently, in this budget, you have cuts in the MiLAT/MYPART programme, \$4.8 million; in the MIC (Metal Industries Company) you have a cut of around \$10.6 million; YTEPP, a programme that has been around for so long, that has made a difference in the lives of thousands of people, some of whom are adults and parents themselves today, a drastic cut of \$19.6 million; and the NESC, a cut of \$27 million. That is what the People's National Movement Government is using to strangle the young people of Trinidad and Tobago today. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the Minister of Trade and Industry spoke about opportunities for young people when she mentioned the dry-dock repair industry and the opportunities it would provide for employment for young people, but if there are just drastic cuts in training many of these young people will not be able to qualify for these jobs. We must not limit those who are not academically inclined, which takes me now to those who are academically inclined and to the disservice that is being done with the changes in GATE by this Government.

Up to last year there was an allocation for the St. Augustine Education City

committee. I sat as part of that committee, as the Chairman of Tunapuna/Piarco Region, because that education city, the idea was to create an education city in our country, in an area with the high concentration of schools as well as tertiary level institutions. So that you have education as a driver, you have the research coming out of the tertiary level institutions, business incubation and technology coming together, so that the diversification and the trade and economic stimulation that is mentioned from time to time by the Government could become something real, and this is not something that would reap rewards immediately.

Madam President, I want to take this opportunity, as I did in my last budget contribution, to call on the Government to re-examine their proposed changes in GATE and make it more fair to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. At present, the current recommendation leaves the gate open to political interference as we saw under the Government's scholarships programme under the previous PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*] Under the Ministry of Tertiary Education—now I have heard the Ministers taking about—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Ameen. Excuse me, but could we please, Members, listen to Sen. Ameen in silence. Thank you. Proceed.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President. I have heard Members of the Government talking about having standardized accreditation, tertiary level programmes properly approved for funding, ensuring that students are not jumping from one programme to another, and I would like to advise you to look at the policy that we had at the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. There was an accreditation board that was responsible for ensuring that the programmes funded by GATE were properly up to standard and approved; that all tertiary level institutions must have accreditation before they get funding; with regard to

students, students were required to pass their various exams before they were allowed further funding; if they fail, they had to pay in order to go into another programme.

So a lot of the wastage that took place under the previous PNM Government was corrected under the People's Partnership Government and you had value for money. [*Desk thumping*] So all of these measures that are being mentioned, they were already in train, and what this Government—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Hon. Acting Attorney General, please, let us listen to Sen. Ameen in silence. For those who prefer to chat, there are the facilities outside of this Chamber. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President. And because I also as a recent—well I have to say recent. I recently completed my Masters. I benefited from GATE and I know the requirements at that time had changed to ensure that there was more value for money so that students who failed a course could not move on and so on, but there were no discriminating policies, discriminating against persons because of their gender, ethnicity, race or age, and we must ensure that we remove any form of discrimination from the policy regarding GATE.

Madam President, I refer to a story by a young graduate a couple months ago who after doing his Bachelor's and Master's could not find employment. He had applied to the Ministry even through the graduate programme—and I do want to implore that while discussions had started, that we should continue in a direction to have a national strategy that would inform us as to the human capacity required. So, for example, if we have strengthened our public health system and we are looking at having more and better hospitals and public health facilities, we should be looking at educating nurses and people in the allied health industry. I do not

know what is going on with the Academy of Allied health and Nursing at El Dorado, but I know that that was a part of the People's Partnership's drive to ensure that we had an improved public health sector, something that is falling down under the present PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the PNM is free of course to have their own policy, they are in charge now, but I want to urge that you must not punish the young ambitious people of our nation by shoving aside the good things that were done because they were done under the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]
Successive Governments who mean well for the nation must build upon whatever was done, and education is not an expenditure, education is not something that you reap rewards immediately for, it is an investment in the long term of our country. [*Desk thumping*]

The last year's budget listed the increase in VAT from zero per cent to 12.5 per cent on hundreds of zero-rated items including books, computers and computer accessories. That increase in VAT was a great deception by the PNM on the people of this country. They called it a reduction in VAT. The result was an increase in food prices, an increase in the cost of transport. Parents as well now, who are faced with these increased prices, no longer have the benefit of the Textbook Rental Programme, and the additional strain by adding the VAT to books and laptops, those who may have bought any of those things online now have to pay a 7 per cent online tax. I say "online tax" because the Minister will be able to clarify.

The online tax, it was assumed by citizens, would be 7 per cent on purchases made online by citizens. However, because it will be implemented through the couriers, persons who bring any items into the country via air freight would be required to pay this tax. Is it that the onus is now on the couriers to distinguish

whether the parcel is in fact a purchase that was made online by the person receiving it?

3.15 p.m.

Is it that the courier is going to have to distinguish whether it was a relative who lives in another country who bought something and is sending it to you? If it is that you have—it may not necessarily be a new purchase, but something that they are sending. So, if the Minister could clarify how it is going to be decided whether this 7 per cent tax by the couriers, that are going to be implemented through the information from the couriers, how it will be determined that the package is in fact an online purchase.

Madam President, as I am on the subject, we have had one year since the increase in VAT from zero per cent to 12.5 per cent on hundreds of items. I trust that the Government and the Minister had the opportunity to review the results of that increase. I can tell you that for the ordinary citizen the result is an extra strain on your pockets. The Government listed, when they put the VAT back on some of those basic food items, in 2015 the revenue from VAT was \$7 million as stated in the documents provided to us—

Hon. Senator: Seven billion.

Sen. K. Ameen: Seven billion dollars, sorry. In 2016, the amount estimated in last year's budget was \$12 billion, which is almost double in terms of the amount the Government calculated it would receive by increasing the VAT from zero per cent to 12.5 per cent on all these items.

However, it has been reported that the actual revenue coming in, again, was close to \$7 billion which was close to what was collected before the increase from zero per cent to 12.5 per cent. In this year's budget I see in the estimate of revenue

that it is estimated close to around \$8 million—

Hon. Senator: Eight billion dollars.

Sen. K. Ameen: Eight billion dollars, my apologies. So, Madam President, I am asking on behalf of all the citizens, and especially the poor and working class of this country, that since the total revenue from some of those basic items does not make such a big difference in the total revenues required to run this country, but it does make a big difference in the pockets of the average citizen.

I am asking for the Minister to reconsider the items that were removed from the zero-rated listing last year and reinstate, as it was previous to that, and perhaps focus as he has mentioned in last year's budget on the holes in the buckets, the inefficiencies of the VAT collection that leads to the situation where even with a tremendous increase in VAT paid over the counter, there is very little increase in what is actually collected by the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, *Trinidad Express* yesterday October 20, 2016 “Expect food price hike...says supermarket association president”, and I will just read two lines:

“Higher fuel prices mean higher transportation costs, and this cost may be passed on to the consumer.

And this is exactly what president of the Supermarket Association, Dr. Yunus Ibrahim is anticipating will happen with the recent 15 per cent increase in the price of diesel”—later in the article he says:

““We are in a low-margin industry where all profits are being eroded and it is getting increasingly harder to run one's business, especially in a low margin, high volume industry such as ours...’

And increased transportation cost is not the only factor. Increases in

corporation tax and other costs will affect not only supermarkets, but all businesses...

He expressed a view that this may force many small supermarkets and other businesses to close down.”

Madam President, through you, I would like to ask the Minister to give consideration for those people who have to face all those other hikes and reconsider the items that are zero rated.

Madam President, I now move on to, as I mentioned the collection—and the Minister even in last year’s budget lamented the inefficiencies in the rate of collection of the taxes, and I know that there were talks about the Revenue Authority. Madam President, we are reliably informed that officials of the IMF are here, and that they are holding discussions with officials of the Customs and Excise and the Board of Inland Revenue on the formation of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. The Minister could, perhaps, be able to clear the air?

Mr. Imbert: It is true.

Hon. Senator: He said it is his boys. He said it is true. It is true. He says it is true.

Sen. K. Ameen: All right, so the Minister over the floor is saying it is true, but I am sure he could explain.

Hon. Senator: “And he says da is he boys”.

Sen. K. Ameen: Those are your boys? Is that so? [*Laughter*] Madam President, the proposal for the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority under the Patrick Manning administration would have displaced hundreds of employees of the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise Division. Madam President, the Minister has indicated that his boys are here, and I wish to humbly ask, whether this Revenue Authority, if you intend to go by way of contract employment? I want

to know if—

Madam President: Sen. Ameen you have five more minutes.

Sen. Ameen: Thank you. I want to know whether the Government is going to appoint directors? Whether you have had any talks with the PSA? And, Madam President, the firing of hundreds of workers, the displacement of these workers, we objected to it then under the Manning administration and we oppose it now. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I am very passionate about people, and I have spent all of my adult life in local government, and I just want to quickly touch on the failure to this Government to have local government reform. I know that a date has been announced, and to the citizens of this country, what they want is their potholes fixed, their street lights working, the grass in the savannah cut, and the garbage picked up on time. Up to this morning I heard an article on Power 102, a protest in Vance River, Vessigny, the residents are protesting the performance of their counsellor. This local government election is an opportunity for citizens to register their disapproval of the governance of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, allow me to respond to some items raised by Sen. Sinanan, when he spoke. He sounded as though he was easing into the Ministry of Works and Transport [*Desk thumping*] based on the items in the portfolio. When a Senator, a Government Senator could come in the Parliament and talk about the cleaning of Tunapuna river and the cleaning of Diego Martin river, as if it is something novel and great, I want to tell you, and I am sorry whoever wrote your speech did not complete the list of projects—

Madam President: First of all you are addressing me. Okay?

Sen. K. Ameen: Yes.

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Madam President: Thanks. [*Laughter*]

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President, I am sorry that whoever wrote the speech of Sen. Sinanan did not include by way of the Sangre Grande area, the expansion of the Valencia Bypass and all those other projects in that area; [*Desk thumping*] the Diego Martin Highway. But I want to tell you, cleaning rivers should be par for the course for any performing government. But what we have, the Ministry of Works and Transport was given \$44 million for drainage from the Consolidated Fund; they spent \$10 million, only 23 per cent; of the \$11 million for river cleaning, only \$3 million was spent—

Hon. Senator: “Oh goood”.

Sen. K. Ameen:—of the \$20 million for flood alleviation and drainage, only \$1 million was spent. [*Continuous desk thumping*] They are under-utilizing resources, and it is an indication of non-performance and laziness on behalf of this Government. [*Desk thumping*] On the recurrent expenditure 2016, \$145 million for drainage under contracted services was allocated, only \$15 million, 10 per cent approximately was spent; \$10 million was allocated to lease equipment, of that only \$500,000 was spent; Infrastructural Development Fund, \$105 million for drainage and irrigation, of that only \$26.3 million was spent, less than 25 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister either does not know what is going on, I do not know if there is a junior Minister in the making on the other side, but certainly the resulting flood, the loss of property, the distress for citizens cannot go unaccounted for, and if this Government plans to clean rivers, I say, that is your job. Do it!

Hon. Senator: Fire! Fire! [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Budhu. Sen. Budhu has asked and sought leave under

Standing Order 42(11), and I have granted it to her.

Sen. Sarah Budhu: Thank you very much, Madam President. It is always indeed a pleasure, honour and privilege to stand before you to contribute in this honourable House.

But, Madam President, before I go into the bulk of my contribution, I take this opportunity to respond to my colleagues on the other side, as I sit here in disbelief. Quoting from Sen. Mark, he said “PNM cannot deal with the economic challenges, there is no hope for this country, our budget lacks consistency, strangulation taking place, is cutting and chopping”. Madam President, I left here wondering if they are living in such a delusional world, or they are starting to believe their own tales. Well let me remind you all amidst the mess you all left us in, we were able to survive. That is what you should be telling the people of this nation. [*Desk thumping*] There was the removal of fees for persons over 60 years and older for driver’s permits and passports; we cut out wastage in the delivery of food cards. It had people dead and buried and other wealthy people collecting groceries on behalf with the deceased ID card and with your tax-paying dollars, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] All this has stopped after the hon. Minister intervened and conducted an audit in her Ministry.

We have commenced the programme under the HDC; we paid Caroni workers outstanding money; Sen. Small mentioned that persons are holding on the edge, but to assist the less fortunate we proposed to assist persons with 25 per cent if their electricity bill is \$300 or lower. [*Desk thumping*] We are outfitting and occupying our government buildings to reduce rental fees; personal allowance has increased to \$72,000. Madam President, Sen. Mark then went on to say that the \$500,000 allocated for the Prime Minister’s residence that he is sure the cost will

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 Bill, 2016 (cont'd)
 Sen. S. Budhu (cont'd)

2016.10.21

go up. But, Madam President, we do not follow their approach, when they say something costing X is really X times 10, just like Algebra.

I now move on to Sen. Solomon. Sen. Solomon said that the boardwalk was deteriorating under the PNM. In one year. Really? One year?

Sen. Ameen: Yes, you never went there?

Sen. S. Budhu: I went there last week and the boards were really raising—
[Interruption] I know they are lacking attention on that side, Madam President.
[Interruption]

Madam President: Sen. Sturge!

Sen. S. Budhu: I really went there last week, but the boards were rising, but there was poor work. This was because of poor work and lack of upkeep when you all were there. But nonetheless we are here now and would not leave those things hanging.

To Sen. Richards, you mentioned something about special education. The Ministry of Education does have a special education school-based intervention; the Ministry of Education offers a comprehensive system of support for students with special educational needs through the provision of specialized services such as: diagnostic testing, speech and language assessment, therapy, psychological assessment and treatment, and physical occupational therapy. I just wanted to address that.

As for Sen. Ameen, I will respond to you later on in my contribution, and I just want you to know that no one writes our speech on this side. We are intelligent on this side, and we would be here for the next 20 years and more. *[Desk thumping]*

3.30 p.m.

So, Madam President, I, too, wish to join with my senatorial colleagues in this honourable House and the people of Trinidad and Tobago who have expressed deep appreciation to the hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Colm Imbert, on his budget delivery, and I must commend him for doing his utmost best under such crucial circumstances. The Greek philosopher Aristotle once said that:

“Quality is not an act, it is a habit.”

And for the second time, the hon. Member has made it a habit of presenting a quality budget. [*Desk thumping*] He never ceases to surprise me, but then again, he is a proud seasoned product of the People’s National Movement where the end product is always great. So I say warm congratulations and offer my deepest gratitude. [*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Despite the rant and the rave and the misbehave and numerous speculations—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Budhu, just have a seat. Please, please, can we listen to the Senator in silence and I am hearing comments up here, some of which are unkind, so if you want to make those comments audibly and discuss them, please leave the Chamber. Sen. Budhu.

Sen. S. Budhu: Thank you very much, Madam President, for your protection. Despite the rant and the rave, the misbehave and the numerous speculations and wild and unsubstantiated allegations of our Government, prior to the reading of the budget—and they are still doing it—that gas going up, food card and pension going to cut, utility rates going sky high, frightening the population, causing unnecessary panic, Madam President, we have proved the mischief makers wrong. Instead, we have brought relief to the most vulnerable.

This budget is well accepted by our citizenry. A budget so well-developed

that the entire population can breathe a bit. We in Trinidad and Tobago know it is not business as usual. The last fiscal year brought us numerous economic challenges arising from a drastic fall in collectable revenue, cash flows and fiscal deficits. It is no secret on assuming office, in 2015, we had been pursued by financial problems wrapped around the collapse in the oil and gas prices. Many oil-exporting countries, like Trinidad and Tobago, rely on revenue from oil production to fund government spending with an aim to develop one's country. But with falling oil prices only earned us budget deficits, social problems and pressured us to higher taxes and government spending cuts. It was time for us to evolve and further diversify our economy and hence the reason we are here to make short to medium sacrifices in order to turn this ship around.

But, Madam President, I must say we have done an enormously fantastic job in steering this country in the right path. We knew we had mauby pocket so "we did not go buy champagne". We did not run this country on auto pilot. Every decision we made was an end product of proper consultation. We held national consultation on local government; we held national consultation on labour; we held national consultation on sports and we held national consultation on education and we will not stop here. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, as someone once said to me, performance is personal before it is organizational. None of us here work in a vacuum and our approach to boost performance requires productive relationship with our peers, our leader and, most importantly, our community at large. So we ensure that those who are significantly vulnerable in society do not feel pained as all of us will participate equitably.

We have taken steps to restore confidence, we have taken steps to rebuild

trust by delivering some of the policies and programmes put forward in our manifesto, which is now government policy, to restructure and stabilize our economy amidst turbulent times. But we cannot do this alone, we need to work together—every man, every woman, every child—to increase our level of productivity and to heighten our level of engagement. As a matter of fact, there is nothing that can help us endure dark times except our faith. These are the times which demand that we, as people, work assiduously to overcome our differences and to find a common ground upon which we can stand if we are to build meaning and purpose and to set achievable goals which would remind our prosperity that, in spite of difficulties, we cared.

My message for the nation is that let us not get hopeless but rather get busy living because challenges and uncertainties are unavoidable. So my theme for today is “Let us go ahead with what works”. Now, our system provides diverse and very real opportunities for our people to empower themselves for the future and one of these opportunities is a good education. Human beings, today, need to have specific sets of skills to survive in this competitive world. As a matter of fact, education is the backbone of any country. It is the birthright of every citizen.

You see, Madam President, inventions are now part of everyday life. To understand, to acquire skills, to decide between right or wrong, education is a must as it helps polishing skills. It makes an individual more responsible and it brings development and a country moves ahead. This Government believes a literate nation is a marching nation. From health advances and agricultural innovations to efficient public administration and private sector growth, we will continue to unleash the potential of the human mind.

While enrollments have risen in promising fashion around the world,

learning levels have remained disappointedly over the last few years and many remain left behind idly turning to criminals. Because growth development and poverty reduction depend on the skills and knowledge that people acquire and not the number of years that they sit in the classroom, we have transformed our vision. And that is why in achieving Vision 2030, we are placing heavy emphasis on helping citizens become more independent, critical thinkers who are creative, innovative and entrepreneurial. We are committed in ensuring values, attitudes and behaviours regarding risk-taking, investment, innovation and entrepreneurship must be promoted within our education system.

Madam President, there is a saying, when morals decline and good men do nothing, evil flourishes. Every citizen has a duty to learn of that that threatens his home and his children. A society uninterested and unwilling to learn from the past is doomed. That is why this Government is so mindful of the perpetual role of education in shaping the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. At this point, I wish to congratulate the hon. Minister of Education who, within the first two months upon assuming office, presented a 12-month action plan focusing on governance and administration; ensuring access to quality education and training by all citizens; advancing curriculum planning and development; advancing curriculum service delivery; providing quality infrastructural and educational facilities, and providing continuous teacher training. All of those goals, you would have heard from the hon. Minister of Education in the other place elaborating on its effectiveness.

Madam President, I now want to move on to ICT. I was appalled when the hon. Minister of Education revealed in the other place that there was an absence of an ICT education policy. I mean, for heaven's sake, did they not realize they were

defeating the whole purpose? All the old talk about we did not want to supply laptops for the nation's children and that we are a careless Government. We were just fixing the problem with a proper solution and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are soon realizing the kind of mess we were left in and it really takes time to attend. So I am satisfied that this fiscal year, a comprehensive ICT in education plan will be rolled out ensuring that there is training and professional development of teachers, adequate and appropriate ICT infrastructure, as well as curriculum reform that will certainly contribute to the intended outcome of student success.

Madam President, I now turn to the controversial GATE issue and I say controversial, because again, they are quick to go to the media houses or social media to make statements that are nothing close to what we are really intending to do. Always pointing fingers, misleading the people. For the last 10 years of government, this Government has spent \$5.8 billion in making tertiary education easy, accessible to persons wishing to increase their knowledge base and of course, to get employed and because of this situation we are in now, we had no choice but to review the GATE programme. But I, for one, applaud the Government for the introduction of this cost-sharing mechanism as it is in alignment with the country's development needs as these changes are reasonable and fair in theory. As a citizen of this country, I can freely state that what I appreciate most of the reformation is the fact that those who really need the assistance will continue to get it. If we did not make these cutbacks, sooner or later, we would have felt the lashing effects.

We still have not left no one hanging. We will continue to build partnerships for development at every level. The private sector will be supported to revitalize and sustain growth for the economy. This Government has the courtesy to still explore long measures to ensure the people of Trinidad and Tobago still have

adequate access to higher education such as the introduction of the education savings bond, the establishment of the national savings fund and the fiscal incentives aimed at the insurance companies and credit unions.

So, Madam President, I say kudos to those students who understand the situation we are in. I sincerely think that maybe some people will value education a little more, and I hope some people make wiser decisions when it comes to their area of studies as these are small sacrifices we need to make in order to survive as a nation.

As we look down back history, we become appreciative of all that we have now, hence the reason, Madam President, I support my Government's idea to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago's rich history be taught in our schools. There is a quote by Robert Penn Warren that states that:

“History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future.”

Madam President, permit me to read from an article from the *Daily Express* dated Wednesday, October 12, 2016, page 4 and the article read:

“Former education minister...has slammed the \$84.3 million cut in the school feeding programme.”

The hon. Member in the other place then went on to ask:

“Does it mean that they are not going to give breakfast to the students or...are they cutting their meals?...”

Madam President, I can only imagine the amount of sour feeling. “Yuh know that sour feeling yuh does get by yuh throat when you start to begin to feel hopeless?” That is the feeling that the people of this nation probably got after reading that

statement. Though there has been a decrease in the figure, it does not mean that we are going to take away food from one's mouth. We are just going to manage it properly with what we have. So let us not be troubled by the old talk.

Madam President, I now want to shift my focus to sport and youth affairs in this country as I, myself, am considered a youth. According to the National Youth Policy for Trinidad and Tobago, it is estimated that there are approximately 450,556 young people between the ages of 12 and 29 in Trinidad and Tobago representing some 34.2 per cent of the national population. And we have gathered that one of the key connectors for youth has been the field of sports.

It is evident that sports shape and maintain social values and are held in high regard such as hard work and fair play, self-discipline, sacrifice and commitment to oneself and another. Research documents have proven sport participation can lead to greater health and well-being, as well as social, emotional, moral, physical and psychological development. In short, sport has the potential to contribute to positive development and stability of both individuals and society as a whole.

So, in light of this, our Government acknowledges that each young person has a purpose in life and our role, as Government, is to help reveal that purpose. We firmly believe that our youths should be active drivers and not just passive recipients of the development process. This is why, Madam President, our hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs' constant endeavour is to work for the empowerment of the youth of this nation rather than the past administration who ran wild with our funds and have the audacity to state that there is a lack of opportunities for young people.

3.45 p.m.

They left the Brian Lara Stadium to rot, same thing with the Diego Martin

recreation ground, the Chatham Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre, and do not talk about the LifeSport fiasco where there was financial irregularities, and “de man at de centre” of the affair who received a \$34 million had the audacity to say, Madam President, “Is ah jiggle in de piggy bank”. Then you all have the audacity to say that we have political spite? That just goes to say the kind of money they had at their fingertips, but these nightmares will certainly be a thing of the past, once they remain on that side.

Madam President, we are a responsible Government who wants to give the young people a chance to become the best that they can be. In doing so, the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has already paved the way for this. He has really reached out and communicated with the stakeholders involved, dealing with things in an opened-minded way, and has been very enthusiastic. This is very commendable as it helps us to fix the problems, hearing from the people directly involved and affected. I applaud the hon. Minister for reviving all those unfinished projects that were left dry for five years. It is indeed a bold attempt to stimulate the economy by creating jobs through construction.

Madam President, we intend to use sports as an income-generating measure, successive Governments have not understood the benefits that can be derived from it. There are a number of youth camps and programmes throughout this country, in which we try to engage our young people in a positive life, and to take them away from the environment of troubling lives. I distinctively recall earlier this year, the Laventille Youth Facility, children, youth and adults completed courses in computer literacy, drumming, folk dance, music literacy, hip hop and karate. There was even the school research and homework assistance, and boy how I wish these things were offered in my days.

Madam President, this youth facility can be an invaluable tool for both young people as well as adults, as it opens employment and entrepreneurial doors, allowing families to enjoy greater financial stability and security. It is history that as humans we often neglect the maintenance of the most valuable assets. The issue of poor maintenance of sport facilities would be a thing of the past. We assure the people of this nation, especially our youths, that our facilities will be well maintained in order to be harnessed and not impede the Government's efforts to encourage community sports and do physical activities due to unsafe and damaging sports facility;

For the first time there would be a database that will oversee the maintenance of our facilities, analyzing information and that shall help us make the right decision. The National Tennis Court, National Aquatic Centre and the cycling velodrome will be used to tap into the development and improving our sporting tourism. Taken together, all of these factors are likely to set the stage for sport and physical activity to flourish from the grass roots level, for serious and genuine pursuit of excellence to be practised and for the emergence of world-class athletes

In closing, Madam President, I am confident that we will succeed in transforming our vision into reality, so that there is the greatest good for the greatest number. Though we are clearly beset by challenges on many fronts, we draw inspiration from the fact that we have been able to survive many diverse challenges already. This is not a Government that rests on its laurels, on the contrary we will rise each day to go forward into the world to do unfinished business that summons us with the cries and anguish of our urgency. We are always about the people and I rest today because we have the vision, the compassion, the philosophical conviction, a cohesive team and God's blessing to

bring peace, prosperity to all our people.

Madam President, I thank you and may God bless us. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sophia Chote SC: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President. Forgive me, I do not have any quotes from Aristotle to start with this afternoon, but I do have a few small points to make with respect to the presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance.

I would like to thank Parliament's staff for distilling the information about which Ministries got what amounts and so on, which was posted up on their Facebook page. Quite frankly, I do not think I would have understood what has been set out in the budget speech had I not seen those figures clarified on their Facebook page. I know that there are people listening to these debates and looking at the debates, and perhaps they may be assisted by going to Parliament's Facebook page, for that information.

Now, when I got home last night I learnt that a man had died. He is the same man who Sen. Ameen spoke about, and presumably he was a constituent of one of these Ministers here or in the other place. According to reports, he was 37 yearsold and there was a video accompanying the report about this man's death. I was shocked by what I saw and I think that all of us as parliamentarians should be shocked, and should ask yourselves the question, "Why are we spending all this money on national security? [*Desk thumping*] Because over the last two years we have spent, well, we will have spent \$18billion on national security, and we have police officers who simply cannot effect a simple arrest. We must pay \$18 billion for that? [*Desk thumping*] Should we not spend that money in some other Ministry where he might get a better reward? Because when I looked at it, what did we have before we spent these \$18 million?

We had Operation Anaconda, brought us nothing but bad jokes. We had any number of Ministers in the Ministry of National Security. We had Matrofski, Mcguire, Snipes, John Gould, Steve Henry, Cameron Ross, Policing for the People, police service transformation, the Crime Suppression Unit, the Anti-Kidnapping Unit, the Crime and Justice Commission, the Inter Agency Task Force, Scotland Yard, Penn State Justice and Safety Institute, George Mason University, Israeli radar and technology, blimps, interceptors for our so-called porous borders, helicopters, new vehicles, bulletproof vests and body armour, high-tech weaponry, CCTV cameras, cybercrime unit; we have bought the entire shop. [*Desk thumping*] And we are investing more money or throwing more money at national security, and we are not getting the rewards which we should. I think we need to bite the bullet, and say that, “If it is that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is not doing its job, then some means must be found to get rid of those officers who are hampering the process of crime interdiction”, that is the only thing that may be done.

Now, in addition to that—I did not finish my list, because when I read the booklets which we got, I see that we now have a National Security Council Secretariat with a threat assessment centre, in the Office of the Prime Minister, with a National Intelligence Agency, providing reliable and strategic information to the national security command centre.

I was trying to think how on earth is a Ministry going to be able to create a proper reporting structure with all these existing groups, not all of them under the Ministry of National Security. I think, for example, the Anti-Corruption Investigation Bureau is still under the Attorney General’s Department. How is the Ministry of National Security going to create a proper structure of reporting, to

ensure that activities embarked upon are audited for quality, for efficiency, for all the things that we would expect to take place when an exercise such as this is carried out?

I do not know what to say. I am entirely confused, because I see \$18 million in the budget, well, over the last two years, for the Ministry of National Security, and today, we get a little package from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and when I look at page eight of it, there is a chart there talking about serious crimes between 1983—2015, and according to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service:

We are at the lowest figure since 1983.

Well, if this is so, why are we spending \$18 million?

Hon. Senator: \$18 billion.

Sen. S. Chote: \$18 billion. I simply can find no rhyme or reason to help me to understand why so much money is being spent on the Ministry of National Security, which has not served any Government over the last, I would say, 20 years in the manner in which it should. If any Ministry had done that, our citizenry would not have been living in the kind of fear in which they do.

When I looked at the *Social Sector Investment Programme* document, at page 43, I got some hope because what this document is talking about is, Trinidad and Tobago in the context of the Caribbean, and its global competitiveness, and:

“The top factors”—it says—“which are debilitating Trinidad and Tobago’s competitiveness are ‘crime and theft’, ‘poor work ethic in national workforce’, ‘inefficient government bureaucracy’ and ‘corruption’.”

So I say to myself, “Well, if the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is telling us that violent crime is down, then perhaps some of that money which was intended

for them, because we already have all these wonderful things which have been purchased and are usable, how about if we transfer some of that money to dealing with these other issues, which will enhance our competitive value within the Caribbean? So some of that money could be transferred to retraining in the national workforce, making government bureaucracy more efficient, and weeding out corruption at all levels of society.

Now, in Parliament we talk about corruption and I think people get the impression that corruption is only for the “big guys”. They are the ones to be caught. They are the ones we have to look for, the “big fish”, but what we do not understand is, within the public sector there is a very deep level of corruption which [*Desk thumping*] takes place every day.

Licensing office, classic example. I can give you another example. If you have ever tried to get a birth certificate or if you have ever tried to get a deed stamped, it might shock you to find out what you have to endure.

4.00 p.m.

The Registrar’s General Department is responsible for permitting documents to be stamped. A young attorney had to be called to the bar a few months ago, but before you file your documents in the High Court, you have to go and get the stamp duty embossed on it. There was a tent outside, and he had to arrive at five o’clock every day otherwise he would not fall within the 10 people that that department decided to deal with on that day.

Now, I am sure that dealing with 10 people in that office was not going to take up the day of one public servant or, indeed, the entire department. So it must be that this department was working on other matters. I have found that, generally speaking, it is miraculous how certain firms are able to get documents when

individual practitioners cannot. [*Desk thumping*] I think we have to address the fact that corruption within the public service is deep.

I came across another example which really shocked me. It was a racket being run by a high-level civil servant of essentially ghost gangs within a Ministry, within a Government Ministry. This is not what people talk about in the weekly press and so on. This is not what people talk about when they talk about CEPEP gangs and names on lists and so on. I am talking about a high-level official carrying out—I do not know—some sort of enterprise to have ghost gangs on the pay sheets of that Ministry with moneys being paid out to persons who do not work for that Ministry.

So when we look at corruption I think, perhaps, we need to forget about the big boys a little bit, because the way it looks to me, we are nowhere nearer getting to them than we were 10 years ago. So, let us try to clean up our public service. Let us try to remind the people that when they hold positions, they must work. [*Desk thumping*] They must do their work. They must do it ethically; they must do it fairly; they must do it for every citizen who comes to ask for their service or assistance regardless of who they are or how they look.

I think if money has to be spent on retraining, it is to be spent in retraining people who have become used to, I do not know if it is disrespecting their workplace or the way in which they work, but they need to have some sort of ethical pull-back. Now, I am sure there are experts who could do this—who retrain, refocus—but that is exactly where I think money should be spent, because that causes considerable grief, this inefficiency, the waste. You go to a government department and sometimes you think that the person you are speaking to takes pleasure telling you that he or she cannot help you, or cannot assist you to get what

you want to get done. So I think that is something we need to focus on. It is marginally connected to crime but, certainly, retraining of our public sector is a must. [*Desk thumping*]

The last time we had it, I think it was in 1991. I recalled I think it was— [*Crosstalk*—Gordon Draper, yes who had caused some changes to be made, but I do not think that anything was done since. So I think the time is now. So let us take some money away from the Ministry of National Security, because they have all the goods, and why not put it into retraining?

Now, I would like to correct one little thing, and that is when Sen. Ramkissoon spoke and was asking the question—when she was referring to the State Enterprises Investment Programme—well, why are you embarking or why is UDeCOTT embarking on new projects when there is a project of \$292.31 million or something like that which is still incomplete? I think I heard the hon.—I do not know, Madam President, if I should address him as the Vice-President or simply as Sen. De Freitas—Sen. De Freitas had suggested that that was the wrong figure. But no, when I looked at it I checked and it is there at page 85 of the document. So what Sen. Ramkissoon had given as the figure is actually quite correct. Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me to make that correction.

Now, I think one of the things we need to do—and it is actually sort of connected with what Sen. Budhu has just spoken about— we have to focus more on education. I do not mean passing exams. I think our people need to be educated on how to become self-reliant. This is why when I saw that the legislation was being proposed to govern credit unions, I thought that was an excellent thing. I hope that it happens during the course of this year, because I think over the last 15 years, every year, a Bill trying to deal with credit unions has been brought before

the Parliament and it never gets passed. Somebody always has a problem with it. I do hope that this administration is able to have the existing legislation amended or repealed with a fresh Act so that credit unions can be governed. You have to take a policy choice. Are you going to treat them as a financial institution and who is going to govern the way in which they operate? Make the choice. [*Desk thumping*]

I think revitalizing the credit union movement is significant because we can also use it in the schools. I remember being in primary school, and we had the junior cooperatives, and we were taught how to save by that simple practice. You got your little bank book and you were told what it was for and what you could use it for, and that kind of thing. It was an extremely helpful learning experience. I must say, it did not last with me into adulthood, but I am sure that it is a good start for young people, especially now where young people seem to have this sense of entitlement. They no longer talk in terms of what they need. They talk in terms of what they want. So this might be a new way to try to teach them now to save.

I do not have a head for figures, so I must confess my contribution to any budget speech is going to come across a little choppy, because I am simply trying to make sense out of what is unfamiliar material to me. So, forgive me.

Now, there is one matter that affects the court system and I would like if, whoever the Minister is that that person may be able to address this issue. The Office of the Prime Minister—I cannot remember which department—has written to the magistracy indicating that when children, when boys are brought before the court for being uncontrollable that these boys should be sent to the St. Michael's Home for Boys.

Now, I understand, perhaps, why that was done because we know there was considerable money spent on refurbishing of the St. Michael's Home for Boys, but

the reality is this. There is no more room for boys at the St. Michael's Home for Boys. Boys are being brought back to the court with injuries. They are being brought back to the court in tears after having been attacked at the home. It has simply got out of control.

So parents are now being told by the courts, "Listen, it is better you take your uncontrollable child home, because I am not going to send him to St. Michael's." Now, that is a very serious issue, especially when we want to talk about who is marginalized in society. Young men are, in a sense, the weak link. So let us see how we can shore them up, give them the protection; give them the confidence to achieve their true potential.

Now, when Sen. Roach spoke about disabled persons being left out of the budget presentation, I thought to myself, no, no, no. I am going to read this to see what there is. Well, he is right. Page 135 of the document *Social Sector Investment Programme* says this:

- "The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities..."

It sets out what the UNCRPD does. It sets out the category, "Persons with disabilities". It does not even distinguish amongst the different kinds of disabilities that human beings suffer—physical; mental. It is all in one group here.

4.15 p.m.

Madam Vice-President, let us see what the plan of action is:

"A plan of action to advance the inclusion of persons with disabilities including the levels of physical and infrastructural access under Articles 9, 19, 24, 25 and 30 of the UNCRPD, was established.

In addition, a reporting Matrix was developed to monitor and ensure continuous implementation of projects and programmes regarding building

and infrastructural access. All Ministries represented on the Committee are required to report quarterly. In particular, physical and infrastructural access have been improved in the following areas: Schools and Universities, Hospitals, Sporting and Recreational facilities, Tourism and Leisure facilities, Court Buildings, Public Housing and Public Libraries.”

Well I could talk about one of all of these, and that is to say court buildings, and I am pretty sure that there are very few court buildings which provide for access by disabled persons. I think I could count them on the fingers of one hand. So I do not know who is reporting to these Ministries saying that all of this is being done. I certainly will like to find out, because if it is not being done in the courts, is it being done in any of these other places listed here?

The outcome that is hoped for is:

“An Efficient and Effective Social System for the Poor and Vulnerable.”

Please, this is so misplaced. A disabled person can come from any walk of life.

Madam President, so I go to page 96:

“Disabilities Affairs Unit - Technical Vocational Centre for Persons with Disabilities.

The Disability Affairs Unit is dedicated to the inclusion and empowerment of Persons with Disabilities...through implementation of targeted programs and activities in collaboration with key stakeholders. The Objectives of the Unit include:

1. Promotion of family, financial, social/welfare services and other opportunities...
2. Engaging in disability research and needs assessments
3. Facilitating the direct provision of disability aids/equipment,

programmes and activities towards mobility, full inclusion and empowerment...

4. Promotion of the rights, abilities and concerns of PWDs.”

But I cannot understand why the Disability Affairs Unit should focus or should call itself a “Technical Vocational Centre for Persons with Disabilities”. Is it that we feel that persons with disabilities are only able to deal with technical and vocational training? Well this is just simply wrong. This is wrong-headed policy. Perhaps, I am hoping that it is an error that can be corrected, but certainly if it is not an error then that policy needs to be changed, because it means that you are treating disabled persons, who can do things as well as you and I, in a different way. So I think we are stigmatizing differently-abled persons. Even though it is called Disability Affairs Unit, we are stigmatizing differently-abled persons in this manner, and it should not happen.

This is what this unit did from April to June 2016: it interviewed 97 clients. Thirty got equipment loans, 30 received skills training and further educational development, students participated in a sports events and one student enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps and students benefited from a two-month music therapy programme, and students received training in a variety of subject areas.

“Constraints”—and this is, I think, the crux of the matter—“Financial staffing and space constraints at both the Unit and the Centre have impacted upon Programme activities.”

That could change. Take the money from the Ministry of National Security and use it where it can be better spent. [*Desk thumping*]

I also would like to briefly touch on page 66 of that same document which deals with the strengthening of the justice system. I do not know if there was much

input from the Judiciary, with respect to the information contained here, but certainly some of it is so hopelessly out of date. For example, the recommendation of a videoconferencing facility at the remand yard prison in Golden Grove—that was a recommendation from 2003 from a report done by Mr. Justice Mark Mohammed. It is as old as that; we are in 2016.

The other things that are listed here:

“Construction of a new state-of-the-art facility for Forensic Laboratory and Pathology Services—the project is at the initial stage of acquisition of the land from the Commissioner of State Lands.”

All of that is well and good, but when we hear that we have only one properly qualified forensic pathologist in the country, I cannot understand why in the interim that has to be always the case. A few years ago it used to be a forensic pathologist by the name of Dr. Chandu Lal, who did almost all of the high-profile autopsies. Now we have another highly qualified forensic pathologist. Why do we always have one? Can we not offer employment to more than one forensic pathologist, and we are spending \$18 billion on national security?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: They are not easy to come by.

Sen. S. Chote SC: I know that it is not a field that many people enter, but I cannot think in this whole wide world with genocides here, there and everywhere on every continent that you could think about, that we cannot hire one more forensic pathologist to help us speed the process along, because this is part of how you address your justice system. [*Desk thumping*] This is how you do it.

What has been happening now is when the other pathologists do autopsies, members of the family do not want to accept it because they want to have the autopsy done by someone who they believe is a properly qualified forensic

pathologist. I do not know what is so difficult about that. [*Crosstalk*] With all due respect, you know, when I looked at the figures for the two sides, the budget from the Government and the budget from the former Government—

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

Sen. S. Chote SC: Yes, so this is a nice thing that I could end my contribution with. I looked at the first budget for the current Opposition and the first budget for the Government; there was not much difference. So let us just stop the pretence that this one is doing something that that one did not do, or that we have new ideas that you did not have. I think anybody who can read, can simply go to the *Hansard* and see that you are not poles apart in terms of policy and how you address issues. I think what happens is the difference would be the will to achieve what you want to achieve. That is the only difference. But I certainly do think, and it is perhaps a good thing for us to recognize that you are not poles apart in terms of what you think is good for our country.

So it is not a case of Government and Opposition constantly fighting; people are tired of that. If citizens can understand that some of the projects that you are carrying on with were projects implemented by the other administration and vice versa, then I think they would be much happier or feel a greater sense of satisfaction about the performance of their MPs.

So with that, I thank you, Madam President.

Sen. Daniel Dookie: Thank you very much, Madam President. I am extremely delighted to have this opportunity to participate in this very meaningful debate as we engage the direction of Trinidad and Tobago.

I would like to begin by responding to a couple comments that came from those opposite. It had been said by Members of the Opposition, in this debate and

elsewhere, that this Government and the People's National Movement as a whole lack vision. I want to place on the record that the People's National Movement is the only political party which had articulated, communicated and documented a vision for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to remind us, lest we forget, of the People's Charter adopted by the inaugural conference of the movement on January 15, 1956, which highlighted the party's first vision for Trinidad and Tobago, and outlined the party's fundamental principles and policies. If you engage this document, you would find PNM's vision regarding wages, social security, housing infrastructure, the issue of self-government, including the bicameral system of government and the ministerial system of government that we have today. You would find PNM's vision regarding education documenting for the first time a fundamental policy of linking our education programme and development to the political, social and economic development needs of the country. Further, if you were to examine PNM's vision in 1956, you would find our first concept of industrial development and a party's national philosophy and policy regarding labour—PNM vision from 1956.

I also want to draw your attention, Madam President, to the Chaguaramas Declaration, also referred to as Perspectives for the New Society, approved and adopted by party convention in 1970, which articulated a vision for Trinidad and Tobago to bring about social change at the time, which articulated a view, as the country—through PNM's vision—attempted to improve its development, to bring about a heightened level of participation by our citizenry in the affairs of government in Trinidad and Tobago, recognizing that through education it was important—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: At this stage, hon. Members, we will take the tea break. So we

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will suspend until 5.00p.m.

4.30p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam President: Sen. Dookie.

Sen. D. Dookie: Thank you, again. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam President, before the break I was responding to the accusation levied against the PNM that we lack vision. And I reminded the country about the People's Charter in 1956, and I began to share some information regarding the party's next—at the time—vision for Trinidad and Tobago which was a Chaguaramas Declaration which basically sought to bring about restructuring of the country by promoting social change. And in that regard, the party pursued a vision of promoting intimate participation by our citizens in the management of their affairs of Trinidad and Tobago.

And in that document, if you examine it, you will see fundamental policy regarding trade unionism, infrastructural development and it is interesting to note as well you would see government policy and vision regarding rural development. And if in fact we have a rural development Ministry today, Madam President, it was founded on the vision by the People's National Movement since 1970.

And that led, Madam President, to the third visioning exercise of the People's National Movement which produced the PNM's "Perspectives in the World of the 80s and Beyond". But prior that, Madam President, Prime Minister George Chambers laid in the Parliament a development plan for Trinidad and Tobago entitled "The Imperatives of Adjustment", containing the work done by a task force approved by the then Cabinet under Mr. William Demas and that fed as an input into the visioning exercise which produced the PNM's "Perspective in the World of the 80s and Beyond".

And what is fundamental in this document? There was a fundamental statement of fact which read:

By the 1970s the PNM had achieved most of its principal goals that it had set itself.

And those achievements, if you pursue the document, would include internal self-government, integration—because at the time there was the Caribbean Free Trade Association—it would have also identified the successes of the then administration in education, housing, and social development.

And the party then moved towards what it referred to as the next phase of national development, moving away from what it termed industrialization by invitation towards the ownership or the promotion of ownership of local resources which led to significant ownership of resources by local entrepreneurs. And that led, Madam President, to the rise of the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago and also a new industrial base.

And PNM's vision continued, as you may be aware of the fourth vision document of the People's National Movement, the Vision 2020 document approved in convention in the year 2000. And for the first time the People's National Movement introduced the philosophy to the population of the ability of Trinidad and Tobago to achieve developed nation status. And if you engage what was outlined in that document, you will find fundamental PNM policies regarding women and gender development, business development, domestic savings, agricultural development, the rise of industrial estates in Trinidad and Tobago and education.

And, Madam President, I wish to state that this 2020 document and also the plans that would have been articulated in it, led to many great developments in

Trinidad and Tobago. For example, I can state with confidence that the International Waterfront came with success on the foundation of Vision 2020; the University of Trinidad and Tobago as well came on the success of Vision 2020; e TecK, GATE and an accelerated housing programme of the People's National Movement during that period were founded on the strength of Vision 2020. So, Madam President, I thought I would put this on the record to prove beyond any doubt that the People's National Movement from 1956 to now presented this country with vision and hope. [*Desk thumping*]

So today, I can state with confidence that self-governance and the self-government for Trinidad and Tobago was attained on the foundation of PNM vision; regional integration was attained on the foundation of PNM vision; our cultural development was achieved and attained with success on the foundation of PNM vision; industrialization and rise of the professional class were also achieved on the strength and the foundation of PNM vision; the rise of the manufacturing sector was achieved on the strength and foundation of PNM vision. So, Madam President, the People's National Movement as an organization and as a Government cannot stand accused of being visionless.

As a matter of fact, I put it this way: it is the UNC who has proven to be a party without vision. [*Desk thumping*] They have never produced a documented vision and plan for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, Madam President, I wish to state that they are like a ship without a sail moving to and fro with every political doctrine. And their latest political doctrine is the blue economy, the green economy, the yellow economy, the black economy, but the only economy that they created with success is the corrupt economy and the inefficient economy. [*Desk thumping*]

The People's National Movement will write our own history. And then I heard Sen. Mark in his contribution telling us yesterday that the PNM would wither and die. Sixty years as a political institution, Madam President, we are approaching the realm of political immortality. [*Desk thumping*] And I state as Martin Joseph said:

As long as there is a Trinidad and Tobago there will be a PNM. [*Desk thumping*].

And I put that to rest, Madam President.

And I also listened to the attacks on Government regarding its attempt, with great success I would put it, on restructuring and simplifying the VAT regime and also attacking our initiatives regarding tax. I heard the comment: tax, tax, tax. But I wonder and the question I ask myself, what would have been the UNC's proposal to deal with the fiscal deficit? And I would like to remind us and remind the country that the UNC told this country how they would deal with the fiscal deficit and the fiscal challenges facing our country. And they told us that if the UNC was in government today they would increase VAT to 17 ½ per cent on every commodity other than foodstuff and they would increase corporation tax to 35 per cent. And they look at me as if I am making it up.

I go to the *Hansard*, with your permission, Madam President— January 26, 2016, that is this year and I am reading from the contribution of Opposition Sen. Wayne Sturge, a spokesperson for the UNC who referred to themselves as the alterative government. And I want to remind the country what the alternative government placed as their major fiscal intervention to save Trinidad and Tobago. I quote:

But I am asking if the Government can consider since we are seeing hard

times, if the Government would consider no VAT on food, zero per cent, perhaps raising VAT on everything else to 17½ per cent and perhaps raising corporation tax from 25 per cent, a low of 25 per cent if we can get back to 35 per cent as it was. I am quite certain if you raise it to 35 per cent, we may be able to bridge the deficit in terms of what we collect.

UNC policy; and today they want to attack this Government for bringing about simplicity in our VAT regime and taxation structure. I remind the country, you see, sometimes they do not know what to say [*Laughter*] and sometimes the truth comes out and that would have been an administration that would have tax, tax, tax. The evidence is clear, I put this to rest at this time.

So, Madam President, as I examine Government's fiscal proposal and you know they also like to tell us, we have no plan and I would attempt over the next few minutes to put aspects of the budget into the context of the planning process. And let me state that a foundation of a plan lies in your vision and, of course, Vision 2030 would soon be introduced into Trinidad and Tobago.

And one of the first things you do if you engage the planning process is to do a strategic analysis of your environment. You try to understand what are the major variables that work in both your internal economy and your external economy because you want to determine as a nation what are our distinctive capabilities? What are our strengths that we can use to engage the future; what weakness we have that we can work towards correcting; what opportunities lie before us that we can pursue; and what threats lie in the environment that we can know how to defend ourselves against.

5.15 p.m.

And this Government, Madam President, would have done just that. They

would have looked at both the internal and external economy. And if you read the various budget documents you would be able to identify some of the variables and findings of our internal economy. You would see that expenditure grew from \$47 billion to \$63 billion during the period 2010 to 2014; you would find significant decreases in our revenue situation by about \$17 billion, and that is in the energy sector; you would also find a significant decrease in overall revenue from \$57 billion to \$37 billion; you also would have found, if you looked at the document on funded projects, without proper and adequate funding, a decline in GDP of 2.3 per cent, and that was for the third consecutive year, a sharp increase in public sector borrowing and liquidity charges.

And what this means, Madam President, as has been said on this side before, it certainly was not going to be business as usual. What this meant and means as we go forward as a nation, is less income to pursue development. It also meant that a greater portion of our limited revenues will have to be used to fund our debt. And I listened attentively to Sen. Shrikissoon yesterday, and quite rightly he shed some concern about our debt situation, but he attempted to paint this administration and the previous administration with one brush with regard to borrowing. But there is a fundamental difference, I would like to point out, and the difference is this: in the last administration they were borrowing at a period when the country was enjoying record levels of revenue. [*Desk thumping*] This Government is borrowing at a time when revenue levels are significantly lower, and that is a fundamental difference.

Nonetheless, Madam President, those are some of the findings of the internal economy. Of course, we are well aware, as it has been said so many times in this debate about some of the challenges facing us from the macroeconomic level, from the external economy, the price of oil, what is happening with the growth of the

global economy. There have been fundamental changes in the fiscal apparatus of nations who depend on oil and gas, such as Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Norway. So, the demands of the international environment is well known to us.

Therefore, Madam President, the Government of the country would have over the last year and certainly before that, examined what is taking place internally and externally, examined what we believe would have been the opportunities that are before us, what we believe to be our strengths and our distinctive capabilities, and at the end of the analysis would have come up with certain objectives that we believe can be pursued—not just certain objectives, Madam President, but objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and with time constraints.

The budget presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance identified some, and I would just like to repeat it, as I set this as a foundation to move towards presenting Government's strategic initiatives to achieve our objectives. The Government believes that after we would have done our strategic analysis that balancing the budget by the year 2020 is an objective that is attainable.

The Government also would have identified limiting public sector debt to no more than 65 per cent of GDP as an objective, economic growth of 1 per cent in 2017, moving towards 2 per cent by the year 2020, growing our non-energy revenues to about \$8 billion by the year 2020, and growing our total revenue to \$57 billion by the year 2020. So, these are some of the specific measurable, attainable objectives that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is pursuing, and believe that we can achieve.

The next question that we have to ask ourselves as we engage in developing Trinidad and Tobago, what can be done to achieve these objectives? In other

words, what would be our strategic option facing us as we move towards achieving these fiscal objectives? And the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would have identified a number of measures, but I would limit my contribution in this regard to some measures regarding revenue management and expenditure management as specific strategic initiatives geared towards achieving the fiscal goals that the country would have set itself through the very distinguished Minister of Finance.

So, revenue management is a strategic approach being pursued by the Government to take us towards the attainment of our goals. And the Government would have identified that there were—and there are certain challenges regarding the issue of revenue management and tax administration in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government believes that they can address—we can address—the shortcomings by focusing on what we would have identified as some of the challenges facing tax administration, such as staffing, such as skill development, such as legal issues, such as cultural issues. If you examine our country you would realize that we have a relatively large informal economy, and you would realize that there is a high level of avoidance.

What the Government intends to do is to promote participation, simplifying our tax administration procedures, building trust, and creating a system that is fair and equitable, that we believe would lead to voluntary participation in our tax administration system. And building trust, participation and ensuring that we have a fair and equitable system have all been proven to bring about effectiveness in tax management system. And what is the expectation, what is the outcome, is closing the tax gap—that is, reducing the amount from what the Government actually collects and what the Government should be collecting.

In terms of revenue generation management, the Government also would

have identified in its budget presentation the intention to promote trade and export. And the very distinguished Minister of Trade and Industry would have spoken a lot about Government's intention in this regard. She would have highlighted the agreement with Panama regarding the partial scope agreement, and I will not get too much into that, except to say that there are significant opportunities in Panama in a number of sectors, including agriculture, tourism, food and drink.

What I want to point out, as I commend the Government for pursuing this initiative, is that the opportunity is certainly ripe to pursue now, because if you examine the economy of Panama you will note that they have a growing middle class, and that represents demand. If you also look at the economy you would find that between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of the population enjoys satisfactory and comfortable standards of living; which means disposable income; which means the opportunity to export.

I want to compliment the Government in pursuing this initiative and it is an initiative that we believe will bring revenue to Trinidad and Tobago. Also the Government, as articulated by the distinguished Minister, I say again, is pursuing similar interventions with countries such as Chile and Cuba.

As a matter of fact, Chile is an extremely large exporter, they have in excess of 20 trade agreements and they have relatively high levels of GDP. Cuba as well, high level of import. It is expected if you engage their economy that GDP is expected to grow until the year 2021. And they also have an expanding middle class, which I said before, represents disposable income which means the opportunity to export. So, I really think that the Minister and the Government are on the right track, and this is going to provide significant opportunities for our manufacturers to engage further in the internationalization of business.

One of the interventions that I am very excited about, that I believe will assist the Government in earning revenue and bringing about, as I said, a balanced budget by the year 2020, is what I term taking us into a new era of tourism. And I know the Minister of Trade and Industry, and Sen. Nadine Stewart, and Sen. Nigel De Freitas, and others would have spoken a lot on tourism. But I just want to point out a few things in this regard, because I am very excited about this, as I believe this is going to bring fundamental benefit to Trinidad and Tobago.

I believe as a nation we have a distinctive capability in tourism which can afford us the opportunity to gain a strategic advantage over our competitors. In Trinidad and Tobago I believe we have the luxury of sand, sea and sun; I believe we have a likable culture. We are a happy people. That is one of our shared values or superordinate goals, one of the things that unite us together despite our differences, we have something that is unique, we have Tobago and we have Trinidad, and that, to me, presents a very unique opportunity to take advantage of the opportunities in the tourism sector.

I wish to point out in this regard as well, Madam President, that I am very, very convinced that significant thought and planning would have gone into Government's initiative regarding this sector, because, if you engage the scientific literature on tourism, and in particular tourism in smaller island states, you would find a significant correlation if you were engaged in factor analysis, a high level of correlation between brand-name hotels and airlines. And therefore, it is telling me, Madam President, that the approach to bring a brand-name hotel in Tobago is founded on scientific study.

What these two variables do together, if you examine again the literature, it will tell you that brand-name hotels bring the airlines and the airlines bring the

passengers. But more than that, what I want to point out, if you look at the literature it will tell you one of the reasons why people want to come to small island states is because of the unique culture that exists in small island states. And just as well, when they come to small island states, again if you engage the literature, it will tell you, tourists demand mobility.

So, when I look at Government's proposal in terms of tourism—and this is the context that I am speaking to tourism about—and you look at Government's other development plans regarding, for example, the road to Toco, the port, the ferry service, the upgrade, and the building of a new terminal at the airport in Tobago, it tells me that the Government is looking at this thing from a sectoral perspective and is building a tourism sectoral architecture that will ensure that Trinidad and Tobago derives the greatest advantage from this particular initiative.

It tells me, Madam President, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is planning this thing right, and if you would examine what is being done, compared to what the literature tells us that you must do to be successful, I am convinced that the Government is on the right track. I am very much excited about this, and they are building an architecture in tourism that will bring benefits for Trinidad and Tobago.

And that is the way to do it, Madam President; not like the UNC, who told us they gave us a children's hospital. They gave us an incomplete building with some equipment. And I want to tell them today, they built no children's hospital for Trinidad and Tobago. I want to tell them that an incomplete building is not a hospital. [*Desk thumping*] And when you engage development it is important to put the full architecture together.

5.30 p.m.

But let me also say further, because I am hearing some talk. They told us they build a university in south Trinidad. If you go down to south Trinidad you will see an incomplete building with bush all over, goats running all over the place and they tell us they build a university. A building is not a university. [*Desk thumping*] I tell the country today that the UNC built no university. The PNM, for example, Madam President, built the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senator: But they like goats. [*Laughter*]

Sen. D. Dookie: I am not going to get into who like goats. I like mine curried. I do not know who like it elsewhere.

So, Madam President, revenue generation activities. I am very excited about tourism. And, of course, from revenue generation perspective, again, the Government is going to ensure that the relevant property tax system is in place and the property tax is collected in Trinidad and Tobago. There is absolutely nothing to fear about this. I want to state something that I have said before, the rationale for a property tax is a benefit principle. And we ought not to rob our local government bodies from the opportunity to earn income by instituting property tax.

I would also like to point out something that I believe is important for our citizens to know. As I said, property tax operates on a benefit principle. And the moneys derived from property taxes are used to provide services for the citizens. And I want to point out a significant finding in literature, Madam President. The benefits that you receive from property tax have been proven to significantly outweigh the cost. In addition to that, one has also been proven, if you examine the relevant literature, because the literature tells us that this is one of the fairest and most equitable taxes that exist in the world. And what the literature also tells us is that, because of the services that are rendered to the citizens by money derived

from property tax, the services that are provided for citizens in their various communities lead to an increase in the property value of the citizens. I think that is a fundamental benefit that should not escape us.

So, Madam President, in terms of what the Government is pursuing, in terms of revenue generation, in terms of revenue management and administration, significantly improving our tax administration system, simplify it, modify it, we have done so with VAT, promote trade and export. The distinguished Minister of Trade and Industry would have expounded on that.

Madam President: Sen. Dookie you have five more minutes.

Sen. D. Dookie: Oh my goodness. Okay. So on the expenditure side, Madam President, the Government would have passed the amendments to the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015 and, of course, this is designed to bring about a new era in terms of public management and administration in Trinidad and Tobago. I think I have to put aside my notes and conclude, as I would have spoken about strategy.

But, Madam President, what I think is fundamental, as we engage implementation, is this Government is engaging in action to bring about new public management, taking us into the era of new public management. The Government would have recommended and proposed and is pursuing diligently the Revenue Authority for Trinidad and Tobago which would be used to implement a lot of their strategic initiatives regarding revenue and tax administration.

The Government would have also—would have mentioned the Office of the Procurement Regulator and bringing about procurement management in an effort to ensure that there is no corruption, there is a significant reduction in wastage which, at the end of the day, would bring about value for money. So you have the

institution of the Revenue Authority, the institution of the Procurement Regulator and you also have the Statistical Institute.

Madam President, I want to congratulate the Minister of Planning and Development, the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, for paying particular attention to the Statistical Institute and what is happening with the management and the use of statistics as reported with alleged interference. But what I want to congratulate her for is paying particular attention to that and taking the relevant corrective measures to ensure that statistics are treated in a certain way in this country.

Having said that, Madam President, let me state that there is growing importance and understanding of the role the statistics play in the development of the nation. The UN, for example, has a particular facility that offers training regarding the use of statistics, and a development of statistics providing human resource support, technical support and providing support in terms of implementing strategies regarding statistics. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I believe, Madam President, is taking us into a new era of new public administration with the strengthening of our institutions; the strengthening of our institutions in this regard, regarding the Revenue Authority, regarding procurement management and also regarding statistics.

So I believe, Madam President, without doubt, this budget shows vision; this budget clarifies the objectives that we are pursuing as a Government; this budget clarifies a strategic intervention we are using and this budget showed us what system of structure of governance we are putting in place to ensure that the measures that we are articulating are successfully implemented.

So one year of government; one year of government under the very distinguished, hon. Dr. Keith Rowley; one year of corruption-free government,

Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] One year of hope, one year of high expectations and I believe, Madam President, many, many, more years of PNM leadership and blessings to Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. As per usual, it is an honour and privilege to join this debate on:

“An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2017.”

Madam President, it is just over one year that this PNM administration came in office. We took office on or around September 7th, just one month before a budget was due. You will recall when the Government term ended in May 2015 we begged and we beseeched the UNC administration to call the election in time so in the event that a new Government came into power they would have had ample time to study the numeric and prepare a proper budget for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They did not do that. They carried us down to the wire, three months after May on to almost September 7th, which was the last possible Monday the election could have been kept, just in order to stymie a new administration position to prepare a sensible budget for Trinidad and Tobago.

Having said that, we prepared a budget within one month of taking office. Obviously, and most importantly, we had to use the same old mould because all the budget planning prerogatives were already completed. Additionally, much to our chagrin, what we found were fiscal confusion, fiscal chaos, fiscal indiscipline and, at its ultimate stage, fiscal recklessness. They had maxed out the Central Bank overdraft facilities.

There was one point in December—Dr. Rowley said it many times, the Minister of

Finance said it—there was one time in October 2015 that there were three days of money remaining to run Trinidad and Tobago. There was a proliferation and a plethora of a short-term billion-dollar loans with a six-month maturity period, all of which were taken months before the general election. We had to refinance that early in the fiscal year. Saddled to that, we were left with a \$5 billion back pay, of recklessness knowing that the country's revenue was dwindling. They went and made important and significant settlement with the trade union movement, saddled with a \$5 billion back pay liability; and, obviously, outstanding liabilities to contractors in the tune of \$3 billion to \$4 billion which we are still auditing to see how much of that is real.

Madam President, how did we survive 2015/2016 without major disruption and government, I am tempted to say God alone knows. But I know. We survived because of prudent and structured fiscal management ably led by our hon. Minister of Finance, Minister Colm Imbert. [*Desk thumping*]

So today we have broken the old mould for the first time. We have created a new mould, one that is distinctively branded with PNM policies and vision. It is in this PNM mould headed by the distinguished hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, and ably implemented by our hon. Minister of Finance that we have now stamped a PNM footprint, a PNM fingerprint and even a PNM retina identification to this national budget. [*Desk thumping*]

It is at this point in time I want to formally congratulate the Minister of Finance, again, for a budget well done and well delivered. [*Desk thumping*] It provides clarity of vision, it provides a focused agenda with clear deliverables and, most importantly—and let me say that again—most importantly, it provides a roadmap to bring back this economy to growth and sustainability and, once and for

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all, with the ultimate aim by 2020 to stop deficit budgeting. I appeal to Sen. Shrikissoon we will be trying our best that by 2020, deficit budgeting will be something of the past.

Let me spend a couple minutes on some rebuttals. Sen. Mark indicated the budget makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. That is just jargon. As a matter of fact, it is the first focused attempt of taxing the rich. One million dollars and more in disposable income either per person or per company will now be subject to a 30 per cent tax bracket for income over \$1million, totally. Sen. Mark went on to say that we spent \$60 billion last year.

Hon. Imbert: He said that? “All ah dem does say that you know.”

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: We dropped the expenditure by \$11 billion. We actually spent only \$52 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Imbert: “All ah dem does say that.”

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: And then one final piece of clarity to him when he was speaking about TSTT and Liberty Global owning the 49 per cent shares of TSTT, Liberty Global could sell the shares to who they want. They are a private company. What does the Government have to do with that? Government has 51 per cent shares in TSTT; that is our business. Whosoever the minority partner wants to sell its equity to, it is a free game, it is an open market economy. We have absolutely nothing to do with that. But to say now, there is a sinister plot to set up ANSA McAL and somebody else to buy Global equity shares and then we, NEL, will sell them 2 per cent to come to 51 to take over TSTT, that is wishful thinking.

Hon. Imbert: That was their plan which I stopped.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: “Ohhh, ohhh.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. Imbert: “You tink it easy.”

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Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Okay, so I will spend no more time on Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Thank you. [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir. He said it was his 25th budget contribution, and I always expect this scholastic and scholarly discourse on macro-economics and macro-economic policy. He switched his paradigm this time and I want to compliment him for that, because you cannot be the same way all the time. He took a new approach. He made a genuine effort to build that case for the poor and the underprivileged which is something we will take very seriously and some of the issues that he raised we will consider them seriously and I think his approach is extremely commendable in this Parliament.

5.45 p.m.

Sen. Shrikissoon, I mean, took over from where Sen. Dr. Mahabir would have left off last year, [*Laughter*] and he did, in fact, present a scholarly overview of macroeconomics. I just want to say that I totally support, and I will bring it up with the Minister of Education, hopefully, that your concept on GATE of income per household, per registered child at university is a valid concept, because you may find yourself with somebody earning over \$10,000 but they have three children in university and that is a point that has been well taken.

Sen. Ramkissoon raised a lot of points, just for her own—on a point of clarity, the State Enterprises Investment Programme for the year does not come from the Consolidated Fund. That is not part of the budget. It is just provided there for additional information for all those things, but we do not have direct control of Petrotrin funds or NGC funds as the case may be.

You raised some issues on NIDCO and the Point Fortin Highway contract. I do not have enough time to spend on that, but that contract will be restarted very

shortly during this fiscal year. There have been some legal issues which we are sorting out and the contracts will be broken up into smaller components and local contractors will be invited to bid.

I plan to spend a couple minutes on energy so in that context I will deal with some of the issues that were raised by Sen. Small in terms of gas pricing and what have you. Sen. Ameen, I have nothing here for you, so I apologize. Okay? Sen. Chote, I think the point she raised about public service performance is a valid point and possibly public service corruption probably also exists in a very rampant way that we are not even conscious of. But I just want to draw her attention to one fundamental point. I want to draw it to the Independent Bench, to the Opposition Bench and to our Bench. I keep saying here every time I get up to speak that some of the most fundamental governance issues we face is with the service commissions. But the service commissions is a creature of Marlborough House, and any government who wants to lose an election, attack the service commissions and “yuh dead”. It is something we will have to live with for generations to come, but as the world modernizes itself and governance structures modernize themselves in advanced economies, you will see that the service commissions have outlived their usefulness.

And executive authority must lie with a government to make decisions. It happens in the United Kingdom. There is no service commission in the United Kingdom, you know. There is no presidential appointments in the United Kingdom, you know. The Queen, the throne speech she reads is prepared for her word for word and she cannot change a word, and the Queen has no executive power in the UK. But I just make that as a point. I am not proceeding along those lines, but I just want to draw the nation’s attention that one of these days we will

have to wake up and look at the service commissions and find out what is their relevance in a modern Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, we are faced with some cold, hard facts. Energy revenue has dropped from \$19.3 billion in 2014 to \$1.6 billion in 2016, a 92 per cent decline. Total revenue has dropped from \$57 billion to \$37 billion, a 35 per cent decline. Our present position—and I just want the facts as raw as you could get them. Our present position in the 2017 budget statement is: total revenue, \$47.4 billion; total expenditure, \$53.4 billion which gives us a deficit of \$6 billion. But it is not that.

Core revenue, which is sustainable revenue, is down to \$37.0 billion. We are making up a 10 per cent of the deficit from the one-off sales of assets. Sen. Shrikissoon is right. That is not a comfortable position to be in. Okay? And the reason for that is that we were hit by a perfect storm, a perfect storm of reduced energy prices, a perfect storm of declining production, both in gas and in oil. The gas curtailment is now one Bcf. That is one billion cubic feet of gas per day. August production in oil was a mere 66,000 barrels a day. The Minister of Finance told you that is the lowest in 60 years.

I remember the time I was working, after A levels, as an employee of what was then Amoco in Galeota Point. Being from Mayaro it was easy to get a job then after A levels. They had just found Poui, Teak and Samaan. That was 1977/1978. The country's production in 1977 was 271,000 barrels a day. Amoco alone was producing 156,000 barrels a day. We were filling a tanker every five days and shipping out the oil. Today, it takes two months to fill a tanker in Galeota because they are down to 15,000 barrels a day, which is Repsol's production.

That is where we have come from. However, we have looked at the energy

sector and in our plan to balance back the budget by 2020, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is forecasting oil price at around 50—to average \$50 a barrel in 2017, going up to \$60 a barrel in 2018, and keeping along that trend. She is forecasting gas price in the long term to be around \$3 per MMBtu which will take us from a revenue stream now of approximately \$2 billion in 2016 to \$14 billion in 2020, and by which time we will sort of balance the deficit. And, obviously, there will be issues relating to how we plan to bring back the production which probably I do not have time to get into today, but it will include Angostura, Circa, Juniper, Angelin and what have you, and most importantly, our cross-border—across the border gas. And I want to make the differentiation. Cross-border is Loran Manatee where you have to unitize the field. Half of the field is here, half is in Venezuela. Across the border is Venezuelan gas which we will be purchasing.

In terms of the revenue stream I just want to give Sen. Small the assurance—and the Minister of Finance has already given the assurance in that regard—that we are going to deal frontally with the issue of transfer pricing. I know that is your pet peeve and I know every time you come here you speak about the revenue leakage that is coming out of Atlantic LNG. We plan to deal with this frontally for the first time this year, and his boys in the IMF are advising him on that matter—and girls.

Hon. Imbert: “Doh forget de girls.” [*Laughter*]

Sen. Small: I am available to you, Minister.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: At what price?

Sen. Small: It will be negotiable.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Just very quickly, we will also be diversifying the economy, which was amply dealt with by the hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon, Senator and Minister of Trade and Industry: manufacturing, service, tourism, maritime, oil

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service sector. But I just want to go back to one topic because I really feel hurt when I think about it. Everybody is saying now that no new revenue stream was created in the last decade. But we were creating one, you know, aluminium. And everybody in this country jumped on a bandwagon with Anil Roberts, an ill-informed—

Hon. Imbert: Illiterate.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: I “doh” want to say illiterate—ill-informed person and he ranted and raved on the radio every evening about no smelter, no smelter, and he joined this bandwagon only to say all the issues were about the pot linings and the pot linings would have been disposed of in the United States. Okay? Sen. Small knows that. And everybody jumped on that bandwagon. We had already built the TGU Plant, and I have said it here in this House on many occasions, this Government was saddled with a \$45 million a month payment to TGU for power that was not used. It was a take-or-pay contract—\$45 million. And it is only now with the Gandhi substation that is being built—and it is almost completed—that we will be starting to use some of that TGU gas to send up to the grid to north Trinidad and Tobago.

So we lost an opportunity for a new revenue stream on aluminium. And it was one of the worst decisions a country would have ever made, only because it got carried away with the rhetoric of certain people.

And I am quoting from the *Newsday* today, the Prime Minister on scrapped Alutrint Smelter Plant:

“TT owes China hundreds of millions”—of dollars.

“Is Anil Roberts and the UNC cause that.”

Hon. Imbert: They cancel the contract.

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Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: They cancelled the contract and they denied this country a reliable revenue stream. Today aluminium prices are still strong. [*Desk thumping*] And in countries like Australia and Norway, they are benefitting from aluminium. We are trying to revive it now because that is a dead duck. We want to import ingots and take it to e Teck, to Tamana e Teck Park and start to make rims and parts for motor vehicles. So we do that.

Just some quick points. I would not have time to go through this but I have studied the response of other oil-based economies, how they have responded. And let me just read something from some research that I have done.

Further, OPEC members together posted—and I want Sen. Mahabir to listen to this—a current account deficit of \$99 billion in 2015, compared to a surplus of \$238 billion in 2014.

And hear this.

This was the first time since 1998 that a current account deficit was experienced among OPEC countries.

And it goes on to give you what each OPEC country is doing. Everybody is cutting fuel subsidy. Everybody is looking at their expenses. Saudi Arabia cut Ministers' salaries by 20 per cent, but their salaries are obviously higher than ours, so I am not going there. And then I just want to close off on this issue of other countries by quoting from an article from *The Economist*, September 24, 2016. And I admire Norway, eh. To me, Norway is a model country. Sen. Paul Richards spoke about Finland, Scandinavia. They are advanced and they are progressive, you know:

This week the Norwegian sovereign fund—and this week is September 24—the Norwegian sovereign fund was worth a whopping \$882 billion.

And it goes on to say:

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“The annual revenue it generates now regularly exceed income from oil sales”—itself.

That is a diversified economy. If every single oil well in Norway shuts down in the morning, the revenue from the fund investment surpasses the revenue foregone from that. These are progressive countries. These are countries we can learn from.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Will the Minister give way for one minute?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Yes, but please—[*Crosstalk*] I just want to comment on rural development.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: I just want to ask, Minister as a matter of policy, is it the position of the Government that it is going to rebuild the Heritage Fund if the price of oil were to once again increase to the levels that they were five years ago? Thank you very much.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The Minister of Finance has advised me that he will deal with that when he is winding up.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Madam President, my portfolio, Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, during this year we have conducted 14 consultations. We have prepared—it is the most widespread consultation that has ever occurred in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And invariably—and I say this without fear of contradiction—we were well received in all 14 corporations, whether they were UNC-run, or PNM-run.

We have drafted our policy position which was adopted by Cabinet about a month ago. The legislation, which is handled by the hon. Stuart Young, is currently being drafted and it will be tabled to a joint select committee of Parliament in the first quarter of 2017.

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However—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Ameen: After the election? You said it was coming—[*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Well, we are going to face the election because we are not going to postpone any election. We will be hosting this election in the old mould, but we will have a two- to three-year transition period as we rule out because transformation is not—and I want to make this point—something that occurs easily in a society like others. This is serious devolution of power you know. This is now where regional corporations will be in charge of their own affairs at a very fundamental level. They will be allowed to retain taxes and spend it in their own jurisdiction. They will be allowed to handle the social service delivery.

A lot of people talking about the leaked poverty report. We have some serious concerns about the report, but having said that, social service delivery is best handled at the level of the regional corporation because who knows better, the families who are at risk. The old lady who is getting the runaround and cannot get her pension because she had to come and give her life certificate in Port of Spain; who knows the families that are subject to domestic violence, or incest? It is at the level of the regional corporation. You will be handling your own space, and as I said in the consultation, the Governor of Georgia is the Governor of Georgia. Obama cannot tell him what to do. It does not matter whether he is a Republican or a Democrat.

We want to have a system where the chairman of a regional corporation runs this corporation independent of whether he is UNC or PNM. So the same powers that the chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation would have, which is 100 per cent PNM, will be the same powers that the chairman of the Penal/Debe

Regional Corporation will have which is 100 per cent UNC. So that is the model we are adopting.

This is the report. [*Minister displays the report*] It will be made available to the general public very shortly. It is the draft policy position on local government where we will have full-time councillors; they will have executive authority. We will be giving additional responsibility to the regional corporation to collect and retain some of the taxes in which their jurisdiction has. We will be focusing on municipal policing. Sen. Clarence Rambharat I think spoke about municipal policing. Cabinet has already agreed to employ 100 municipal police officers per corporation which will increase a strength of 1,400, and what we are trying to do now is bring regionality into the policing.

So in other words, the Sangre Grande Municipal Police will be staffed largely from people from the corporation. That is what municipal policing is about. You cannot have somebody transferred from Diego Martin into Sangre Grande, it just makes no sense. The concept of municipal policing is like that and that recruitment will take place shortly, and if you go through the budget figures in detail you will see something like \$37 million have been already allocated to that.

Madam President, could you tell me how much time I have?

Madam President: You have until 6.17 p.m. So you have 14 minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Now rural development. My good friend in his debut speech, Sen. Rohan Sinanan, made a heavy pitch on rural developments, so I do not want to add much more to it, but basically to say that rural development is the future of Trinidad and Tobago, because for far too long—and I make no apologies for it because of the economic forces that control where an investment dollar goes. The investment profile will always be skewed towards the population centres and

the areas of high density population. It is a matter of pure economics. So if you have a road to pave and one road, same distance, has 200 people living on it, economics will tell you value for money, bang for buck, you pave that road instead of a road with 10 residents on it, but if you apply that policy, ad infinitum, rural people will get nothing.

So rural development must take place with direct government policy intervention, and that is why today I want to again praise Dr. Keith Rowley, because of the PNM party, which is largely an urban party, to come up with the concept—because everybody have accused PNM of only studying Port of Spain and the East-West Corridor, you know. But this is the first Prime Minister that saw it fit, that his first policy announcement when he became the Opposition Leader in 2010 was in Moruga, where he told the people of Moruga, as Opposition Leader, that a new PNM administration will have a Ministry of Rural Development. [*Desk thumping*]

And it is in that basis we conceptualized certain mega projects to really bring economic and spur economic activity into rural areas. For example, the Moruga Fishing Port, the total upgrade of the Moruga Road from Petit Cafe Junction straight to Marac. Sen. Shrikissoon, you know where Petit Cafe is. Petit Cafe Junction straight to Marac, at connectivity, economic activity. Toco/Matelot: Valencia new arterial road into Toco; Toco ferry into Tobago.

We are also dealing with certain policy because the schedule that was given to me, as Minister of Rural Development, say you have oversight responsibility for all rural development projects, irrespective of which Ministry it comes from. So I am working closely with the Minister of Housing and Urban Development now as we develop a rural housing policy. Rural housing will mean that we do not want no

La Horquetta, or no Edinburgh 500 in rural areas. We want what we call village expansions.

I will use Moruga as an example again. I do not want, and it will not happen, that we go into Moruga, bulldoze 50 acres of land and build 400 houses. I will build 50 houses in Marac, build 50 houses Grand Chemin, build 50 houses in Basseterre, build 50 houses in Fifth Company, build 50 houses in St. Mary's. So the Moruga community will still get its 300 houses, but in a village expansion mode where the village will now absorb the housing estate and not vice versa. [*Desk thumping*]

Rural banking. I met with the Bankers Association, I asked the question: why should a person in Cedros have to leave Cedros to go to Point Fortin to take out \$500 from the bank? The ATM banking technology is now available and she should have a major outreach programme to these rural communities. Okay? We are looking at rural broadband; we are looking at rural economic activity, agro processing plant. My closest ministerial colleague, in terms of rural development, is obviously my good friend Sen. Clarence Rambharat, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, because the nexus between agriculture and rural development—go to any United Nations Report, in the alleviation of poverty, rural development and agriculture—goes hand in hand. Good?

Finally rural transportation, because in any event the Government must subsidize to some extent rural transportation because it is the intent of the Ministry of Rural Development not to urbanize rural areas. It is to keep the rural lifestyle, but to bring in the amenities that people of the urban centres now benefit from so that rural people could still access those amenities but maintain their rural lifestyle, because country people do not want to leave the country, you know. Good? We

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give them house, we give them broadband, we give them transport, we give economic activity, they could stay there [*Desk thumping*] because the people of Moruga will stay in Moruga and vote PNM. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] The people of Toco/Matelot will stay in Toco/Matelot and vote PNM in Toco/Matelot. There is no reason to shift people around with no gerrymandering. Okay.

Madam President, I want to just close on some controversial matters now. A lot was asked to me, in the Finance Committee of the House—where we will be building several regional corporations? How much more minutes I have?

Hon. Senator: Until 6.17 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: 6.17 p.m., so eight minutes. Regional corporation headquarters. Regional corporations are poorly housed as we speak. There is one shining example that was built by Hazel Manning, a PNM Minister of Local Government, which is the Chaguanas Regional Corporation headquarters. Under the dying days of the Manning administration we awarded a contract to Jaspal Bhogal to design four regional headquarters, Arima, Diego Martin, Princes Town and Penal/Debe. PNM built Chaguanas already, you know the UNC was going to build two out of the four and do you know which two? Princes Town and Penal/Debe. Obscene! And to make matters worse, you know they had Club 88? When Panday break away from NAR he formed Club 88. They had something called the hundred-million-dollar club. Everything that the UNC put their hands on was \$100 million and more. I quote the example of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation headquarters:

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar turned the sod the Sunday before the election. Madam President, in Katwaroo Trace—I do not know which one of you all know where Katwaroo Trace is—flat land, 3,500 square feet of office space and the

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contract was awarded for \$124 million. Thirty-five thousand square feet of it. That worked out to \$3,500 per square foot. We had to cancel it. Dr. Rowley has mandated me to go back out to tender and build Penal Corporation—because we are not victimizing them, you know—and build Diego Martin Corporation for the same \$124 million. [*Desk thumping*] We are building them simultaneously. Okay? I have been mandated by the Prime Minister to demonstrate to the nation the obscenity of some of the things that occurred, to build Penal Corporation headquarters and Diego Martin headquarters for the same \$124 million, which I intend to do.

And finally, Madam President, let me just say a couple things on CEPEP because you know CEPEP now falls with rural development. A lot has been said in the other place about how much people you are going to retrench because the budget cut to \$425 million from almost \$600 million before, but I ask you the question, through you, Madam President. In 2010 under the last days of the Manning administration—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:—there were 6,000 employees in CEPEP with a wage bill of \$350 million and the country was clean; in 2015 the wage bill jumped to \$609 million with 12,000 employees and the country in bush. Understand this, Madam President, 264 CEPEP contractors—you are talking, about in Port of Spain, 264 CEPEP contractors and we are not talking about Tobago—39 constituencies. The constituency of Minister Stuart Young, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has zero contractors. Two hundred and sixty four contractors in Trinidad, you know. Minister Young has no contractors in Port of Spain North which includes Belmont, St. Ann's and Cascade. Siparia has 12. Diego Martin West, which is the

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constituency of our Prime Minister, has two. I mean, your level of—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Imbert: Discrimination.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:—discrimination should never be so obscene. Discriminate a little bit nah, but God, so? I mean, something has to be fundamentally wrong with the site. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Ameen: Worse when you all won—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: It could never be worse. It could never be worse.

Madam President, let me just deal with one more matter before I close, the CEPEP health sector initiative. It is the same Dr. Moonilal and hon. Ganga Singh who say CEPEP “does paint stone and they feeding at a trough like pigs”. That is the exact language they used. They opted from 6,000 to 12,000 you know, to 264 contractors, but that is not the UNC style. The UNC style is that I have no power unless I could award contracts. So giving CEPEP contracts, which is a recurrent contract have no money in it you know, because the contractor gets the little \$50,000 a month operating cost. So to make racket, you must award contracts.

So CEPEP came up with this programme called the health sector initiative, and they said that they will be using CEPEP procurement and project management expertise—where the project management expertise came from?—and they awarded 35 contracts to repair health centres in North Central and North West Regional Health Authority—thirty-five contracts because of their project management skills, you know. You have no project management to cut grass—at a whopping cost of \$148.68 million.

“Dah wah ah tell yuh, is ah hundred-million-dollar club. Anything under ah \$100 million is small change, so yuh must deal in the \$100 million and above.”

6.15 p.m.

Madam President, I used these last examples with a double sword, in jest and in the most serious method because this has to stop. This type of behaviour has to stop. We cannot even afford it, but even if we could have afforded it, it is obscene. And I want to give the country the assurance that this administration, as my good friend, Sen. Sinanan said, we will be spending \$53 billion but we will not be “tiefing ah cent”. [*Desk thumping*] And if we cut out the haemorrhaging, the waste, the inefficiency and the corruption, this country can survive and survive well on \$53 billion of government expenditure.

So, in concluding, Madam President, I want to, again, compliment the Minister of Finance, I want to compliment the astute leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley. I want to compliment my colleagues in the Cabinet because we have all been working very hard over the last year to put this country back on an even keel and I wish the country and I guarantee that we will do all in our powers to make 2017 budgetary year a productive and successful year for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Rodger Samuel: Madam President, I am thankful that I have the opportunity to take part in this budget debate. I want to thank God for the opportunity and I pray that all of us in the House would have the kind of wisdom that God would continue to keep us and hold us in times that are perilous financially, in our security systems where danger seems to lurk in every place.

Madam President, since in high school, we would sit as young people and in those days listen to Finance Ministers like Dr. Eric Williams, Robinson and those were like the gems of the industry then, they were the political arena and these guys would present budgets. But we found ourselves as young men and young women in school intrigued by the presentations but disturbed because in so many

instances, the presentation never came down to the levels where the average citizen could fully grasp it.

And from that era to now, the average citizen, when it comes to budget presentations, seems only concerned about what commodities would raise or what would be reduced to their benefit but the rest of budget presentations seem not to appeal to the average citizen and as such, Madam President, when decisions are taken by governments, the citizens at large are quite unaware as to what is really taking place. And I believe that the time has come for us to look at the presentation of budgets and be clear in the fact that it must clearly define—because it is not every citizen that has a copy of the *Review of the Economy*, it is not every citizen that has all of these things, and it means that having access to it but it being put in a language that is palatable, my hon. Minister, is important.

It is important for us to know that because if we want to educate a society, it means that we must now deal with the society to bring them up to the standards and to the levels of understanding so that they can be very clear that when governments that represent people, not just represent party supporters but represent people as a whole, the citizens would be very clear with regard to what is being done, what has been done, how the finances had been used, what has been achieved and what are the plans for the fiscal year or the year to come and it is important for us to understand that.

I have also been intrigued, Madam President, with regard to themes of budgets. I am a person that when you put a theme to something, “I kind ah brainstorm the theme, I meditate on the theme” and then for the year to come, I try to determine if the theme was true, if it realized, if it is really something that had been really true to its purpose and I sat over the last couple of weeks and I began

looking at themes of past budgets from 1999 until 2017. I found that themes do not make sense to the reality of what is taking place in our society.

In 1999 to 2000, guess what was the theme? It sounds familiar with what we have this time: “A Blueprint for Human Development and Sustainable Growth”. That sounds familiar at this stage in 2017. And then you had themes like “...Leaving No One Behind”. Well, if that was the case, we would not be the way we are today where we still have people living on less than \$1,000 a month. We would not be in this position if no one was left behind. In 2003: “People...Our Priority” and if people were really our priority—and I must commend Minister Khan, because in his deliberations, he was confessing that the PNM may have learnt from their tremendous mistakes before 1986 because he boasted about oil production of 200,000 barrels a day and that kind of situation, but we ended up in 1986 broke. And it meant that a lot of mistakes were made but we learnt from the mistakes that we make and it is important for us to understand that.

As a matter of fact, it was Sen. Daniel Dookie who, in his excitement, spoke about the children’s hospital was not completed so it was not a children’s hospital and the campus in San Fernando was not completed so it was not a campus. But the Government Campus, they boasted about building it; they boasted about building the Brian Lara Stadium; they boasted about building the Scarborough hospital and they were all incomplete. So it is important for us not to go down that kind of road because it kind of falls back in your own garden from time to time.

[*Desk thumping*]

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

Madam President, in—[*Interruption*] Or, Mr. Vice-President, I am sorry, Sir, I did not see the switch. [*Laughter*] Sorry about that, Sir. In 2004 and you are

talking about a budget theme that says about "...Empowering People". Have we ever achieved these things in life? The following year it was "Ensuring Our Future Survival". The following year was a "...Future Prosperity Addressing Basic Needs." The other one is "Moving Onward..."; "Determined to Reach Our Goal" and it goes on and on and on.

Now, last year, was "Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust". If you do a survey in the country, you would realize that that has not been realized in the last year. [*Desk thumping*] So all of these themes do not make sense. As a matter of fact, the theme this year, it sounds like the theme from 1999: "A Blueprint For Transformation and Growth".

Mr. Vice-President, last year's theme has proven one thing: that it was an illusion, it was deceptive. After all of the euphoria of an election, it was bandied about, about restoring confidence and rebuilding trust and it turned out to be "ah kind ah joke" because the only thing happened is that it was clearly visible—and confession is good for the soul—that the Government had no clue or plan for 2015/2016. It is a fact and they keep saying that they did not have time to prepare a budget and they did not have time to do this, it is a fact that they had no plan. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, any individual would know that budgets are not prepared in the month of September. As a matter of fact, preparation for budgets take place right after the mid-year review and Ministries have to continue submitting all of their data and stuff like that, and I know Minister Khan would want to respond but I understand.

Sen. Khan: That is the point I made why we had to use the same mould that was already prepared.

Sen. R. Samuel: I understand your problem, Sir.

Sen. Sturge: “No, yuh hata ask to give way, yuh cyah just—”

Sen. R. Samuel: No, no, he and I are cool. We are cool. And that the theme and the budget for 2015/2016 only showed us clearly, as they keep saying, that it was based upon manifesto promises and really, if it was based upon the manifesto promise and the manifesto is so vague, you could understand why 2015/2016 was a kind of misnomer. It was nothing to realize and we expected nothing to come out of it. [*Desk thumping*] It is a fact.

Mr. Vice-President, the purpose of a budget—and I am asking questions—is supposed to be that the budget must meet a certain legal requirement, that the budget must establish spending and income raising, that the budget must establish a work programme for the fiscal year, its objectives, and presented to the Parliament and in so doing, presented to the public. But the budget must manage and control resources and their use; that the budget must assure the proper mix of costs and services, and it must link dollar with results. Thus far, Mr. Vice-President, the budget that we have before us did not give us a clear idea as to how the Government of the 2015/2016 era spent the people’s money in Trinidad and Tobago. What was clearly achieved? It was not a definite idea that this is what we promised, this what we have achieved, why we did not achieve such and such and as such, we are doing so and so. That was not in the budget and because it was not in the budget, that is left in the air. It is left in the air and it should not be left in the air.

As a matter of fact, in discussions with many people concerning budgeting and the budget and stuff like that, that, you know, over the years, Mr. Vice-President, governments, from inception, never clearly defined how moneys were spent and we have found ourselves in this period of life with a different—a

mindset of a society, a young generation that is demanding information. We are in an info-type situation now and they are asking, well, what is being done? What have you done? Let us get a detailed account as to how you spent the money, what you achieved, why you did not achieve, why you did not achieve it, and as such tell us, how you plan to do what you are planning to do now. That is not happening. And though we change and rearrange, everything seems to remain the same and it is important for us to understand that.

And the Parliament must now take the decision to now ensure that budgets are presented in a certain way. We have to revisit how budgets are presented because the citizen needs to be educated and the citizen needs to be clear, because elections are “euphorious” and they are not won based on facts, they are won based on propaganda and that is what this nation is known for. The masters of propaganda are the people who rule this country for more years than anybody else. They are the masters of it. [*Desk thumping*]

So the idea is that we must educate people so that people can make informed decisions and they can make sure that the information that is coming, when it is coming from Ministers of Finance and they are coming across, it is clear and precise and that the people are educated and they know what is taking place in the country and what the Government is doing. It must not be old talk.

6.30 p.m.

The Parliament needs to make the difference. The Parliament needs to make the change, and I am putting it on record that the Parliament must also instruct budgets to be done in a certain way, and make sure it reports as to how it spent the money, and where the shortfalls are and where they failed, and where the promises were not—and then they must come and determine how we are going to get there. I

am putting it on record. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, so the theme of this budget is “*Shaping a Brighter Future – A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth*”, but Webster says, that a blueprint is a detailed plan of how something is done; detailed. I looked at this particular budget there are no—it is not clear, there are no details about anything, quite a number of things are vague in the budget. [*Interruption*] I went through all those things, you know. Let me tell you something—but this is what the public hears, are you hearing me? I am dealing with the public’s education, because the Parliament is a representative of the public, and if the Parliament does not make sense, then what we have in a society is chaos, that is where I am going, Minister Khan, okay?

So this is what the people hear. This is what you stand for three hours and present. A blueprint, that means the citizens believe I can take this blueprint as you present it, and I can learn as to what you have done, where you are, how you plan to do it, where your shortfalls are and how you intend to overcome it; clearly defined. So this is not to the public detailed, the average citizen cannot follow it. It is important for us to understand, because the average citizen—if it is a detailed plan, and we have budgeted for crime and we have budgeted for agriculture and food security, what is the detailed plan for crime? What is the detailed plan for food security? If it is supposed to be a detailed plan—and this is not—because there are no detailed plans about crime in the budget presentation. There are no details about food security. It is just about money to be invested, but there are no details that would say to this society, this is what is planned and this is how we intend to execute it, and this is what it will cost, because a budget is a detailed plan

So what you budgeted for national security? What is the detailed plan? How

is the country educated as to how they are going to approach the security of a society? [*Desk thumping*] You know what they will tell you? That is a national security issue. How? How am I to sit home after a budget and feel safe that these people have a detailed plan, and we are spending so much billion dollars on this plan, and that I am looking forward to this plan working? The budget is an illusion. The budget presentation is an illusion. It is an illusion to a nation that just deals with figures but no facts. That is an illusion. So we feel that people feel safe because we are spending more money. That is an illusion. There are no performances, no results, no statistics, no data. As a matter of fact, what we have found is that crime detection is at its lowest. So when you think about what is the detailed plan? None!

The Minister of National Security would always stand and say, you know, “We are duh, duh, duh”. We have all kinds of plans. “We all this.” We are looking into this, and people are being slaughtered on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the detailed plan. How can I say to my children, this is what the Government is doing, because I need to educate my children. The Government is doing such and such and plan, and duh, duh, duh, duh. We have achieved such, and such, nothing, but national security has the largest budget—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Ramdeen: And crime is the worse.

Sen. R. Samuel:—and crime is the worse. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, Mr. Vice-President, I was comparing Trinidad and Tobago with a population of 1.3 million people, with New York City of eight million-and-something people. The last check I had, they had 419 murders in New York City; eight million people. In Chicago, 2.7 million people, I think it is about that or three million people, they had 500 murders. We are one point two, one point three, and we are competing.

What is the difference? Are we getting value for money? Because all the plans are hidden, and Sen. Chote talked about we have been through Operation Anaconda, operation this, operation that and those are nice fancy terms, but you know something, at the end of the day, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago feel no safer. [Desk thumping] and if we continue how we are going, Mr. Vice-President, 2017 will elapse and we will feel worse, why? Because the citizens “doh realize”, they feel this Government has no plan whatsoever, there is nothing detailed. We have a national security council that sits, but the citizens are none the wiser of any plan, because they say it is a national security problem. I mean, come on.

Then we talk about food security, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Mr. Vice-President, I have been looking at the *Review of the Economy*, I did not print this, but in the last year production and everything seems to have collapsed. It means that the Government has shut down the country. Let me just read a little bit from the *Review of the Economy*, page No. 27, if I have your permission. Agriculture, I mean food security, is important. I remember being in Cuba and Cuba has this thing where they have so many provinces, and the provinces know, the population knows, and what is the consumption rate, and how much food is needed to sustain their province, and they are now channelling their farmers to produce a certain quantity, certain likes, so that they can feed their nation, in case of real hard times, they can feed their people; not in Trinidad. Listen to what happens:

“A contract of 6.0 percent is forecasted for the Agriculture sector in calendar 2016...”

Listen, here it goes again:

“...which is a downturn...”

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I thought I heard something different before:

“...which is a downturn from the 1.2 expansion achieved during calendar 2015.”

So, before when “dey say was ah corrupt Government doin’ nutting, wastin’ de money”, agriculture expanded by 1.2. [*Desk thumping*] But now we have “ah good Government” who has it all and knows it, and seems to be doing it right, agriculture has contracted. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, listen to this carefully:

“Domestic Agriculture which is estimated to decline by 9.3 per cent in 2016, its worst performance since 2010.” [*Desk thumping*]

Its worse performance in the last year. I am bemused by this, you know.

“A contraction is also projected in Distilleries, the second largest agricultural sub-sector, with the real value-added of this sub-sector falling by 4.2 percent...”

“In ah year, yuh shut it dong”. Mr. Vice-President, let me just go a little further.

Let us go a little further:

“Domestic Agriculture
 Root Crops

In contrast, dasheen production declined by 32.8 percent...”

This is not oil and gas. This is dasheen production, [*Desk thumping and laughter*] declined. “We cyar even geh dasheen”, [*Laughter*] declined by 32.8 per cent.

Rice production—“declined by 41.0 percent...”

Vegetables

During the first five months of fiscal 2016...the production performances of vegetable crops were uneven, when compared to one year earlier.”

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Let me continue reading, this is the *Review of the Economy*. [*Continuous interruption*] “We go talk 'bout forecast just now”.

“Pineapple”

This is not oil and gas, Sen. Small. [*Crosstalk*] “Doh confuse with de oil and gas” and world situations, and “we not in control” of all that happens in the world, “an all dese kinda high language and we are jus ah small, a lil dot in de midst” of all these massive oil people, and what decisions they make affect us. This is people in Trinidad and Tobago planting food to try to feed—dasheen. [*Continuous crosstalk and desk thumping*] This is what it is.

“Pineapple production fell, 12.9 percent...

Paw Paw production decreased by 36.8 per cent...”

It means that if we have to supply to a society to sustain, to have food security, it means that when things fall, they have to be supplemented somehow—
 [*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Or starve.

Sen. R. Samuel:—or people starve. It is important for us to see this. The Minister and I, we have had much discussion because I personally feel that—and I said to him that “I disagree with the budget allocations for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries”, why? Because we are so down in a hole that we need to do some serious stuff to get up even to level it off; real level it off, because everything here so far is on the “decline”. This is Government that knows it all. This is a Government who has all the answers. They have learned from the 1980s, the oil booms. They have learned from 2007 periods of declining—said all kinds of stuff, and now, in one year, and I am emphasizing, “in one year”,

Mr. Vice-President:

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“Paw Paw has decreased by 36.8 percent...

Livestock...

The latest available CSO data indicates that there was a 1.8 percent decrease in broiler...”

“Ting seem to just”—

Meat production:

“During the first quarter of 2016...”

Everything seems to be just happening, the moment—there is a decrease in the nation, the moment September 7th hit and PNM got in power. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mutton declined, dairy and beef, the first quarter of fiscal 2016 production decreased by 9 per cent.

“Pigs” [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President, [*Laughter and crosstalk*] I mean, we laugh at this, but this is serious business. [*Laughter and interruption*]

“Approximately 29,938 live pigs were sold during the first quarter of 2016, 12.1 percent below...”—the previous year. [*Interruption*]

It is so strange and [*Continuous interruption*] I question the allocations and the plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land of Fisheries. I question it. Not only that, but the Minister in his budget presentation talks about expansion of the cocoa industry and the coconut industry. He says:

The coconut industry with emphasis on production, 900 acres on the east coast are now being repurposed through our coconut rehabilitation and replanting programme.

I fortunately live in the east, and I had to check on these things. “It aint much goin’

on”, you know—[*Interruption*] because I could tell—I mean, the Minister will know why, but I have to say, you know, that is not—this does not represent the facts and the reality. It does not represent the reality. The reality is “dat dey in trouble. “dat dey are struggling”. [*Desk thumping*] The reality is that the 900 acres are not being repurposed, okay?

6.45 p.m.

I am being honest with you. This is not to pick any punches with nothing. The fact is that when I feel that you bring a budget, I must be able to question what you say. That is my job to question it. My job is to figure out, if you said this is happening, let me go and check to see if it is really happening. Am I right? [*Crosstalk*] It is to check and see what is happening. I am glad about the cocoa situation. I remember when the NAR was in power, and they started to revitalize all those estates, cocoa estates and thing, when they lost the election, all the estates shut down. I am glad that this is being done.

So, Mr. Vice-President, it is very strange that we confuse the society with all of this nice rhetoric and we talk high and we do stuff, but if people are to start to check on what is going on and take note of it, they will realize that a lot of budgets is a lot of talk and no action. No action. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President, on page 11 of the budget speech, the Minister of Finance says:

As to the expenditure carry-over from 2015, this honourable House may recall that the payments for back pay arising from the public sector wage agreements covering the period 2011—2013 were earmarked to be completed in fiscal 2015.

He talked about how much money they have to pay with negotiations. In 2010 it

happened. Every Government finds themselves in situations where they have to pay what other Governments have done. [*Desk thumping*] Every Government! So this is nothing strange. But we come and we elaborate and we carry on—I am going through the budget, you know. I am going through it almost page by page because, Mr. Vice-President, it is an illusion. [*Desk thumping*] The purpose is to illude, to be deceptive, to make it appear to be what it is not. [*Desk thumping*] It is an illusion. It is an illusion.

Mr. Vice-President, I remember when—this is page number 40 now—the Minister was talking about the situation with the layoffs at ArcelorMittal and other private sectors and stuff like that. I decided I am going to investigate what took place then, and then try to figure out what was promised to those workers, the 600-and-something workers, plus the others that were retrenched and stuff like that. I remember the Minister of Labour and—I cannot remember the other part of it—but Sen. The Hon Jennifer Baptiste-Primus had promised in the media that she was going to bring legislation to the Parliament before the end of this year—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Something your colleague did not do—

Sen. R. Samuel: Let me finish—that she will bring legislation to the Parliament. I am holding you to your word. I am not talking about who did not do and whatever before that. Okay? I am dealing with you now—you will bring legislation before the end of this year, so that future situations that happen like with the people at ArcelorMittal will not happen. I am holding the Minister to her word. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Khan, I am holding her to her word—[*Desk thumping*—]—so that future enterprises that shut down like ArcelorMittal where the workers had problems will not have to face the same thing. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Vice-President, could I have your protection here from this hon. Minister?

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Members, please allow the Senator to make his contribution. As much as you may want to respond to what he is saying, I am sure you will have an opportunity to do so but, in the meantime, allow the crosstalk to tone down. As much as it is coming from this bench, it is also coming from the Opposition Bench in terms of support for your colleague. It is getting a little loud as well. So let us take it down and allow the Senator to finish his contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

Sen. R. Samuel: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I thank you for your safeguard, Sir, and your protection. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Vice-President, so really, when we look at the budget presentation to the society, what they have heard, it is really scary because really there is nothing that this nation has received to stand upon.

There are tenders that have already gone out. They were invited for the Wallerfield to Manzanilla Highway. There were—[*Crosstalk*]—I want to find out what is the cost. Nothing has been presented. Not only that, what is the procurement procedure? [*Crosstalk*] It was not proclaimed. So, I want to find out what procurement procedure is being used to deal with the tender for the Wallerfield to Manzanilla Highway. [*Desk thumping*] It is important for us to understand that.

And then on that same page, I heard the Minister say that when it comes to the Point Fortin Highway project, OAS contract has been terminated so far and NIDCO, under new management and direction, has already recovered \$670 million. Mr. Vice-President, there is something known as performance bonds [*Desk thumping*] in any kind of contractual arrangement, and that if these people do not perform they pay. That is what they collected. [*Desk thumping*]

That is part of the contract. But, you know, we make, again, it is an illusion.

It is deception. It is what they are good for. Why? Because they would not say, you know, every contract has performance bonds, and if the contractor reneges that they must pay. They would not say that and, as a result of the performance bonds, OAS has to now repay. They will not say that. Do you know what they say? Oh, under new management, in other words, the past management was corrupt and under new management, under the PNM, we collected \$607 million. But, do you know something? The performance bonds are part of the thing. That is part of the thing. Who put it there? [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, this is no joke, you know. This is no joke, because let me tell you something: I do not have to bad-talk your mechanic for you to bring your car by me. I have to prove myself. If I only could bad-talk your mechanic and say, “the man eh no good”, in order for you to bring your car by me, I am a fool. Sorry to say that. I will have to be like that because it means that is all I could do—I have not proven my words, all I could do is try to gain ground on talking you bad.

Mr. Vice-President: You have five more minutes, Senator.

Sen. R. Samuel: I have a lot of time, a lot of time. Mr. Vice-President, then we come to page 55, because the Government keeps borrowing. I am kind of concerned in a society where they say that the unemployment rate is low, yet people are living below a thousand dollars. It is high. I cannot balance that at all. That is kind of strange that unemployment is low, but people living below a thousand dollars is high, and that says a great deal. I do not know what is going on with the economics.

I remember that, Mr. Vice-President, the Government decided that they will compete with the banks, and people said “wha” because the banks are not giving us interest and stuff like that. The Government decides we are going to introduce

Government Bonds. But what they did not tell the nation is that the Government Bonds is the Government borrowing from the society at an interest to get more money to spend. They did not say that to the nation, you know. They did not say that this is a liability, this is an expense. This sends up your borrowing level limits. This takes you to a different level of your debt because if you are going to sell bonds, Government Bonds, it means you are borrowing from the same people you are pressuring.

You are borrowing from the same people who are paying more tax, more VAT, they are paying VAT on more things, on the pump, is on everything. That is what the Government plans to do. They were borrowing US at 4.5 per cent, but they want to give poor Trinidadians 3 per cent. It is an illusion. [*Desk thumping*] They want to give citizens 3 per cent, but they talk about when they were borrowing at 4.5 it was oversubscribed. I remember “oversubscribed” but now they want to give you 3 per cent over a three-year cycle. [*Desk thumping*] I am watching all of that. I am watching it. I am watching it.

Mr. Vice-President, you see, you have to clear up yourself, you know. You must clear up yourself when you speak. You see, I am saying that all the time. They must clear themselves to the citizens when they speak. Sen. Khan, you understand what I am saying. They must clear themselves when they speak or else the citizens are none the wiser. I am bringing it up. I have about a minute again.

Mr. Vice-President, so at the end of the day, we find ourselves in a dilemma. So many things are collapsing. The services aspect of GDP is collapsing. If you look at the *Review of the Economy* even services are down. Everything seems to be down in the last year. It meant that the Government of the day has not lifted us up. What they have done, they have caused everything to be on a decline, to be on a

decrease—less people buying cement, less people manufacturing stuff.

If we do not look at the cause—and the cause is within the last year, you know, because every time they compare it to the previous period, the previous year it was not so. There is a serious decline and decrease from the previous year. They need to look at themselves. They need to stop all the nonsense, and all the old talk about who was there and who build and who did not build. They need to start to get down and decide, here what is going on. We cannot afford for all these things to be on the decline and on the decrease. Let us begin to work and put the kinds of policies and programmes in place to build it back up so that we can secure Trinidad and Tobago, first of all, internally and then we can expand it externally.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to thank you. I wish I had 10 hours because there is so much in here that I need to criticize, but God bless you. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Michael Coppin: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to contribute to this national conversation. Before I commence, I feel obliged to give thanks to Almighty God, the most merciful, the most magnificent, for without him we cannot live and without him we cannot die.

I believe it was Tom Stoppard, the British playwright, who in one of his plays speaks about mankind being passengers on a boat, being able to move very small measures, but being moved along inexorably like the wind and current into one direction. Mr. Vice-President, a fatalistic, existential quagmire. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President, I would not be deterred this afternoon by the hon. Sen. Sturge. I have gotten to know him in the last year, and I think at times he gets carried away with the excitement in this Chamber, but today is a day for serious debate. Today is a day for Trinidad and Tobago to reflect on the expenditure,

revenues, the last year and to come up with some solutions as to how we can, in the next five years, project a course that the future generations will be grounded and there will be intergenerational fairness.

7.00 p.m.

I want to comment on a number of things that Sen. Samuel would have said, very briefly. I am no expert in agriculture, but I have here the statistics for 2013, 2012 for the agricultural sector. In 2012 real GDP growth in agriculture declined by a whopping 12.6 per cent, but Sen. Samuel would not speak of that. He has selective amnesia. In 2013 the real GDP growth in agriculture declined by 5.8 per cent, but he would not speak of that. In the five years of the UNC, the real GDP in agriculture was next to nothing. In fact, three out of five years were characterized by negative growth. So he ought not to come—I think it is quite disingenuous of him to come to this honourable House and to selectively pull statistics out of a hat, and then when time to respond he runs away. I hope he is upstairs listening and being educated, because this is serious business.

Mr. Vice-President, I want also to look very briefly—because I know the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development will deal with him adequately on Monday—yes, there will be wetting after wetting after wetting I am sure. He spoke about the purported failure of the Government to pass employment rights legislation within one year. Now, Mr. Vice-President, if we remember, under the UNC Administration—they had five years—I think they appointed a national advisory committee in 2012, and in 2013 it came up with a series of recommendations, a very comprehensive report: 25 recommendations, and I have a copy here, just incidentally. It recommended a wholesale paradigm shift in the way we look at employment rights in Trinidad and Tobago. It made recommendation

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for the amendment of the Industrial Relations Act, an Act which we know was passed in 1980. It made certain recommendations also for the amendment to the definition of “worker”. It made certain recommendations for the amendment of the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act; it made several recommendations. And what did the United National Congress do? They did absolutely nothing about it.

So how could he come to this honourable House and selectively pick out statistics and ignore the fact that the United National Congress had all this time to do and did nothing. They are the anti-working party in this country.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: I shall bring him into an enlightened state.

Sen. W.M. Coppin: Yes, bring him. What did the PNM do in terms of industrial relations in this country? One of the first things they did, I think in March 2016, was to appoint a National Tripartite Advisory Council. I do not think we ever had that in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] where we had private sector, labour and Government sitting together and thinking for the first time how we can together think about solutions to reform industrial relations in this country. We have never had that.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

I do not want to dwell too much on the ramblings of Sen. Samuel, because I know Sen. Avinash Singh and Sen. Baptise-Primus will have ample time to deal with that. I want to return to the substance of my contribution. I really would like to focus on the budget. To speak on a budget is never easy. I would like to borrow some economic theory from my days in college. There is a theorem by the name of the Impossibility Theorem, Arrow’s Impossibility Theorem, which speaks about as a society becomes more diverse, taste becomes more sophisticated, society becomes more developed, that it is almost impossible for a society to agree on one

allocation of resources which is equitable and fair. It is called the Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, and it is a theory that led to Kenneth Arrow winning the Nobel Prize. What it essentially says is that you cannot please everyone—you just cannot please everyone.

Madam President, as we have seen in this budget debate, persons have been saying that the budget is too high, some say it is too low, and I think someone said whenever you hear that amount of confusion, you know perhaps that you have gotten it right. I think when I have punched the numbers, that Trinidad and Tobago, in the state that we are in, the budget is a remarkable one. The Minister of Finance must be commended for what he has done for Trinidad and Tobago. We do not know now, but future generations will look back at this as a defining moment, when Trinidad and Tobago was at its lowest and a man by the name of Colm Imbert stood up like a true champion and put Trinidad and Tobago on the path to progress.

I want to speak about what I have noticed from a macroeconomic perspective. Now the macroeconomy is very important, because it reflects the totality of an economy, and I will get further down into the micro economy. What I have noticed in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs—but before I get to that, what I have noticed is that there is no explanation—there is no plausible explanation to me—why a past government in five years have spent a record quantity of money at a time when oil prices were rising from a low in 2009, with average oil prices at \$90 WTI, and gas prices at US \$3.5 MMBtu, and we had record government productivity—so they say, that is the figure in terms of real GDP growth, of government expenditure, and yet the past UNC Government only recorded two years of economic growth. It is mind-boggling; I cannot understand

it. I have asked economists to explain it, we have looked and we have dissected the economy, but yet something seems to have gone awry.

We had record levels of spending, \$62 million, \$57 million, \$61 million, but yet we only had two periods of economic growth, and that was in 2014. Well, three periods, 2014, decline, 0.6.; 2015, decline, 0.6. In 2012 and 2013, very, very little growth, despite large sums of money being expended from the national Treasury. And why that is? No one knows. A number of theories have been proffered, and it is one of the theories that I really want to explore.

No one in this country, as far as I am aware, has looked at what the cost of corruption is to the national development of this country. No one has said it, but I have seen a lot of Senators here today—I think Sen. Richards spoke about it. Sen. Shrikissoon, I do not know if you spoke about corruption; did you?

Sen. Shrikissoon: No.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: But for a number of Senators it was a recurring theme, but no one has said it. There was a study, and I would like to quote, done by the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute in 2009, in which contractors in the construction industry were basically asked about bribery and corruption within that sector, whether or not they had been ever approached by any government official for a bribe. Interestingly, Madam President, 52 per cent of the respondents answered yes that they had paid a bribe. The level of that bribe varied, with 27 per cent reporting that they had paid over \$1 million in bribes.

The Trinidad and Tobago Transparency International local chapter has estimated that in Trinidad and Tobago the cost of public procurement to the private contractor increases between 20 to 25 per cent. The OECD has estimated in a 2013 report that on average corruption costs the world economy 5 per cent every year. If

we could get it, the world economy would grow by 5 per cent. So imagine in a country where corruption is the order of the day, where everybody knows that the Government, public officials, the public service is corrupt. What is the true cost of corruption to the national economy of Trinidad and Tobago? That is a question that I would like to pose here today.

I would have liked Sen. Mahabir to be here, because over the tea break I engaged him. I said, “Sen. Mahabir, I have a serious problem. I have been looking at the numbers and for Pete’s sake I just cannot understand how there could be real economic growth in all these sectors, record amounts of money spent by the Government, a government with 38 per cent of the national economy, and yet we cannot get this country stabilized. We cannot get economic growth. Every year we are growing negative. We are spending record amounts of money. Every year, budget after budget, budget deficit, budget deficit.” Sen. Mahabir said, “Nine years of consecutive.” I do not believe he is correct. I think I have seen in 2012 I believe, we had a budget surplus, but we have been—Sen. Shrikissoon is doubting me, but I have the statistics here, at least from the Central Bank. We did not have nine years of persistent budget deficits. There was at least one year of a budget surplus.

In any event, what we have been doing is called countercyclical policy, and what we should be seeing is a stabilization of the economy, but that has not been happening. That is something that should be worrying to Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to turn to the Office of the Attorney General. Much has been said about the level of expenditure on fees to outside counsel; a lot has been said. In the last session we also had the Finance and Legal Committee brought the Office of the DPP here. We sent out several requests for information, and we found several disturbing things in the national state apparatus.

Now, Madam President, I would like to do a comparison of personnel expenditure from 2010 to 2015, and compare it with the level of fees spent on outside counsel. What I have found is very, very startling. We spent in 2010, \$36.3 million on fees to attorneys; however, we spent \$40 million on outside counsel, that is in 2010. In 2011, we spent \$62.2 million on fees to attorneys—that is outside counsel—but remuneration to staff at the Attorney General was \$44 million; again, a disparity. We are spending more on outside counsel than we do for the Attorney General staff. That figure includes NIS and all other forms of remuneration that is not current wages.

In 2012, the fees rose to a whopping \$104 million, whereas personnel expenditure to the staff of the Attorney General was stagnant at a bare \$44.6 million. In 2013, the former administration spent \$103 million on fees again, where the staff of the Attorney General's Office only got \$45.7 million. In 2014, \$206 million on goods and services of which, \$118.5 million was to outside counsel, while the staff only got \$60.6 million. Finally in 2015, under Garvin Nicholas, the outside counsel got \$117 million in fees and \$65 million spent on staff.

7.15 p.m.

So we see there is a serious disparity. For some reason we are favouring outside counsel to the staff of the Attorney General's Office. And that is a serious thing. And I see my learned friend, Sen. Ramdeen, has just walked in and I do not want to dwell too much on Sen. Ramdeen because I am sure the Attorney General—well he dealt with him sufficiently in the Lower House and I know Minister Young will deal with him as well in the wrapping-up.

However, Madam President, the *Hansard* reveals that the said Mr. Ramdeen, Sen. Ramdeen, would have received \$35million or he would have

been invoiced \$35 million. And if I am incorrect, that is the figure that the Attorney General would have quoted and I am sure if he is incorrect your colleagues would take him to the Privileges Committee.

So, what I would like to say, what that relates and if one—attorneys-at-law in Trinidad and Tobago are governed, there are some sort of rules that we live by. There is something—there is a practised direction on cost that was issued by past Chief Justice Satnarine Sharma. Now, if we take at its highest band for local attorneys, advocates, we have \$2,500 per hour that the advocate can make or can earn in this country per hour. Taking it at its highest, Madam President, it would mean that the billable hours, right, the billable hours to rack up in an eight-hour working week—let us assume Sen. Ramdeen was an employee of the State, he would have made 4.5, it would have been 4.5 years of making \$20,000 a day; if you understand that. Imagine going to work for four and a half years and earning \$20,000 a day. I do not know anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago where someone can go to work for four and a half years and claim \$20,000 a day. Madam President, it is startling. As an attorney-at-law I just cannot explain it. I do not know. I think he is going to struggle with that, if it is true. Well, I believe that it is true because he has not taken the Attorney General to the Privileges Committee.

Madam President, it does not stop there. We have two QCs, Mr. Alan Newman and Vincent Nelson submitting a bill of over \$130million of public money for works being done; if we understand what that means. That is like going to work and claiming double—if we assume that they are making senior counsel wages, which I doubt they are because they are coming from England, a

senior counsel wage, he can charge \$3,500 an hour. In England in 2006, it was £2,500. So I do not think these senior counsel, these Queen's Counsels are going to come to Trinidad and charge \$3,500 an hour. But if they are, Madam President, it would mean if they come to Trinidad, \$3,500 an hour at the rate that they are charging they could have been employees for 5.6 years, 5.6 years and be earning a month \$56,000—\$56,000.

And, Madam President, there is really no difference in quality between the senior counsels in Trinidad and Tobago and the Queen's Counsels in the United Kingdom. To believe that, Madam President, is to deny our own self-worth. It is to deny who we are as a people. And you see it in court. I believe that the United National Congress was represented by one of the said Queens's Counsels in the election petition. It did not help them, you know, they lost at the first instance and they lost at the Appeal Court.

So, I do not understand, they—as Fitzgerald Hinds always tells me, eh, as Fitzgerald Hinds always tells me, “the facts of the case [*Crosstalk*] the facts of the case is what really determines whether or not you win or whether you lose. But for some reason we have two senior counsels, Queen's Counsels, coming from the United Kingdom and somehow earning this quantum of money which is inexplicable. It reminds me sometimes of our own United National Congress' failure to adopt the CCJ. I believe that they believe that outside is always better. As somebody who studied in England all my life, somebody who studied in England all my life, I do not think myself superior to anyone who has passed through UWI or anywhere.

Sen. Ramdeen: Thank God.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: I do not think so. But what I can say, Madam President, is that the figures do not lie. What we have here, what we are giving these two gentlemen in the last five years, what they have been invoicing the State is a travesty. It is something that needs to be dealt with and looked at seriously as we proceed because the days of wine and roses are over. Yeah? The days of wine and roses are over. So, Madam President, what I would like to do is to stay on that theme of personnel, how we deal with our staff members in the State apparatus, again, in the Office of the Attorney General.

Now, Madam President, in a different dispensation and as the President of Heliconia Foundation, which is well known, I would have sent a Freedom of Information request to the office of the Attorney General asking certain questions like: number of persons terminated; number of persons not renewed; for the persons who were not renewed, what were the reasons; the persons who were terminated, what were the reasons. I would have asked for the number of persons who were not previously hired; who are employed at the Attorney General's Office; how many new persons were employed; what were the qualifications? Those were the types of questions, because we have too many rumours in this country and no one does anything about it.

So I decided to ask the questions of the Office of the Attorney General to find out whether or not there was any smoke to the fire, Madam President, and what I found was startling. And I have sent the file to the Integrity Commission and I hope, I genuinely hope, that what I have seen that they will see as well. Eighteen persons—I want to get the file—17 persons terminated, in my estimation, without good cause, letters of resignation, upon resignation, upon

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resignation. Who resigns from the Attorney General's Office, Madam President? Thirty-two not renewed without good cause. And when you see the reasons, no good reasons. Two hundred and eleven new persons given jobs in the office of the Attorney General—211 new persons. [*Crosstalk*]

And when I—it is important. You are saying the budget, but I know the United National Congress because they always stalk my Facebook profile. When they get agitated I know I am on the right track, Madam President. When they get agitated, I know that I am on the right track. And I want to say something; 18 of those persons who were hired, there was no qualification, no evidence of qualifications on file; 18 persons, no evidence of qualifications on file. File just picked up itself and run away, Madam President. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Senator: Usual UNC style.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Yeah? Sixteen of those individuals' qualifications— when you ask what was required, and you ask what these persons have?— [*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Call their names “nah”.

Sen. W. M. Coppin:—chalk and cheese. That is all right. I would not call their names, but I have their positions. I will call it: Director of Communications Unit; advisors to the Minister; Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the Law Reform Commission; Communications Specialist; Paralegals; Legal Officer 3; two senior advisors; social policy and planning executive assistant to the communications unit and a personal assistant not qualified for the job. And, Madam President, I have had the unfortunate experience of going to meet the former Attorney General Anand Ramlogan. He might not remember me, but I

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went—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: How unfortunate.

Sen. W. M. Coppin:—it is a rather very unfortunate situation. And when I went there I remember my phones being searched as if I were going into some CIA, you know, department—

Sen. Ameen: The procedures did not exist at that time.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: And, Madam President, what was very strange, strange that stood out to me, Madam President, is that—and they know there was a unit—and you realize that a lot of these individuals here, named here, belonged to the communications unit of the Attorney General's Office. That it is a well-known unit that existed, right, in the Office of the Attorney General. They were employed, as far as I know, they were employed to do certain covert operations, to go on to Facebook and to just run rampant on the People's National Movement while they were in Government.

And you would realize and it is not surprising to me that all of these people, a lot of these people were in the communications unit, and I hope that the Integrity Commission really is taking notice of the files that I have sent to them because I will not let this matter rest. [*Crosstalk*] I will not let this matter rest. Right? I will not let this matter rest. And I am not intimidated, Madam President, by the rambling of the new Senator. [*Desk thumping*] I am not intimidated one bit because I am a patriot. I will act in the interest not necessarily of the People's National Movement, or the United National Congress, I will act in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, on that point, I want to turn to the case flow management which is a

subject dear to my heart. We had a couple joint select committee reports that are due. We have one due and we had several enquiries on the case flow management.

Madam President: Sen. Coppin, you remember the point that I made yesterday. If you have a joint select committee and a report has not been laid and submitted, be very careful about what you are making reference to. If they are public meetings and things came out in the public meetings, fine. If they are in camera meetings—no. Okay?

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Well, Madam President, I am very well aware of that, you know, Madam President. So there were certain utterances which were ventilated in the media, for instance, by the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, where he would have spoken about the human resources shortages and a lot of shortages in—in fact, he said they did not even have the ability at times to buy photocopying paper, and that was well reported in the *Trinidad Guardian* and in a number of dailies. So, Madam President, I am very careful not to tread or to offend that rule.

In any event, Madam President, what I want to point to is the fact that the Development Programme from 2010 to 2015 which effectively is a statement of the capital expenditure of the last Government. And I want to quote some figures because when I quote these figures you would realize that our priorities in the last five years have been truly and utterly wrong.

In 2010, \$6million, roughly, spent on capital expenditure. This is the Development Programme, eh? In 2011, only \$206,000. Imagine, \$206,000 in an entire year for the Development Programme in the Office of Attorney General;

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2012, \$2,933,721, Office of the Attorney General, again; 2013, \$5.6 million. Right? 2015, actual expenditure, all these are actual expenditure, \$3.4 million. Could you imagine that you have a total bill, capital expenditure in the Development Programme of \$26 million? Could you imagine spending \$26 million when attorneys-at-law are claiming \$32 million?—the Ministry \$26 million in capital expenditure.

And you know, the Development Programme of the Ministry of the Attorney General what it is supposed to do? It services things like Magistrates' Courts or ACIB building; Office of the DPP; right?—all these capital expenditures. How could an attorney or attorneys-at-law—Mr. Ackbar Ali, apparently he is Guyanese, claiming \$35 million more than the development project; our own Senator, Sen. Ramdeen—\$32 million which is about \$9 million more than the development, the entire Development Programme in five years. Madam President, it is amazing. It is truly, truly amazing.

But what we have seen is that the PNM Government, on assuming Government, has immediately spent \$35million, this is the Revised Estimate on capital expenditure, more than the UNC did in five years. I think that needs to be applauded. The Minister, the Attorney General, they have realized what has been going on and they have moved very swiftly to address an imbalance that was created by the past administration. And again, the estimates for 2017, it is estimated to be spent \$23million which is, again, almost equivalent to what the UNC spent in its entire five years in Government.

7.30 p.m.

If one understands the importance of capital expenditure one would know

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that spending \$26 million is nothing, when we consider the fact that the only reason, one of the primary reasons, why there was no increase in the levels of staff in the Office of the DPP when it was recommended in 2013 that the complement of staff be increased, was simply because there was nowhere to put these individuals. There was nowhere to put extra staff, but yet the United National Congress took no action. So, immediately on assuming office the Attorney General and the Minister of State in the Ministry of the Attorney General, hon. Stuart Young, they have moved swiftly to address that. And I am informed that a lot of upgrades have been going on to the Office of the DPP, and that in itself is what is needed in order for us to address the imbalance.

Madam President, some of the statistics are really, really frightening. When we look at the type of vacancies that we actually have in the Office of the DPP, I am informed that we have, the DPP's office is understaffed so much so that the ratio of prosecutors to cases in the High Court is increasing every year; one prosecutor to 66 cases in the first quarter of 2010; one prosecutor to 78 cases in 2012; and it has increased to one prosecutor to 150 cases in 2016. So, we are understaffed, because we know they are understaffed in the Office of the DPP and they are underpaid, because we are paying more for fees to outside counsel. You see the type of problems that we have having in the Office of the DPP. It has to be solved. And that is on the criminal side.

On the civil side—I am a civil attorney, so I deal with the Solicitor General's Office all the time. Every time you write a pre-action protocol letter to the Office of the Attorney General, I can be assured that they will ask me for an extension of time. When I file a claim against the Office of the Attorney General I can bet—well, I do not have a house—my car that they will ask me for an extension of time,

and then the nine out of 10 times they are going to probably serve me with a frivolous or vexatious application that has not merit in law.

So, these attorneys-at-law there, they are understaffed, they are underpaid, and they are undertrained. So, it brought a joy to my heart when I read the *Hansard* of the Attorney General in the other place, it brought a joy to my heart, and it confirmed certain reactions that attorneys in the Office of the Attorney General in this new dispensation have been coming to me with, they are overjoyed. Madam President, if you see their faces, some of them before in 2010 to 2015 when I saw them I used to feel sorry for them. They were melancholy, but now their cheeks are rosy, red. They are being trained. They are being trained, and I see in FIDIC, and if you know about the construction industry and the yellow book, red book, it is important for attorneys to be trained, to be given the requisite training.

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

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Madam President, there have been no massive layoffs in contrast to what we have seen in the time of the Anand Ramlogan and Garvin Nicholas debacle, there have been no massive layoffs in the Office of the Attorney General, and it is there for everyone to see. Fees have decreased in the last financial year to \$30 million, could you believe that? That is less than the 2010 levels. And this year it is estimated that fees will be only \$70 million, that is less than the 2011 levels; and personnel expenditure has been increasing. That is expenditure on the staff. So, we are starting over, this administration, and we are bringing efficiency to the system, we are bringing efficiency and parity to the system.

So, Madam President, there is not much more to say—there is so much more I wanted to say, for instance, on the legislation for the civil registry which will

have the beneficial ownership of persons, that is a concept that has been borrowed from the United Kingdom with the four MLD directives that were passed, the United Kingdom is doing it as well, having foreign companies that are going to be contracting with the State, being it mandatory for them to show who their beneficial owners are, and that is something that is going to truly benefit us in Trinidad and Tobago where there is—everyone knows that someone is stealing, but no one really knows, and there is going to be confiscation legislation, I hear the Attorney General has been touting, that is also going to be a welcome piece of legislation.

So, Madam President, I would like to thank you for the opportunity for contributing in this debate, and I hope that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart is acceptable in the sight of The Almighty. I thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Monday, October 24, 2016 at 10.30 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.35 p.m.