

SENATE*Monday, January 21, 2019*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Sophia Chote SC who is ill.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from Her Excellency the President, Paula-Mae Weekes, ORTT:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency PAULA-MAE WEEKES,
O.R.T.T., President of the Republic of
Trinidad and Tobago and Commander-in-
Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/ Paula-Mae Weekes

President.

TO: MR. JOSH O.W. DRAYTON

WHEREAS Senator Sophia Chote SC is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of illness:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, PAULA-MAE WEEKES, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(b) and section 44(4)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, JOSH O.W. DRAYTON, to be temporarily

UNREVISED

Senator's Appointment (cont'd)

2019.01.21

a member of the Senate with effect from 21st January, 2019 and continuing during the absence of Senator Sophia Chote SC, by reason of illness.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 21st day of January, 2019.”

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Josh Drayton took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)

(FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2019

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017 and varied by the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2018, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage of the Bill be taken later in the proceedings. [*Hon. A. West*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Report of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund for the year 2018.
[*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West)*]
2. Telecommunications (Universal Service) (Amendment) Regulations, 2019.
[*The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan)*]

UNREVISED

3. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee, Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards for the financial years 2009 to 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
4. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Education to the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration, Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament on an Inquiry into Mental Health and Wellness Services and Facilities in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Public Administration and Appropriations

Ministry of Tourism

(Presentation)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. I have the honour to lay on the Table the following report as listed on the Supplemental Order Paper in my name:

The Fifteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament on an examination of the expenditure and internal controls of the Ministry of Tourism.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Sale of T&T Birth Certificates

(Measures to Address)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the Attorney General: In light of reports that T&T Birth Certificates are being sold to non-nationals, can the Attorney General state what is being done to address this issue?

Urgent Questions (cont'd)

2019.01.21

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the allegation contained in a newspaper article over this weekend that birth certificates are being sold to non-nationals has not yet been proven. On the receipt of the allegations the Registrar General initiated an internal investigation. The findings were reported to the Permanent Secretary and reported to the Fraud Squad of the TTPS for further investigation.

To date, the investigation in this matter is ongoing and the process of gathering further evidence is, of course, continuing simultaneously. A formal request has also been sent to the Ministry of National Security for the assistance of the Computer Security Incident team so that we could work in tandem. I should say, as well, that the Registrar General is also in discussions with the IT service provider for that particular registry and that IT service provider is looking at the electronic and digital footprints in relation to this process. But I wish to underscore that these allegations have not been proven. There is a process of investigation which is ongoing and, indeed, upon having whistle-blower information that there may have been a consequence, we took all necessary steps as has been addressed so far.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, having regard to the fact that the police has been brought into this matter, can the hon. Attorney General indicate whether any individual, or individuals, working at the Registrar General's Department have been asked to assist the police in their investigation thus far?

Madam President: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, Madam President. I can confirm that the ongoing investigation by the TTPS does involve their own enquiries of persons who were attached to the Registrar General's Department.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, can the hon. Attorney General indicate whether those individuals who are attached to the Registrar General's Department, have they been reassigned, removed from that specific sensitive area? Or are they still located in that particular area where birth certificates can be altered?

Madam President: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: First of all, let me say this. The alteration of birth certificates is not an issue in this matter. No birth certificates have been altered as our extensive investigation has demonstrated. It is, in fact, the applicants for birth certificates, the person who applies for it that is in issue. And to answer the hon. Senator's question, the persons attached in terms of the allegations standing against them are in the course of a disciplinary exercise as we speak, and as is standard protocol, they have been moved away from the situation so that there can be no compromise to an investigation.

Altered T&T Birth Certificates

(Retrieval of)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the Attorney General: Given reports that approximately 147 T&T birth certificates have been illegally altered during the period May 2016 to November 15, 2018, can the Attorney General indicate what steps are being taken to retrieve these birth certificates?

Madam President: Attorney General.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam President. Again, I just wish to underscore that we have done extensive audits into the civil registry database to determine whether birth certificates had, in fact, been illegally altered. The results of the audits reveal that applicant details have been altered, not actual birth record information. There is a significant difference between the two.

The alteration of a birth certificate would lead to serious consequences, but no birth certificate has, in fact, been shown to be altered in the investigations that we have looked at so far. We have, however, determined that there was an attempt to alter applicant details, that is, the person who applies for a birth certificate, and that matter, as we have demonstrated, has been referred to the relevant authorities.

With respect to the retrieval of the birth certificates at the centre, all information in respect of applicants have been submitted to the TTPS and Fraud Squad unit for investigation and retrieval of birth certificates. So each of the issues that we have discovered, having been referred to the TTPS and Fraud Squad, the request is for retrieval of such certificates that would have been delivered to applicants who applied for them, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, in light of the grave nature of this development, can the hon. Attorney General advise this Senate what steps have been taken to put in place systems to avoid any tampering of applicant details, as he has indicated, in the future? What steps have been taken?

Madam President: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I would like to say that it is important to observe in this scenario that it was the Registrar General as a subset of the Attorney General's Office that did the reporting. This was not something which was sprung upon us and which came upon us other than by way of a whistle-blowing report which came to the RG's attention. As soon as the Registrar General discovered these issues, all of the protocols were put into place, and I wish to publicly compliment the Registrar General for being as diligent as she has been in the conduct of her duties and in reporting this matter.

The software provider, Axiell Group, that does the civil registry, the steps that we have taken include, number one, making sure that they are in licence. As the country will know, under the past government in 2013 the licences were allowed to lapse in other registries that the Registrar General hosts, because there is, of course, the Companies Registry and the Land Registry as well. So we have made sure that the licences are in step by having a robust licensing and service level agreement. We were able to ensure the digital accuracy and the access points. Because once the system is robust enough, you are able to know who had authorized access and what was done. It was in that exercise we were able to confirm that no certificate had been altered. But it was in that exercise also that we were able to say that some people may have abused their access position and we were able to find that circumstance. So we are very pleased in the Attorney General's Office that the Registrar General is on top of this issue. The Fraud Squad is in gear. The computer agencies in the Ministry of National Security are aware and in action as well. And very importantly, from an IT perspective, we are very much in charge with that.

We have gone further to harmonize the other registries, the Land Registry and the Companies Registry, both of which were significantly outdated, but which we have managed by way of public tender and award of contracts to introduce two brand-new systems which are in the course of being worked out, and within 12 months the finalized systems would be in gear. So we are very pleased at the progress we have made. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Hon. Attorney General, can you advise this honourable Senate whether the applicants whose birth certificates may have been tampered with, that is applicant details, have these 147, approximately, we are advised, have these

individuals been contacted to at least alert them to avoid a situation where you can have two certificates being available in the society at the same time? Have these people been contacted?

Madam President: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The TTPS Fraud Squad is in charge of that particular exercise. And I want to state publicly, the author of the article, Ms. Denyse Renne, called me and had, I would estimate, a 30-second conversation with me. There was no presentation of particulars in the depth of that reported, much to my surprise, reported on the front page of the newspaper. But Ms. Renne had a 30-second conversation with me, and had she had a deeper conversation with me, I would, of course, have gone into detail to help her out of the circumstances of her article. Headlines and content are often very far apart in journalists product. And I would recommend that if you are approaching the head of Ministry, if you want to get a substantive response, you have to ask a substantive question. You cannot just simply come with a quick I-have-ticked-the-box approach. I cannot condemn the reporting of any journalist in this country, but suffice it to say, when you are presenting a story of this type, it is essential that we get the facts and you put the correct questions, as the hon. Sen. Mark has done today, to clarify this issue. And I thank the hon. Senator [*Desk thumping*] for asking the questions in the way that he has.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the time for Urgent Questions has expired.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, the Government is pleased to announce that it will be answering all questions, save and except Question 41, in which we seek a two-week deferral.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Wade

Mark:

Police Body Cameras

(Details of)

- 41.** Can the hon. Minister of National Security inform the Senate of the following:
- i. the reason(s) for the non-implementation of Police Body Cameras; and
 - ii. when and how will this technology be rolled out in the TTPS?

Question, by leave, deferred.

State Witness Protection Programme

(Number of Persons Admitted)

- 13. Sen. Gerald Ramdeen** asked the hon. Minister of National Security:
- During the period September 2015 to September 2018 how many persons have been admitted into the State Witness Protection Programme?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, during the period September 2015 to September 2018, a total of 76 persons were admitted to the Trinidad and Tobago Justice Protection Programme.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen?

Sen. Ramdeen: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, through you to the Acting Minister of National Security. Minister, are you aware that the number of 78 persons—sorry, 76 persons being admitted during this period of time,

represents a significant decrease in the number of persons that have entered this programme over the period of years?

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, I will not allow that question.

Sen. Ramdeen: Madam President, through you to the hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, can you state what steps have been taken to make the Justice Protection Programme over the period September 2015 to the period September 2018 more attractive for persons to enter that programme?

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, I will not allow that question. Just have a look at the question that has been posed. Another supplementary or next question? Next question, Sen. Ramdeen.

Police Officers on Suspension

(Details of)

14. Sen. Gerald Ramdeen asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

How many police officers are currently on suspension pending the outcome of the following:

- (i) Criminal Investigations; and
- (ii) Departmental/ Internal disciplinary investigations?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the Commissioner of Police has indicated that the total of 277 police officers are currently on suspension as follows: 269 for criminal investigations; eight for department internal disciplinary investigations.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen?

Sen. Ramdeen: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, to the Acting Minister of National Security. Thank you for that answer, Acting Minister. What steps, Minister, have been taken to speed up the conclusion of this large number of

persons who are under criminal investigation and departmental internal disciplinary investigations?

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, I will not allow that question. Another supplementary?

Sen. Ramdeen: Madam President, through you to the Acting Minister of National Security. Minister, are you aware, as the Acting Minister of National Security, that some of those officers who are on suspension under head: criminal investigation, and departmental internal disciplinary investigation, have been on suspension for as long as 14 years?

Madam President: Acting Minister of National Security?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, these investigations are at different stages based on the nature of the offence being investigated and a number of different factors. So there are several reasons why it would have taken such a long time.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen?

Sen. Ramdeen: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, through you to the Acting Minister of National Security. Minister, are you able at all to tell us how many of those persons who are on suspension are on suspension with pay?

Madam President: Acting Minister of National Security?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, I am not able to give that information at this point in time.

Murder Accused at State Prison

(Number Currently Awaiting Trial)

15. Sen. Gerald Ramdeen asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

How many murder accused at the State Prison are currently awaiting trial having been committed to so stand?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, a total of 758 have been accused of murder and are currently committed to stand trial at the Assizes.

**Missing Keys at Port of Spain Prison
(Unchanged Locks)**

36. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In the aftermath of the events of 2015 whereby the keys at the Port of Spain prison went missing for almost twenty-four hours, can the Minister indicate why the locks at said prison have remained unchanged?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I do not have that question here. I think there may have been an error somewhere. Could you, if you state the question I may be able to answer it.

Madam President: Could someone just pass the Minister a copy of the question, please?

[Copy of question handed to Minister]

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, with respect to this question, I know that there is an ongoing attempt to replace the locks. I know there have been some procurement issues and I know that it is a work in progress right now. Some of the locks have been replaced, as far as I understand it, but I know it is still an ongoing process in respect to procurement and replacing the locks at the prisons.

[Desk thumping]

Madam President: Sen. Mark?

Sen. Mark: Madam President, having regard to the fact that this event took place in 2015, can the Minister provide this House with some of the procurement challenges that the prison authorities may be facing in changing these locks on the prison gates?

Madam President: Minister?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, I know at one time there was an issue with respect to the providers of those locks. As you will recognize, of course, they are not simply locks that you can purchase anywhere with respect to the prison system. There were, in fact, some issues with respect to a provider. I believe by now it should have been overcome, but they are treating with those issues.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein?

Sen. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam President. To the hon. Acting Minister of National Security. The Minister indicated in his answer that some of the locks have already been changed. Can the Minister indicate how many locks have been changed and how many are yet to be changed?

Madam President: Minister?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, I am unable to give that figure right now.

Flooding in Greenvale Housing Development (Relocation of Residents)

42. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

In light of the recent flooding in the Greenvale Housing Development, can the Minister indicate whether consideration is being given to relocating the residents?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation's records state that there is a steady increase in demand for public housing with over 176,000 applicants on the waiting list. In light of this, the Government is looking at other initiatives to provide low-cost public housing by getting the private sector involved, through the private/public partnership on Housing Construction Incentive Programme. At this time, the HDC is not giving consideration to relocating the residents of its Greenvale Housing Development as there is not a sufficient supply of housing units to cater to all 634 residents affected by the recent flood.

Madam President: Sen. Mark?

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, can the Minister indicate whether his Ministry has been approached or was approached by residents of Greenvale and if he can identify a number seeking relocation?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have asked two questions there, so let us go it over. The first is whether anyone approached—is that not it? So could you ask the first limb of the question?

Sen. Mark: Okay. Have any residents approached your Ministry with a view to having themselves relocated?

Madam President: Minister?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, yes, some residents have approached the Ministry requesting relocation, but as was mentioned before, that is not being considered at this point in time.

Madam President: Sen. Mark?

Sen. Mark: Can you advise this honourable House how many residents would have approached the Ministry for this particular arrangement— relocation, that is?

Madam President: Minister?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: I cannot give you a specific number, but several residents have raised the issues. Even in the public meeting that we had after, several of the residents raised the issue of relocation. I cannot give you a specific figure. **Madam President:** Sen. Mark?

Sen. Mark: Madam President, can the Minister indicate in light of the decision of the Government not to relocate residents of Greenvale, can the Minister indicate to this House what measures are being taken to provide the residents with some degree of comfort as it relates to any future untoward development re flooding?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question. Any more?

Sen. Mark: Can the Minister give an undertaking to provide to this Senate how many citizens would have approached the Ministry, that is, for relocation? Would you be prepared to give us an undertaking?

Madam President: Minister?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, several people asked for relocation, and even some of the people who asked for relocation in the initial stage have withdrawn those requests. So there is a mixture of number of people who have asked. And HDC, having done some work in the aftermath of the flood, some people are quite comfortable with the work that has been done by the HDC. As a matter of fact, Madam President, there is, in fact, an initiative right now to do flood mitigation through the Ministry of Works and Transport working together with the HDC, looking at flood mitigation to prevent a re-occurrence of the flooding that took place in Greenvale. So the residents themselves are reconsidering that request for re-allocation.

2.00 p.m.

**Greenvale Housing Development
(Flooding Details of)**

43. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Given the recent flooding at the Greenvale Housing Development, is the Government considering establishing a Commission of Enquiry to determine the following:

- i. the cause of the flooding;
- ii. who should be held responsible for the losses incurred; and
- iii. how can a reoccurrence be prevented?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, consideration has not been given to the establishment of a Commission of Enquiry. However, during the post-Cabinet media briefing, on October 25, 2018, by the hon. Prime Minister, the Ministry of Works and Transport was immediately instructed to conduct a hydrological investigation into the affected areas including south La Horquetta that leads into the Greenvale Housing Development. This will determine why Greenvale was heavily impacted and what physical works can be done to ameliorate the draining system and bring greater comfort to those persons who live in that area. Evaluations have begun and remain ongoing. It is expected that the design of an engineering solution for the draining issue at Greenvale will be finalized by the end of January, early February 2019.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, can the Minister indicate when this hydraulic survey began?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, the hydraulic survey has in fact been completed already and it is being evaluated right now.

Sen. Mark: Would the Minister be willing to share with us elements of that completed hydraulic survey?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, that comes under the Ministry of Works and Transport. I do not have any authority to so pass on that information.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen.

Sen. Ramdeen: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, to the Minister of Housing and Urban Development: Minister, was that type of survey and that type of study not done before the Greenvale project was constructed by the Housing Development Corporation?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: There was a survey that was done prior to the recent flooding in Greenvale and additional survey work was done after the flooding. So it was a combination of those two that was done.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister indicate whether based on internal enquiries by his Ministry, could the Minister indicate whether anyone has been identified or held responsible for the situation that occurred in Greenvale based on your own internal investigations?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question. Do you have anymore?

Sen. Mark: No.

Madam President: Next question, Sen. Deyalsingh.

Petrotrin Workers and Families
(EAP Counselling Services)

86. Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Can the Minister advise whether counselling services will continue to be offered to former Petrotrin workers and their families via the newly formed entities' Employee Assistance Programme, in order to continue to assist these former workers in transitioning?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, PEAPSL Consultancy Limited, which is the Petrotrin Employee Assistance Programme Services Consultancy Limited, continues to provide psychological and financial counselling and advice. These services are currently available to all former Petrotrin permanent and non-permanent employees, and their families, until May 2019. A 24/7 hotline, 474-CARE, has also been established and it is being utilized. To date, approximately 4,000 persons, which includes employees and their families, have sought counselling in some form or fashion.

Madam President: Sen. Obika.

Sen. Obika: Thank you very much, Madam President. Given that some of the persons' resources may run out this year, could the Minister indicate what support will be given after May 2019?

Madam President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Well, counselling obviously cannot be provided open-endedly. So I think May 2019 is quite a distance into the future. People may still have psychological issues coming out of the trauma of losing their jobs, but this is the plan we have in place as we speak.

Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
(Protocols for Members of Parliament)

107. Sen. Saddam Hosein asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Can the Minister advise the Senate as to the policy in place and the protocols effected by the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the arrival and departure of Ministers of Government and other Members of Parliament, at the Piarco International Airport?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago is usually advised in advance by the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs whether Ministers of Government travel in their official capacity. This is sometimes also communicated by personnel from the office of the Minister. In the case of departure from Piarco International Airport, the Minister will normally be accompanied by the protocol officers from the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, who would coordinate with the airlines and staff at the airport Diplomatic Reception Lounge. All checking arrangements are coordinated by the protocol officers of the Ministry in accordance with the DRL until departure. When a Minister arrives at Piarco, he or she is normally met by a protocol officer from the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs who facilitates Immigration and Customs requirements. While this process is taking place, the Minister is again accommodated at the DRL. Madam President, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago accommodates Members of Parliament in the manner described in this response, once their travel itinerary is communicated in advance. I thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein.

Sen. S. Hosein: Given reports, Madam President, recently, of breaches of protocol

at the airport by Ministers of Government, can the Minister of Works and Transport confirm whether or not any Cabinet Ministers were in breach of these protocols?

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, I will not allow that question. Next question. Any further questions? Next question, Sen. Hosein.

Shipping Act, Chap. 50:10

(*Galleons Passage Certification*)

108. Sen. Saddam Hosein asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Can the Minister indicate if pursuant to the Shipping Act, Chap. 50:10, any exemptions were granted to the *Galleons Passage* for its certification?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, in accordance with normal procedures and pursuant to this Shipping Act, Chap. 50:10, 13 exemptions were granted to the *Galleons Passage* for its certification. These exemptions are in respect to issues based mainly on construction rules and risk assessments which are normal for this type of vessel. An example of exemption in this area is, the horizontal distance between forward master head light is less than one-half of the length of the vessel. This exemption was granted on the condition of compliance with Convention Regulations 1972, section 13 and IMO Reserves 910(22).

Risk assessment. Risk assessment involved putting mitigation in place and confirmed by drills and inspection. This drill was carried out in conjunction with the coast guard where evacuation exercises were timed to ensure that in the likely event of an emergency persons could safely evacuate the vessel. An example of this exemption is in this area, fuel oil forward of crew accommodation space. This exemption was granted on the condition that no fuel would be stored and used for the forward tank without prior written approval from the Maritime Service

Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Madam President, these types of exemptions are the same as those granted all over the world to catamarans that carry passengers, including the *T&T Spirit* and the *T&T Express*. I thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein.

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, can the Minister indicate, having regard to the Lloyd's Report of 2018 which outlined some 100 defects on the *Galleons Passage*, whether any of these defects were remedied before the grant of the exemptions?

Madam President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam President, the fact that only 13, 1-3, exemption had to be granted, it meant that all the rest would have been complied with. Thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein.

Sen. S. Hosein: Can the Minister indicate or provide to this honourable Senate a list of the works that have been done in order for the vessel to have complied with the other defects of the Lloyd's Report?

Madam President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam President, I will have to liaise with the Maritime Division because they are the ones who would have undertaken the responsibility of certifying the vessel. So those reports would have been compiled and the exemptions would have been granted by the Maritime Service Division in accordance with their Act. So I am sure once I liaise with them, if it is permissible I will forward a copy to this honourable House. Thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein.

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, can the Minister indicate what would have been the cost in order to remedy these defects?

Madam President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: I do not those costings at hand, however, if requested I am sure a copy can be made available.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein.

Sen. S. Hosein: This is my last supplemental, Madam?

Madam President: It is.

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, under the Shipping Act when any exemptions are granted to a vessel, the exemption certificate is normally issued, can the Minister provide to this honourable Senate the exemption certificate for the *Galleons Passage*?

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, I will not allow that question. Next question, Sen. Hosein.

Sandals

(Monies owed by the Government)

109. Sen. Saddam Hosein asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Having regard to the statements made by the Chairman of Sandals that Trinidad and Tobago owes his company money, can the Prime Minister state the amount of monies that the Government owes to Sandals?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, no money is owed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to Sandals Resorts International. Let me repeat that because the optics—no money is owed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to Sandals Resorts International. The CEO of Sandals Resorts International, Mr. Gebhard Rainer, made it clear at a press conference held at the Office of the Prime Minister, on January 15, 2019, that no cost incurred by Sandals would be passed on to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein.

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, this question was filed before the collapse of—

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, a question please.

Sen. S. Hosein: Sorry. I am just giving the premise of my question. The timing of the question was before the collapse of the deal. Can the Minister then indicate what were the moneys Sandals indicated that the Government owed based on the statements made by the owner of Sandals, “Butch” Stewart, for certain surveys done on the site in which the Sandals project was earmarked?

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, I will not allow that question. Next question.

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, there had to have been the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, it is not a debate. You can ask a question.

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, can the Minister indicate what is the reason for the write-off of the moneys that Trinidad and Tobago would have owed to Sandals?

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, that question does not arise. Next question. Sen. Hosein?

Sen. S. Hosein: No, Madam President.

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Madam President: Before I call on the Minister, may I just remind all Members please, of the procedural bulletin No. 1, regarding the use of electronic devices. You may remember I was very kind at our last sitting, but I am hoping that today we will not have phones going off during the sitting. Minister in the Ministry of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2019

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The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West): Thank you Madam President. Madam President, I beg to move:

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017 and varied by the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2018, be now read a second time.

Madam President, this is a Finance Bill and it has been passed in the Lower House. The Bill provides for the variation of the 2018 appropriation of resources in the sum of \$586,161,666 to do the following things:

1. to provide additional funds in the sum of \$517 million to bring to account debit advances for the period December 17, 2017, to September 2018, in order to meet the payment of interest on the Central Bank overdraft; and
2. to realign the provisions of the sum of \$69,161,666 in the 2018 fiscal accounts in accordance with the new assignment of responsibility for ttconnect Service Centre under the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications effected by the Trinidad and Tobago Gazette No. 108, Volume 56, dated the 11th of October, 2017, and also for the new assignment of responsibility for the Ministry of Communications and the assignment of responsibility for the Ministry of Public Administration effected by the Trinidad and Tobago Gazette, No. 77, Volume 57, dated the 12th of June, 2018.

In addition, Madam President, hon. Senators are asked to note the transfer of funds between Sub-heads under the same Head of Expenditure in the sum of \$1,457,501,437 for fiscal year 2017, and the sum of \$1,183,532,06 for fiscal 2018.

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Madam President, the total increase in the Heads of Expenditure being proposed is \$586,161,666 and the total decrease is the equivalent amount of \$586,161,666 which produces a nil net effect on the total appropriation. The approval of the reallocation of funds is currently being sought by way of Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Financial Bill, 2018. So, Madam President, what I will do now is give details of what those variances were, to provide some clarity to the members of the House and the listening public. Further, I will give a synopsis of the issues and during the course of debate my colleagues on this side will provide further details in relation to adjustments in their Ministries.

Madam President, at this point I would like to address the Heads of Expenditure for which the reduction in the sum of \$517 million was proposed. It should be noted that following a final review of the 2018 accounts, savings have been identified under the following Heads of Expenditure: Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Utilities, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and Ministry of Works and Transport. The reasons for the savings under the above Heads are as follows: One, in respect of Ministry of National Security under the Sub-head Rent/Lease of Vehicles and Equipment. In respect of this matter the lease for the provision of CCTV coverage expired with effect from July 01, 2017, and the Ministry is awaiting Cabinet's approval for a new contract, and what the Ministry has been doing in the interim is proceeding with the current service provider on a month-to-month basis until that contract is approved, but that produced a savings of \$100 million.

In respect of the Ministry of Health, there were various issues that led to a reduction in expenditure by \$211 million. One: in respect of drugs and other relates supplies, the savings there was \$119 million brought about as follows. Firstly,

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there was a rationalization of the formulary list, which is the list of prescribed drugs. This resulted from that list moving from a total of 730 prescribed drugs to 580 drugs inclusive of those for CDAP. And, Madam President, let me make it clear, it is not that we are providing fewer drugs to the public. It is that the list has been rationalized to get rid of duplications in respect of drugs provided for the same illness and ailments. So rationalization has produced a significant cost savings. In addition, there is a purchasing facility provided by PAHO, the Pan American Health Organization, in securing drugs and this has also produced a savings. What previously occurred was that the Ministry of Health was using various suppliers and, as a result of that, the cost of securing the drugs was more expensive. We are using the PAHO facility and this has produced significant savings in the sourcing of drugs for the use by the health sector.

Medical treatment of nationals in institutions: Under this area the Ministry of Health did two things that produced significant savings. A higher number of patients were treated within the public health institutions during the year rather than outsourcing these persons to private institutions. That produced significant savings. There are claims that are ongoing between the Ministry and various clients of the Ministry, and those claims are being processed and verified. So some of the payments that were anticipated to be made during 2018 in respect of those claims have not been made. So that reduced some savings. A deferral in that case as opposed to an absolute avoidance, but that would have led to a reduction.

Under the regional health authority there was a \$206 million savings resulting from one, the fact that filling of vacancies using Cuban doctors, there was a delay in effecting that. So the expenditure that was expected to be incurred in respect of that did not materialize in full. Claims again arising from legal matters,

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some of them were not finalized and that resulted in a reduction in the cost that was expected to be incurred in respect of that matter. The Ministry of Health has been seeking to establish a virtual library. It was having difficulty locating and contracting a supplier for that virtual library, so this again resulted in a reduction of costs. In respect of the North Central Regional Health Authority, a savings of \$9 million, and the South Regional Health Authority, a savings of \$5 million resulting from the following: The Ministry undertook a review of the procurement process for all regional authorities, with a view to eliminating cost in efficiencies, in the acquisition of medical supplies on goods and services, and it produced some positive results in that regard. Also, there was better management of the use of overtime in those facilities and that also led to the savings of \$14 million.

The waiting list for surgery: There was some cost savings in that area as well. Again, there was an increase of surgical procedures undertaken at the public health institutions rather than by private providers. Specific surgical procedures were also increased, that is, cardiac surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and cataract surgeries performed by Cuban doctors at the San Fernando and Port of Spain General Hospitals and Mount Hope. So in sourcing these things which were previously given out to private service providers, have produced a significant cost to the Ministry, and you may have seen occasionally articles on the newspaper indicating where doctors and nurses were encouraged to come out on the weekend to increase the speed with which these services were being provided. So we are seeing the benefits of that approach by the Ministry that resulted in a \$7 million savings.

The hospital refurbishment programme. There was some delay in the implementation of some of these projects which resulted in the Ministry not

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incurring all the costs that were expected to be incurred during the 2018 period. There were tender issues, for example, for the prenatal and chemotherapy rooms, and the electrical upgrade of Building 24 of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. The upgrade to the regional administrative centre for the South West Regional Health Authority was delayed due to OSH non-compliance issues. The contractor terminated his contract and we had to appoint another service provider. So that resulted in delay and, therefore, reduction in the cost that was incurred in that year. That will be a cost that will be rolled over to 2019.

Repairs to the roof of the labour ward were delayed due to contractual challenges and that too had to be given to another service provider. Under the Health Services Support Programme there was a \$10 million savings. This is the result of an IDB-GORTT funded project. Delay in procurements resulted in a delay in the implementation of that project which reduced the expenditure of the Ministry under that Sub-head. The next phase of the project is a health promotion policy which is carded for launch in each RHA from January to June 2019. That, Madam President, would be the issues that would have led to the reduction in expenditure in the Ministry of Health.

In respect of the Ministry of Public Utilities, there was a \$62 million savings, specifically in respect of the Water and Sewerage Authority. In fiscal year 2018, the Water and Sewerage Authority achieved an overall reduction in recurrent expenditure by \$62 million as result of doing three things: one, it rationalized the engagement of contractor labour; two, it employed more structured use of in-house labour; and three, it implemented more efficient processes in the procurement of its goods and services. So this would have led to a savings of \$62 million.

In respect of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, there was a \$100

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million reduction in the anticipated expense for 2018 and this was as a result of the shortfall in subsidy re the sale of petroleum products. Payments for the subsidy claims were deferred pending the completion of a reconciliation exercise.

Under the Ministry of Works and Transport, there was a \$44 million savings in relation to the expense set aside for the dry-docking of the *T&T Spirit*. It was expected that there would be two such processes undertaken, but the vessel was actually only dry-docked once during the course of the year and that resulted in a \$15 million savings.

Under the Works and Transportation again, in respect of the Public Transport Service Corporation, the corporation would have acquired 35 new buses which reduced the cost of repair and maintenance that would otherwise have been incurred if it kept on running the old buses that had been in use before those new buses were acquired, and this produced a \$29 million savings in recurrent expenditure.

Madam President, I now refer to the transfer of funds between Sub-heads under the same Head of Expenditure. With effect from August 01, 1988, Cabinet delegated its authority to approve transfers between Sub-heads under the same Head of Expenditure to the Minister of Finance when it agreed as follows: Request for transfer of funds between separate Sub-heads under the same Head of Expenditure should no longer be submitted for the Cabinet, but can be decided by the Minister of Finance on the advice of the Budget Division.

2.30 p.m.

Consequently, the Minister of Finance approved transfers of funds in sum of \$1,457,501,437 for fiscal 2017 and \$1,183,532,006 for fiscal year 2018. It should be noted that the transfers were approved by the Minister of Finance based on

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notes from the respective Ministers requesting the transfers. It should note these transfers requested to reflect changed circumstances in the Ministries and Departments and a consequential reordering of priorities. They do not increase the total appropriation in any way. Statements showing the transfers approved by the Minister of Finance and explanations for these transfers would have been provided to Members of this honourable House.

Madam President, the fiscal data for 2018 is substantially finalized and the provisional outturn in central government fiscal operations for fiscal 2018 recorded deficit of \$5,351,000,000 or 3.43 per cent of GDP. This is 910 million less than final revised projections. So the deficit is lower than we had originally communicated. The variance was mainly as a result of two things: lower than projected revenue of \$368 million and higher—sorry. Lower than expected expenditure in the amount of \$1,278,000,000. So in respect of the lower revenue, the revised revenue for fiscal 2018 was \$42,617.6 million whereas the actual amount collected was 42 billion, 249. So it is 249 collected versus 617 originally reported; a reduction, as I indicated, of \$368 million. The negative variance on the revenue side was due mainly to lower receipts under taxes on goods and services of \$141.9 million and non-tax revenue of \$387.8 million.

In respect of taxes on goods and services, the unfavourable variance or the reduction in collection was mainly attributed to decreased collections from the energy and non-energy sectors as well as low compliance by companies in heeding administrative measures implemented by the Board of Inland Revenue. So the Board of Inland Revenue's attempt to improve its collection compliance was not as successful as they had hoped. So the combination of those two things resulted in a reduction of the revenue by \$386 million.

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With respect to the other reduction of \$387 million in non-tax revenue, this reduction resulted from a lower than anticipated inflows from the sale of the Clico assets. Now so let me explain that because we would have said to you before that the NIF offering was oversubscribed. What the Ministry of Finance opted to do because of its determination to smooth the cash flow over this period was that it did not deposit into last year's accounts all of the income from the sale of NIF. It deferred some of the deposit into the 2019 income year because it anticipated that during the period end of September to the end of December, its revenue and cash flow would have been negatively impacted because the bulk of the Ministry's income comes in at the end of each quarter. So to manage its cash flow for that first quarter of 2019, it would have deposited some of the NIF funds into that quarter rather than the end of the 2018 period. So that is what resulted in the reduction of revenue for 2018.

In respect to expenditure, the revised expenditure for fiscal 2018 projected at the time of the presentation of the 2019 Budget was 48 billion, 897 million. The actual expenditure was \$47,601,000,000; a reduction of \$1,278,000,000. The major areas in which the expenditure was lower than projected were as follows:

1. Interest payments. Interest payments were less than projected by \$564 million, and the primary cause of this was the lower than anticipated level of expenditure on domestic loans due mainly to underutilization of funds which were provided to meet payments on loans and fixed rate bonds.
2. Current transfers were less than projected by \$515 million. This was attributable mainly to the non-receipt of directives to allow for the transfer of funds to the following Infrastructure Development Fund,

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Caricom Development Fund, Public Housing Construction Programme, Business Stimulus Programme and the Fiscal Incentive Programme for farmers.

3. The third reason for the reduction in expenditure Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies were less than projected by \$215 million. This was mainly under the THA in an amount of 205 of the 215 since a number of non-cash transactions were not finalized and brought to account.

In respect of capital expenditure on the Development Programme, the reduction in the expenditure total \$127.4 million. The expenditure was lower under the Consolidated Fund by 135.2 and higher under the Infrastructure Development Fund by 7.8. Because as you may remember, the Development Programme is funded from two sources: the Consolidated Fund and the IDF, and these were due mainly the delays in implementation of the projects and processing of claims for payments under the Consolidated Fund.

Madam President, this accounts for the variations that we are seeking approval for this afternoon. I wish to reiterate that the Bill before us seeks to vary the appropriation for fiscal year 2018 in sum of \$586,161,666. And Madam President, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the Bill before us seeks to vary the sum issued, authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017 and varied by the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018).

Madam President, you know transparency and accountability to be fully

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operationalized and realized require full disclosure. And the hon. Minister, who has lot of experience in these matters, was very short in providing this honourable Senate with details as if we are a rubber-stamp group to come here this evening, very short on details. Madam President, so short, the Minister refused to inform this Senate of the savings so-called in Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. Skipped that completely. And then when it came to the whole issue of the interest on the overdraft, no serious details provided by the Minister to this House. Why is the Minister seeking to deny this Senate full disclosure on this matter? Why?
[Desk thumping]

The Minister of Public Utilities saved \$62 million and Madam President, what we are told is what is in this document here that you could have read and I could have read. The Minister read this without giving us any additional details. So if I were not following details of this matter in the House of Representatives on television, I would not be able to make a proper contribution based on the presentation given by the hon. Minister. *[Desk thumping]* So, Madam President, I am very and extremely disappointed with the Minister in the Ministry of Finance. Very, very disappointed.

But, Madam President, we allow the Government to bring something in two days when we are supposed to get four and yet still we have been short-changed. Well, I want to serve notice on the Minister, on the Leader of Government Business. In the future, we shall not be supporting any Bill that requires four days' notice in the two days. "We not doing that. Ah just giving yuh notice. Yuh could bring it but yuh not getting our support in the future."

Madam President, the Minister gave the impression and I want to deal with the matter. You know, one would have expected some kind of perspective and

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context for these variations but we did not get that context at all. We did not get that context. Madam President, let me, first of all, deal with some elements in the variation because you know the IMF has a lot to say about this. I will quote what they have said on this matter that we are dealing with here today. Unplanned expenditure cuts. And, Madam President, you know there is a difference between savings and suppression? To come and tell this honourable House that you saved when you actually suppressed expenditure is to “mis”—I would not say misrepresent the facts and the reality.

Madam President, let me give you an example of this distortion of the reality which we are being asked to support today. We are told that the Ministry of Public Utilities because of the Minister’s perspective on doing more with less and as a result of a rationalization operation that was executed by the hon. Minister, \$62 million was saved. But nowhere did the hon. Minister inform this House that external contractors that provide key services to WASA were eliminated, were retrenched, were dismissed. Nowhere did the Minister indicate that to us, and Madam President, “she can talk how much she wants to talk” whilst I am speaking. [*Crosstalk*] The hon. Minister, that is, I am talking about. [*Crosstalk*] While I am speaking, I need silence and I do not want anyone to be muttering whilst I am on my legs.

But, Madam President, I want to share with you this so-called savings in the Ministry of Public Utilities; so-called savings of 62 million. You know what that led to, Madam President? It led to 116 contractors who do ground maintenance being relieved, being disposed of, being dismissed by the Minister or by—not the Minister—WASA. We did not get that from the hon. Minister this evening, that 116 contractors involved in the ground maintenance were relieved of that task. In

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order to do what? Save \$62 million. So to save \$62 million, you fired, dismissed, removed, Madam President, 116 contractors.

Madam President, in addition to that the hon. Minister did not share with this honourable Senate that in terms of pipeline maintenance, 124 contractors were dismissed by the WASA and then the fleet of vehicles that WASA had, they reduced it by 101 vehicles. I have no problem with if you want to rationalize your vehicles. That is fine, no problem. But why did they not tell us that? Why did the Minister not tell us that 101 vehicles were in fact removed from the system? We did not hear that from the hon. Minister. [*Crosstalk*] No, I am not speaking to you, man, let me speak nah man. I am coming to you just now about subsidies and energy. You take your time.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, Madam President. “Take yuh time.” So what I would like to get from the hon. Minister of Public Utilities when he speaks on this matter, tell us in saving \$62 million in the short run, tell us what is the long-run cost to the citizenry of this country. We know. Madam President—in fact, if you would have read the papers on Sunday and you listened to the hon. Minister speak on water conservation, you would learn that 50 per cent of the water supply to this country by WASA goes to waste through leakages because of a poor infrastructure pipeline network in Trinidad and Tobago; 50 per cent goes to waste. So, at a time when we are being told by the meteorological office to brace for a dry season of drought proportions and telling the elderly and the youths and those with asthma to brace for that incoming dry season and spell, we have a Minister, in 2018, retrenching, dismissing through WASA, 124 contractors. You know, Madam President, what they do? They are engaged in pipeline repair, so when there are leaks all over the

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country, they deal with that. What we are being told by the Minister is that they are using internal crews in order to do so. But, Madam President, what is the reality? What is the reality?

I had to call somebody at WASA after leaks appeared in a particular area in the community that I am from and the people who were affected have been calling WASA over and over and over to have that leak repaired. And, Madam President, nothing. I intervened and luckily my voice carried and WASA was able to respond and the leaks were fixed. Why did it have to take me to do so? Why the ordinary people who were calling could not get a WASA response? Is it because I am a Member of Parliament and if I come here, I will deal with WASA publicly? So it was done.

So these 124 people that the Minister has sent home, these people, we may have saved \$62 million as we are being told, but those 124 contractors might have employed directly 500 people. What would happen to those 500 workers? I am assuming that you may have 500 workers. I do not have all the facts. Maybe the Minister will tell us how many workers actually are employed by those contractors that have now been laid off. So, Madam President, you are saving on one hand but you are disposing of labour on the other hand. So contractors gone home and their workforce gone home. That is efficiency management. That is what is called “Savings PNM style” and that is really a mockery of this whole process that we are engaging here today. It has nothing to do with savings. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government, as the Minister has admitted and she did not go into details, has engaged in what is called the overdraft dance, and the Minister, again, did not tell this country and tell this honourable Senate what are the facts surrounding this overdraft. Madam President, unless you have something to hide,

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you will be open. Why did the Minister not explain to this Senate the reason why the bulk of \$586 million that was saved, why 517 million out of that 586 went to towards the payment of charges, interest charges on an overdraft facility executed by the Central Bank on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago? Madam President, why did the Minister not tell us that?

Because the Government, we are told, initially budgeted for what? Four hundred million dollars to deal with interest charges in the 2018 Budget, but between December of 2017 and September of 2018, the Government realized that the interest charges on the overdraft facility at the Central Bank skyrocketed from \$400 million to almost \$917 million, almost \$1 billion in interest charges. Why did the Minister not tell this country that is what took place? And Madam President, we want answers today. We want answers from the Minister on this question.

Because I could never forget when we are were told, as a country, that when the Government came into office, they accused the outgoing administration of maxing out the overdraft and the country was running on fumes. That is what we were told. Well, I am accusing the Government of Dr. Keith Rowley, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, of maxing out the overdraft [*Desk thumping*] in 2016/2017—and go to the Auditor General's report to find out that—by over \$3 billion. They maxed out the overdraft and then they accused us of maxing out the overdraft and they keep repeating it over and over when they are responsible for.

But, Madam President, not only that, the Government came in December of 2017 and they amended the Central Bank Act to increase the ceiling from 15 per cent in terms of Government seeking advances from the Central Bank to 20 per

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cent; 20 per cent, they did that. I looked at the 2018 because that is the accounts that we are dealing with now, 2018 fiscal year. The total revenue, the estimated revenue at that time was \$45.7 billion. The Central Bank allows 20 per cent as an overdraft on your annual estimates of revenue under section 46 of the Central Bank Act. Madam President, that would give us a figure in overdraft of \$9.5 billion. So, in 2018, the Government is supposed to access, in 2018, just about \$9.2 billion.

We understand the repo rate which is the interest that is charged on these advances moved from 4.75 to 5 per cent. So 5 per cent of 99.2 billion would give us something like 457, \$458 million in interest charges.

3.00 p.m.

Madam President, we are being told today that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had to raise \$917 million to pay interest on the overdraft. Well, the overdraft that we have estimated did not go beyond \$9.2 billion, and 20 per cent of \$9.2 billion is 457 at a rate 5 per cent. So, we want to ask the Government of this country, where did the difference go? If you are to pay 500 in charges interest-wise, where did the \$400 million go to?

Madam President, we need answers from the Government today. We would like to know from the Government, where did the 400-and-some—it is about close to \$430 million gone.

Hon. Senator: “Where de money gone?”

Sen. W. Mark: Where did it go? [*Desk thumping*] Is it, Madam President, that the Government was able to use strong-arm tactics to force the Governor of the Central Bank to break the law, and go beyond the 20 per cent that they are allowed, in accordance with section 46 of the Central Bank Act?

Hon. Senator: Create hysteria.

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Sen. W. Mark: I am asking questions, Madam President. And I am asking questions because the population require answers. So, we would like to ask the hon. Minister of Finance, what is the state of play on the overdraft? And why it is the Government is ignoring the International Monetary Fund's advice, because I know they like the IMF. Because they instituting all the IMF's policies and conditionalities without having the IMF in Trinidad and Tobago. Their badge of honour is the IMF.

Hon. Senator: Speak the truth "nah".

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, I have 2018 September report of the IMF, the Article IV Consultation, it is a press release, and on page 3. The International Monetary Fund has warned this Government about using the Central Bank overdraft facility the way that they have been doing. And on page 3 of this report, this press release, I quote:

"The Government should settle"—according to the IMF—"the overdraft balance with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, and rely on market-based financing."

That is what the International Monetary Fund is advising this Government: "ease up on this" almost abuse that is taking place at the level of the Central Bank.

So, Madam President, we call on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to indicate to this Parliament, this \$917 million that we have been told that they needed to cover interest charges. Our estimation in accordance with the law and the estimates revenues ought not to be more than \$500 million in interest charges. Could the Government explain to this Parliament and to the citizens, where the extra \$400 million went to? What was it used for? Give us a proper explanation. Madam President, I did not hear the Minister; maybe the Minister said it, but I did

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not hear her. So, I have to plead ignorance.

Madam President, the other thing I want to go on to, after dealing with the Central Bank overdraft fiasco. I want to look at the issue of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. I want the Minister to listen very carefully to what I have to say this evening on this matter of fuel subsidy in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President, we are being told that the Ministry saved \$100million. And they are still reconciling payments as it relates to subsidy to Petrotrin that is supposed to come through Unipet as well as NP.

Madam President, I would like to ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries whether the prices that they are charging the consumers today for super gasoline and premium gas, is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in breach of the law governing the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act? I ask the Minister this, and I will explain why I have asked this question.

Madam President, if you know the law which is the production subsidy and levy Act, that Act is designed and was designed by the drafters of it, in the '70s and '80s to protect the ordinary citizens from the vagaries of international volatility in price levels, Madam President, and therefore the law created a subsidy on petroleum products, whether it is super gasoline, whether it is premium, or whether it is diesel.

Madam President, you would recall, that super gasoline is now costing—59 per cent of the population utilize super gasoline in this country, 59 per cent. You know, Madam President what it is costing you and myself for a litre of super gasoline, but we saved 100 million, eh Madam President, 100 million. It is costing the ordinary person who utilizes super gasoline \$4.97 per litre. Madam President, diesel is 3.41 per litre and these are the two fuels that are consumed by the majority

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of the people of this country, 59 per cent of the transport fuel consumed in this country is done through the consumption of super gasoline, 59 per cent. Diesel accounts for 36 per cent. Premium is—as you say premium is very premium, only a small percentage of the population utilize that.

Madam President, let me indicate to you what the Minister of Finance in his budget speech told this country—that is the last budget, and I quote, Madam President:

“Motorists should note that at oil price of US \$73 per barrel”—at an oil an oil price of US \$73 per barrel—“the actual unsubsidised”—Madam President, listen carefully eh—“the actual unsubsidised price of super gasoline should be \$5.47 per litre and the unsubsidised price of diesel should be \$4.96...”

Madam President, a mathematical relationship would tell you that if oil prices are \$52 per barrel, the price of super gasoline at the pump should be 3.90 per litre, and the price of diesel should be 3.53 per litre. You know, Madam President, citizens are being called upon to pay 4.97 per litre for super gasoline, we are getting a little thing off, because the calculation tells me that right now it is 3.41 per litre for gasoline and the actual price is 3.53 per litre.

So, Madam President, the question that has to be asked is whether the current prices for fuel at the pump in this country—Government is taxing the population using fuel prices and by extension are in violation of the law of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to indicate to us, this so-called \$100million that he is boasting that he saved should that money not have gone to subsidizing the consumer, Madam President? If the consumer is supposed to be paying 3.90 per litre and is in fact

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paying 4.97 per litre, is that not a surplus that the Government is deriving and extracting from the population? Is that not a new form of taxation that the Government has imposed on the country? [*Desk thumping*]

So we call on the Government to give this country answers. Already, Madam President, persons who utilize premium gasoline are being taxed, because they are paying beyond the level of the cost of premium gasoline, given the subsidies that they are entitled to. But we deem them rich, and therefore they could afford it. But what about the 59 per cent, Madam President, who utilize super gasoline in this country, are they rich? They are middle-class, they are the working poor who have a little car here and there, and you are asking them to pay 4.97 per litre. When in truth and in fact, a proper calculation will tell us it should not be more than 3.90. So, Madam President, I call on the Minister to tell this country what is going on. What is going on with this situation that our people are being brutalized by the PNM.

I remember, Madam President, when this thing was done some time ago, the same Minister of Finance who was then on the Opposition Bench, he went to town on premium gasoline and accused the Government of violating the law. You know how long we were promised by the Minister of Energy—he does not appear to be in charge of his Ministry. His Ministry seems to be on autopilot. [*Desk thumping*]

We were told by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries that we are going to have an automatic system established, so when the price of oil were to go down, like in Barbados, like in Jamaica, like in the United States, the consumers would benefit from lower oil prices by paying lower prices for gasoline and vice versa, Madam President. You know, Madam President, in Trinidad and Tobago the price gone up, it is the same price you are paying for gasoline. The price gone

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down, it is the same price you are paying for gasoline. So what is the Government doing, Madam President? When is the Government going to put in place—

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

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah, when is the Government going to put in place that mechanism? Madam President, I would like to ask the Government to share with us, and I call on the Government to give us answers, because the Minister was very short on her presentation in this particular area. We are told that the Ministry of Communications saved \$100 million, \$100 million and why Madam President? The Ministry of Communications decided not to renew the contract with the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago, and instead, it seems like there is a preferential customer or contractor that the Government is interested in getting on board to get rid of the TSTT.

Madam President, I cannot understand why the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will want to get rid of TSTT, which is a state-owned, 51 per cent majority-owned company, and go to a foreign company called Integrated Microwave Technology Limited trading as Vislink. And, Madam President, the kind of information that we have gathered, and we will take to the police, to the Integrity Commission on this matter.

We need answers, Madam President, this request for proposal for this new contractor, this new busybody out of London, England, who is supposed to replace TSTT with the new surveillance system for cameras in this country. They aborted the actual request for proposal on three, going on four occasions, because you know why, Madam President? This company called Integrated Microwave technology Limited was not ready. So every time they are not ready, the Director of SSA would abort the whole process and Digicel and Columbus Communication

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and Cable & Wireless—all of them who put in their bid, they are being disappointed because of the fact that there are a lot of activities that are taking place in this transaction that is illegal, that is fraudulent and that is almost bordering on criminality.

Madam President, we call on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to launch a forensic criminal investigation into this matter—[*Desk thumping*] because it was not no savings, Madam President, of \$100 million involving the Ministry of Communications. It was a situation in which, Madam President, they deliberately aborted that arrangement with TSTT in order to favour an English company named Integrated Microwave Technology Limited, trading as Vislink in order to do what, Madam President?—give them favour over TSTT.

And Madam President, we need answers, because the Government is not giving us the full story on this matter or this so-called saving of \$100 million and I think right now as I understand it, Madam President, the Minister of National Security is in London, so we would like the Minister of National Security whilst he is in London to investigate this company called Integrated Microwave Technology Limited to find out what is the link between that company and the Ministry of National Security and the Director of SSA. What is the link? And why are they trying to abort the TSTT contract in favour of this company?

Madam President, this Government is about to collapse and the people are about to get rid of this regime. This regime, Madam President, has failed the people, [*Desk thumping*] they have not only failed the people, they have betrayed their trust, Madam President. When they tell us, Madam President the economy has expanded, Madam President the economy has contracted by 5 to 6 per cent.

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

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say these few words. Thank you very much, Madam President.

Sen. Amrita Deonarine: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate today. While I do not have the opportunity to vote on any money Bills in this honourable House, I am always happy to bring forward my thoughts on the Bill before us today.

The Bill essentially consists of a transfer of 586 million to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Communications from the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Administration, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Works and Transport. The Bill also consists of transfers between Sub-heads amongst Ministries valued at 1.46 billion.

Madam President, 88 per cent of the saving goes to the Ministry of Finance to meet the payment of interest on overdraft with the Central Bank for the period December 2017 to September 2018. Madam President, as Sen. Mark rightly said, this 517 million is in addition to the 400 million allocated in fiscal 2018. And it brings the required interest payments to the overdraft facility at the Central Bank to 917 million. This is almost one and a half times more than originally budgeted.

In reviewing the Auditor General's report on the public accounts of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government overdraft with the Central Bank began in 2011 averaging at TT 6.5 billion between the years 2011 and 2017. The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago account moved into overdraft in September 2011 and was recorded as TT 10.6 million in September 2017. We are yet to know the amount of the overdraft as of September 2018. Madam President, I want to clearly indicate that I got this information from the consolidated statements of assets and liabilities

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under the Treasury statements in the respective years of the Auditor General's Report on the Public Accounts of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, I am concerned, since this overdraft in the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago account is not included in our public debt. I honestly beg to question, how close we are to the 20 per cent limit stipulated in the Central Bank Act section 46. Taking the overdraft into consideration this may mean that the true debt-to-GDP ratio of the country may very well be above the recorded 62.1 per cent. Some may argue that since the Central Bank is owned by the Government, more or less, it means that the Government is owing itself. However, when it comes to managing your resources efficiently, it is still a loan that has to be repaid as soon as possible at an interest rate that is currently around 5 per cent.

Studies from the IMF have shown that at debt levels lower than 30 per cent of GDP increases in the debt-to-GDP ratio are associated with faster economic growth. However, as debt levels rise beyond a threshold of 55 to 56 per cent of GDP, each additional dollar of fiscal spending financed by debt has a negative impact on economic growth. At this point, the economy may begin to suffer from debt overhang. Debt beyond this threshold, that is the 55 - to 56 per cent threshold, discourages investment and investors tend to believe that their profits will be taxed away in order to service the debt, and this can hinder economic expansion.

Trinidad and Tobago has crossed the 55 to 56 per cent threshold since 2014. Madam President, we have three Ministries foregoing \$411 million in "savings". To find this interest payment to the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, well some of it. Moneys that could have been redirected to productive activity within these Ministries. The savings from these Ministries will be financing 80 per cent of the increased allocation for interest payment on the Central Bank overdraft.

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But, these savings, Madam President, in some instances seem to have come about as a result of lapses or delays in processes, procedures of some kind, of some sort. Delays in procurement processes, delays in contract execution, contract management, ongoing verification and reconciliation processes. Delays mean that moneys that were not spent in 2018 have just been deferred to fiscal 2019. And this is where I raise to question the efficiency of public expenditure. My question is, how much of these delayed expenditures to be transferred in 2019 is expected to generate cost overruns? While I understand that challenges do arise in every operational environment, perhaps while with closer monitoring and evaluation and the establishing of issues and risk-mitigation strategies a more proactive approach can be developed.

Studies have found that large cost overruns benefit shortfalls, waste and low completion rates are common in major infrastructure projects in developing countries and can be attributed to via poor selection, monitoring and evaluation. I cite that information from the IMF as well, Madam President.

Madam President, if you would permit me, I would like to direct some questions to the hon. Minister on the savings from the Ministries, particularly those from the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

In the Ministry of National Security, given the delay in the Cabinet's approval to the new contract for the CCTV coverage, which expired in July 2017 and resulted in the 100 million in savings, which areas of Trinidad and Tobago were left without CCTV coverage? And for how long? Is there an indication of the number of crimes committed in these areas that should have had CCTV footage and could have assisted in the detection of these crimes?

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With respect to Ministry of Health, the 20 million savings accrued from the increased utilization of public health facilities. Can the Minister indicate, one, the extent of the increase and two, the standard timeline for the verification and reconciliation processes of claims when such an increase is experienced? The increase in utilization of medical facilities, the public health facilities? Also, Madam President, I see that there are some savings from the increased number of surgical procedures undertaken at the hospitals, my question here is whether there is a similar reconciliation and verification process being undertaken?

Madam President, through you, I would also like to ask the hon. Minister, how the \$26 million savings is distributed amongst the filling of vacancies in the regional health authorities, the legal claims and the supplier of the virtual library? How is that \$26 million distributed amongst those three things? With respect to the recruitment and selection process, not yet completed, can the Minister indicate the reason for the delay? Obviously it was supposed to be done in 2018, right? So, if there were any hindrances in terms of procurement processes and so on, can you indicate, elaborate a little bit please?

Under the Hospital Refurbishment Programme and the Health Services Support Programme, I would like to know what the underlying reasons for the procurement challenges that were faced?

3.30 p.m.

Finally, with respect to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries subsidy payment that has been deferred pending a reconciliation exercise, usually how long do these exercises take? Madam President, I would like to begin concluding by saying that security and health are two of the major issues currently facing our country. I have no doubt that the hon. Ministers comprehend the

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importance of their respective portfolios that play in the day-to-day life of the ordinary man in the street, therefore we ought to take extra care and consideration when dealing with the budgets of these two vital Ministries, each cut—as a matter of fact, each saving, quote-unquote, should be looked at under the proverbial microscope and repercussions thoroughly studied. In conclusion, I thank my hon. colleagues for the opportunity to have contributed to today's proceedings and I look forward to your responses, hon. Minister. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: The Minister of Public Utilities. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte): Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me to join this debate, and as I am about to join this debate, I am spread out all over because I have so many different things to touch on. You know, let us start by saying that the fact that this Government—let me start over. I remember being part in 2017 of a budget debate and the conversation at that time was that, well, you know, you are asking the country to manage its belt tighter, however, there was the feeling out there that there was still too much fat and that there was need for Government to be a little bit more efficient in running and cut waste as much as possible. I remember that being said that, well, you know, we moved from \$62 billion down to \$52 billion, and therefore you had a cut with a certain degree of caution because you could destroy the economy in the process, but, yet still, I remember in the Chamber and other people talking. So here it is we are standing here basically saying that, you know, we have been able to bring our deficit within the tune of 3.43 per cent of GDP well within international standards and being able to keep employment levels relatively high and do all that we have had to do to run this economy with the reduced revenue, and I am getting from Sen. Mark, almost like if, well, you really did not do

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anything.

You know, when you look at what—if I have to dig a little deeper into Sen. Mark's statement, management by his style is about spending, spending, spending, waste, waste, waste, and inefficiency, inefficiency, inefficiency. In the case of my Ministry and the Public Utilities, I am proud to say that in keeping with my Government's attempt to do more with less, we have gone in and looked at the areas of inefficiencies within WASA, and by virtue of that we have been able to cut back on the number of cars that people are renting. We looked at it from cell phones, we looked at it from contractual services, and we have been able to allow to increase the productivity of WASA rather than using outside labour, and I make no apologies for that. [*Desk thumping*] I make no apologies for that. You cannot tell me which part of the world I am sitting. I am running a utility, I have over 5,200 workers, but management under the previous regime was, yes, you have 5,200 workers, but for whatever the reason it will still see a need to leave the workers there, do not utilize them. You are paying them, you continue to carry that bill, but go outside and contract out all the services. Now, under no stretch of the imagination that I should be standing in this House defending that I have saved the people—by virtue of the improving efficiency in WASA we have saved money for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want you to understand that when you are talking about saving money for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, there is one pot of money. There is one pot.

At the end of the day the money saved today here is what allows you to give all of the social services that you have to subsidize. So you cannot say that it does not make sense. It makes no sense to continue to pay workers and you are contracting out the services. But that was what management, as I said before,

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UNC-style was. When you look at the figures under contractual services, you see in 2014, in 2014, the last audited statement shows that total figures reached as high as, contractual services, \$377 million; \$377 million. That is the level of all of those services that were there, services that you could have produced and done internally. And if the people were not doing the services, these organizations are not made—they are made, as I have always said, these state organizations have to provide a certain level of service. They are created not just to create employment. If you have 5,300 workers, you need to work and see what is the problem. You do not fix the problem by simply putting a bandage over it and saying, well, all right, I need to get leaks repaired and I cannot get the WASA workers to work so, you know what, let me go outside and bid contractual services. That is what you call “management by ‘vaps’”. That is what you call “management by kicking the pan ‘dong de’ road”, and that is the kind of management that we were accustomed to. That is the kind of management that happened under Petrotrin for years. However, you realize that that only increases cost, but you could do that when money is no problem, when you have money, money is no problem. But that is when you have it. That is why I said before in my opening statement, then when money is no problem, then what you do is waste it, waste it, waste it, and that I will have no part of because money has value and at the end of the day you have to make sure that you spend the people’s money in an efficient manner.

When you look at WASA, I mean, you go into some more details on that organization, Madam President. Over the period 2010—2015, that organization spent close to \$14 billion between capital expenditure and recurrent expenditure. That is the kind of money that you were actually putting out there and giving to an institution, and as a result, the reason why you had to spend all that money is

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because you were spending money and you were also not getting the type of service out of it. So, Madam President, \$14 billion spent and what did we get for that 14 billion? Let me give you some examples. You see, just yesterday, as you rightly said, we were looking on the paper and we saw the Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant. Remember that? Yesterday it was in the newspaper. This was a project that started at a budget of about \$700 million. We read yesterday that \$1 billion, \$1 billion was paid out, although the project is only 40 per cent, 40 to 45 per cent completed. Another, to complete the project, will take us up to \$1.3 billion to complete that particular project. That is the kind of money that you are talking about for that particular project. Now that particular project was expected to increase the water supply in this country by 10 million gallons a day. So you are asking yourself to engage in a project that will increase your water supply by 10 million gallons a day. When you do the maths you are therefore talking about, and I have the figures here, you are actually talking about producing water under that particular project. You were looking at using water, a production of water of \$130 million for one million gallons a day of water; \$130 million for one million gallons a day of water. That is the kind of money that you are talking about.

At the time of those particular projects we know we are now producing water to get 10 million gallons, and at the end of the day that was management previous-Government-style—"I give you water, you are happy; how much it cost? "Doh worry about dat", because at the end of the day somebody gone with the \$1 billion, we get nothing. But that is what would have happened. Forget about the efficiency, forget about the cost, because, you know what?—we are now doing water projects and we are talking about water projects in the vicinity of \$4 million to \$9 million for 1 million gallons a day of water. So you are talking about four to

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nine versus 130 million. That is the type of wastage that you are talking about in some of these projects, you know, and therefore you cannot continue just simply to talk about—you cannot continue, you cannot run an organization like that. You cannot run a country like that. But that was the type of management that you had under the previous regime. They talk about how—I mean, I have heard again, when you look at some of the projects, I have looked at some of the projects as regards to moving pipes, laying pipes, one of the things that had been talked about in the other House is the amount of pipes that were laid and what is the price of those kilometres of pipes. Again, they talked about 1.4—1,400 kilometres of pipe being laid over a period. We looked at the cost of what we are able to do now via some of the exact same things, the methodology that caused us to go in there and try to make the place more efficient. That same methodology and mindset, we were then doing about, at a cost of \$4.8 million per kilometre of pipe, 4.8 million, we are now doing it at 2.1; 4.8 to 2.1, and that is the type of inefficiency that we had in WASA.

Yes, you had a lot of money. There was a lot of money floating around and there is not as much money floating around now, but money does not—you know, there is a saying, “To whom much is given, much is expected”, but in the case of this Government—the past Government—it is about, who much is given, much must be wasted. So, Madam President, waste is something that we should not condone, and therefore, as I said before, yes, we have been able at the Water and Sewerage Authority, because of our prudent approach towards dealing and managing that particular institution, to be able to cut back on contracts, on outsourcing of things that we need to be done internally for which we have staff to do it internally. And therefore there is no reason, no reason on the face of this

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earth why I should have people coming to work from 8.00 to 4.00 and outsourcing their jobs simply because I want to give an outsourced person a job. That does not make sense. [*Desk thumping*] That does not make sense, and under where I come from that is not management.

So, Madam President, you know, I want to continue to explain a little bit about the types of, you know, to the extent that this Government and in you looking at that institution of WASA, and as I said before, you are spending \$14 billion and if, at the end of the day, I could say, if you give me \$14 billion now, because you were in a position, you were able to get it, I would have been able to do so much more with that money at WASA; \$150 million of that money was spent towards a VSEP programme. There was a decision that \$120 million, borrowed money, towards doing a particular VSEP programme at WASA because it was felt the organization was overstaffed. The organization had 2,000 people benefiting from having to leave the organization through VSEP and arrangements to use up the \$150 million; \$150 million. At the end of the period we started with 5,000 workers, we ended, after 2,000 people left, we ended with 5,300 workers, again, that is the type of efficiency and management. It meant we had the money, there was money around, and therefore it was therefore around to be there to be spent and to be wasted, but here it is you are having a programme for VSEP. You have decided that the staff numbers needed to come down and after the programme, after you have implemented it, after the country continues to spend money to have it, you end up taking back the staff numbers to exactly where they were. That again is an idea and continued mismanagement that went on in that particular institution. They spent money on a number of projects. When we went in, when they went there, there were a number of—a 12-month action plan, 109

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projects that needed to be done, of course borrowed again another \$1 billion to do these projects, but borrowing money to do projects does not mean that projects get finished.

When you really go through the number of projects, again you recognize that only 50 to 60 per cent of the projects were actually done. A lot of the projects ended up with overruns, and then, at the end of the day, in spite of having all of this money at your disposal, we are now left with close to—over \$56 million of people making claims on us. With my little subvention at a time when we are trying to do more with less, we have to find \$56 million to pay people because the projects would finish, money done, and the people want pay. As a matter of fact, if you look at that whole idea of trade creditors, you look into the accounts of WASA, you will see that the amount of trade creditors in 2010 was 245. That is the amount of people that they need to pay. That is what they inherited, \$245 million. By 2014 that figure was actually up to 550 million. That is the kind of money that you have out there. So, again, you are having money, and that is why I say sometimes I get a little bit emotional when I talk about this, because it hurts me to see, as a country, the amount of money that we spent in this institution, and we spent it, \$14 billion. And, at the end of the day, if you will spend it and the country will get value for the money, we would have been so much better off today. The leaks that you are talking about, and if you go back in the records, the number of leaks, and the NRW was 50 per cent since 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014. It did not reduce. It is the number that WASA has been claiming for a long time, and, yes, we want it fixed, but it could be fixed when you have money to fix it. You understand? You have money, fix it, but when you take the money and the money that is being spent to lay the pipes, we are now doing it at almost 50 per cent of the

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price.

That gives you an idea—the only people that were making and who benefited from all of that money being spent are the contractors that were outside. The contractors that were getting the bill, the money; all those contractors where you could have been doing jobs internally and you are doing it outside, those are the people who were getting the money. And then you ended up, as I said before, with \$1 billion worth of money being spent on a water treatment plant of which we have gotten no water. Ill-conceived project in the first place—ill-conceived project in the first place, and therefore all of that is what has put us in our present predicament. All of that is where we are. That is what we inherited, but, again, you know, some of us when you say that, you are not supposed to say that. That is not good things to say, you are supposed to then just move on. You are supposed to then just move on, but I am supposed to just move on. When you had the money, you spent it, you wasted it, and now I am here—you know what was the revenue of Trinidad and Tobago, the average revenue of Trinidad and Tobago in years 2012—2013, 2013—2014, 2014—2015?

Hon Senator: It is a history lesson?

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: It is not a history lesson, it is facts, facts that facts do not lie. At the end of the day the average revenue that you are talking about that the country got was \$56 billion. That is the money—that is why so much money was able to be given to WASA, and given to this one, and pay the contractors while you have workers not working, and “yuh la-la laying”, and we “going dong de” road. Because \$56 billion came in. Do you know much money we have for the three years that we have been in, what is the average that we have gotten in money coming in, that is, our revenue? The country’s revenue is 45, 36, 42. \$42

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billion, from 56 to 42; 56 to 42. That is \$14 billion; 56 to 42, that is the figures. So of course if you have—if that is your drop in revenue, if that is your drop in revenue, and, yes, admittedly, WASA, admittedly because of that, you also, because of that, the amount of money that the Government could allow or could afford to give WASA to fix the problem is now less.

In addition to that, in addition to having all that money, the records will show, as was mentioned by the Minister of Finance in his statement in the Lower House when he talked about coming down to the end that the Government spent close to—what was the figure?—where they took the debt servicing, the debt servicing went up to close to 60 per cent based on the movements and the money in the election year that were spent. So, again, look at responsible Government that you are talking about. You are taking the country's debt servicing at a time when there was lots of money, you took the debt servicing level up to close to 60 per cent. We all know, we have all heard the figures about—well, yes, we know, 60, 65 is where you have to keep it, because then you would get in trouble. But after all of the money that your Government got to then at that point in time to be borrowing and taking the country and leaving us with a wiggle room where we started with a debt servicing getting close to 60 per cent. We are now operating about 61, and we are there trying to manage because we cannot borrow as much money to do the type of capital expenditure that you were able to do. And therefore as a country that is why we will expect that when you get money to spend, whoever gets, whoever has the privilege at the time along that continuum of management, when you get the money that you spend it in an effective manner. So at the end of the day, Madam President, you know, you have money—anyhow.

So, you know, at the end of the day, you know, the Government, when we—

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[*Interruption*] You are right, when there was money there was also heightened expenditure, heightened expenditure, and therefore, again, the expenditure when you had money you had expenditure in the last three years averaging \$56.6 billion. Again, yes, there was money to spend; yes, there was money to spend, and, yes, money was spent, and if you take WASA, for example, money was spent, but as we have always been saying, what do we have to show for the money? What do we have to show for the money, and that to me is the crux of what the difference is between that Government, the previous, and this Government. This Government is about making the hard decisions; making the hard decisions. We are not kicking the pan down the road. We are not seeing that WASA's productivity is low and the workers are not working, and our solution is to go out there and bring contract labour because we are creating employment. I mean, I have to believe that there are other ulterior motives associated with doing that, because that just does not make sense. It does not make sense. What you need to do is to fix and get WASA's productivity up.

Now, admittedly, I heard the Senator, when he picks up his phone and he makes a complaint with WASA, we have not gotten it perfect because I have to agree that the time between what the citizens have to respond to leaks and queries, it takes too long; it takes too long. It takes too long even to get into WASA, but I assure you the problem is not—the problem is to go in there and do the hard work and take the hard decisions to fix the systems and procedures so that you will be able to save and make the Authority more efficient, and it is not to outsource. It is not to outsource a switchboard system and hire more telephone operators while you have telephone operators inside there. That is not the solution.

You know, I will digress a little bit because I have it here as one of my

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notes, you know, I heard a statement being made about the gas and, you know, the fact that we were talking about the super, the price of the super gas, and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is ripping off the people, and so forth. You know, I remember that particular statement. I was doing some research, and, yes, you know, we are a blessed country, you know. Before this last gas increase, Trinidad and Tobago had the distinction about being the 25th lowest country in the world for super gas; 25th. So there were some adjustments.

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We have now moved out of 150 countries to what? The 33rd; that is where we are. So the price of gas in this country, we are the lowest in the Caribbean, the third in the Western Hemisphere for gas and the 33rd in the world—33rd in the world. Madam President, when Sen. Mark talks about the price, and we are putting burden and additional taxes on the people and so forth, we have to bring that into context as to where we are.

The reality is, as we attempt to manage a very difficult situation in this country, a situation that we inherited, with a bloated level of expenditure and a declining revenue, it calls for prudence, it calls for management, it calls for astute management. Therefore, that is what it is that this Government has been attempting to do in all the areas going forward. It is what we have been trying to do in the Ministry of Health that resulted in those levels of savings. It is what we have been trying to do in the Ministry of Public Utilities, and it is what I will continue to do in the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Yes, I am mindful of the challenges that I have before me in the Ministry of Public Utilities, and I wish, I wish that I had available to me the type of resources that were available to the past regime. I wish that. But if wishes were horses—

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well ride. The reality is I do not, and I have to then try to do and continue to do more with less. I do not think that I should stand and apologize for trying to make utilities like WASA more efficient.

Going forward, as things get a little bit better and as the economy continues its turnaround, and as we continue to move in the right direction, we will have more money available as we have now, this year, to drill more wells, to fix more pipes, and we will do it at the lower cost, which is about 15 per cent lower than what it was done before, and therefore we assure this country that we will then get a lot more pipes laid, and we will drill a lot more wells. I assure you, I assure you, that we will not be entering into any projects whereby we will be incurring debt of \$1 billion, supposedly to get 10 million gallons of water, and end up getting zero—end up getting zero. That is the legacy of the past regime, and that is not going to be our legacy.

So, Madam President, I am very proud to be part of this Government. I am very proud to be part of this leadership, [*Desk thumping*] that is attempting, step by step, step by step, to bring a certain level of efficiency in our operations. We did it with Petrotrin. [*Interruption*] We did it with TSTT—we did it with TSTT—and we are doing it step by step in WASA. I will continue to ensure—I will continue to ensure without any apologies, that waste, and wasted cars and even things like cell phones, that wherever I could save a dime in the organization so that at the end of the day I would be able to contribute back to the Treasury and then allow the poor people of this country, the poor people of this country, the ones who really deserve—the ones who really deserve the assistance, not the contractors, not giving out the contracts to people, the savings that you get will rebound to the poor people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] The only way you could do that is by getting rid

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of corruption and getting rid of inefficiencies, and that is what management is all about.

Management is not just about spend, spend, spend, waste, waste, waste, waste, “gimme, gimme, gimme”, take, take, take. That is not management; management is about prudent looking at your resources, managing it effectively and trying to run an efficient organization.

With those few words, Madam President, I thank you, and I thank you for allowing me to speak.

Sen. Khadijah Ameen: Madam President, I want to thank you for this opportunity to contribute, and I wear red as a national colour today, [*Desk thumping*] because I am a patriot of Trinidad and Tobago, and I stand here with the expectation that this was an opportunity for the Government to give an account, and particularly for Ministers to give an account of their stewardship, because their claim is, the claim of this Government is that in many instances the variations, and even the transfers within the Ministries as outlined by the hon. Minister in the Ministry, when she piloted this Bill, the Government credited the need for moving the money and their justification for saving as efficiencies. But if we really go through each of them, we will see where it is misleading to say that there were efficiencies, because in almost every instance where there is a transfer, where there is a reduction, it is because of inefficiencies such as failure to award contracts and failure to deliver on their promises.

Madam President, as I sat here listening to the speaker before me, I do not think I have ever seen the hon. Minister Le Hunte so agitated in this House. I was so concerned for him at one point. I am still very concerned, because apart from being concerned about his health, he might, you know, send up his blood pressure

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there, but my concern is that as a Minister with a Ministry such as Ministry of Public Utilities, responsible for so many critical services in Trinidad and Tobago, in his entire time speaking, he spoke about all kinds of things, except the performance and delivery of his utilities, because he had none to report. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister lamented \$377 million which he claimed was spent by state organizations in 2014. I do not know if he was speaking specifically on WASA, but he was speaking about state organizations in general. This was in 2014 under the People's Partnership Government. But let me tell you, that was \$377 million in delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I can tell you, that in 2014 and in fact, during the term of the People's Partnership Government, more people had water in their taps than the people today. [*Desk thumping*] More pipelines were laid than are being laid, than have been laid for the entire term of this Government. More maintenance and upgrades were done.

The potholes, the wastage, you face the complaints of course. Every government has a duty to repair pipelines as they burst. But you have not been doing the work, and then you complain as though it is the fault of the citizens, and you fail to account today for the work, if any, has been done by WASA or by the Ministry of Public Utilities, even though you went as far back as 2014. Madam President, I was not sure if it was a campaign speech or an opportunity to account to the people for performance in this Parliament.

Madam President, he went back mentioning about a time of plenty. He spoke about legacy. I was shocked to hear the Minister listing Petrotrin as an accomplishment of this Government, as an achievement. I wonder if the Minister remembers that in March 2010, Calder Hart disappeared with \$802 million in

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contracts that were awarded to him by the board of UDeCOTT, of which the hon. Minister was a member at the time—\$802 million. Was that waste?

Sen. The Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order, 46(1).

Madam President: I will allow Sen. Ameen some leeway. Sen. Ameen, continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Ameen: Madam President, the waste, he spoke about waste, and I just want to refer him to the Uff Commission of Enquiry and the report that came out of that. But while I hear him talk about waste, and he indicated that some of the areas of waste that would be cut out would be cell phones and vehicles and so on. I thought: Cell phones? This Minister is speaking of cell phones when just a week or two ago millions of dollars in cell phones were found abandoned in a warehouse in Miami or somewhere in the US, and that was reported? Let him account for that. That falls under TSTT. And the Minister is speaking about wastage? He is speaking about cell phones?

So while I agree you find ways to trim what you may call “wastage”, or certain luxuries that workers might enjoy, you are cutting down on the allowances and so on of the workers. I do not think Ministers are cutting down on their own allowances for cell phones, but millions of dollars in cell phones abandoned in a warehouse and the Minister cannot account for it. Let him talk about that. [*Desk thumping*] So if he wants to talk about legacy, and if he wants to talk about delivery, let him deal with that.

I always say, you know, I like to talk after the Minister of Public Utilities. He came today, he was shouting. I mean, there is no Standing Order against shouting, but he came today and he was so agitated. When I hear him speak today as a paragon of virtue, and then—

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Madam President: Speak to me.

Sen. K. Ameen: Sorry. When I hear him speak today and criticize the performance of the previous government, and he is always bashing, and he seems to forget or he seems to want the population to forget his role under the previous PNM Government. But we will not let them forget. That was a time of plenty, because plenty was wasted and plenty was stolen.

Madam President, I just wanted to deal with that, but I also want to remind the Minister that in the *Review of the Economy*, when he spoke about the national public sector debt, I just want to refer him to page 103 where in 2014/2015 the national public sector debt was listed as 47.8 per cent of GDP, and in every year since that it has gone up. In fact, in September 2018 it is listed as 60.9, and it is projected to continue increasing. So I do not know why you would come and try to give the impression of something different.

If you came to account on a Ministry, I think the public would want to hear from every Minister, and particularly to those who have Ministries that have a direct impact on their lives, they would want to hear, okay these are the areas that we had to trim and this is why, but this is our performance. But this Government has no performance to account for. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I just want to very quickly go into some areas to highlight certain things. Under several explanations for the transfers, the reasons for savings ranged from—I will just pick out a few from under a few Ministries. In the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, that is Head 62, you had an instance of \$1.8 million which was considered a saving. The explanation is that funds provided for contractors' retention fee for the establishment of the Community Education Training and Information and Resource Centre will not be

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utilized as works did not commence on the project. Is that a saving or is that a failure by the Ministry to deliver?

Another explanation was with regard to a reduced number of requests received from administrative districts to conduct observation of Community Development Day, and also to administer community skills training classes. This was just about \$.8 million, but because I have worked in communities I know how important community skills training is in empowering people, but also in bringing communities together. But my question is: Why have there been a reduced number of requests? Is it a directive of the officers of the Ministry? Are these projects being suppressed? We have a number of instances where higher ups tell officers, look, let us cut back on X, Y and Z because we really want to have a saving. So I think that is an important question.

Another instance was approvals to implement the operations of 40 community facilities have not been finalized, and therefore the funds will not be fully utilized. That was \$2.5 million, 40 community facilities. We do not have the details before us in terms of where these facilities are located, but certainly it is again a reflection of some inefficiencies within that Ministry.

Just as I strongly advocate for the empowerment of communities, I also advocate for the empowerment of young people. Another area that I saw under several Ministries listed as an explanation in terms of a reason for saving, was that there was no recruitment under the University Graduate Programme. There was the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, but there was also the Ministry of Works and Transport, and one other Ministry where we had about \$1 million each.

My concern and my question is, I am sure that there are graduates of universities who want to be a part of this programme. I am sure there are so many

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hundreds of thousands of young people looking for jobs. In fact, many graduates are lamenting the fact that their parents have invested so much in them going to university, and then they are not getting employment opportunities. But you have at least \$3 million, \$1 million in each Ministry that is considered a saving. That is not in my view, Madam President, a saving. You are strangling the young people of our nation by denying them participation in this University Graduate Recruitment Programme. [*Desk thumping*] The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government also had cut down \$1 million for this programme, Minister Kazim Hosein. This is happening in conjunction with a number of other areas where opportunities can be provided for young people who have academic qualifications.

I want to move very quickly to Head 78, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services where a total of just over \$42 million—

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, if I may, just for a little clarification as we progress in this debate. What we have before us is the Bill that is dealing with the specific Ministries, increase, decrease. There was information circulated about transfers within Ministries, and I am just reminding Members that the Bill is the focal point and not the information about the transfers within Ministries. Okay; I am giving you some leeway, but I just want to point that out because I do not want us getting so specific into that information.

Sen. K. Ameen: Okay; thank you, Madam President. I was actually replying to what the Minister when she piloted her presentation, where she indicated under several Heads these transfers. So I have some concerns based on her presentation, in certain Ministries, not all. So I hope it will be acceptable if it is in reply to what the Minister raised.

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Madam President: I did say that I was giving that because I do not want the debate to go off the beaten track. The track is supposed to be the Bill. I understand, and I have been giving you leeway and I will allow you to continue, but I may have to make an intervention at some point.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President.

So one of my biggest concerns has to do with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services in terms of programmes that are being hampered by the—well I have to say it is the Government's new approach, the Government's policy approach, when it comes to dealing with the social safety net. That approach has been reflected in their budgets. It has been reflected in other Finance Bills that have come before the Parliament, but I think it is getting to a dangerous point, where we have seen the discontinuation of critical units within that Ministry that have been affected by these transfers.

So, for instance, when a decision is taken at the beginning of 2017 to not renew the contracts of officers in a certain unit such as the National Poverty Reduction and Eradication Policy Unit, that unit effectively is disbanded. That unit is responsible for providing data and recommending policies which will guide the Ministry, and I think that is an essential backbone.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order, 46(1).

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, I will allow you to finish the point but I will just caution you on what I have said before.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President.

As I continue, I am just reiterating. I do not know why the Member opposite is so concerned, but I am raising my concerns based on the indications from the Minister that she mentioned in her piloting, that I have concerns, and I just want to

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put those concerns on the record.

Madam President, this particular Ministry, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, had \$20 million reported as savings, but when you go into the reasons, the reasons are listed as failure to commence, setbacks in implementation, project cancellation, delays in obtaining statutory approvals, and several things that I think they point to failure, not to savings.

There are a lot more concerns that I have with this particular Ministry, but I would only mention one, and that is specific to persons with disabilities where the Ministry has cancelled the Project Centre for Persons with Disabilities, and they are expected now to partner with the Ministry of Health instead, to go through a new programme. But I want to appeal on behalf of persons differently-abled, that we must continue to promote equalization for persons with disabilities through training, through information, through research and empowerment, and this Government's direction—

Sen. Khan: Madam President, I go at 46(1) again. We are not asked to debate that. The Appropriation Bill is clear. There are specific Ministries it covers.
[Crosstalk]

Madam President: So please, let me just say once again. We have a Bill before us. The Bill deals with increases and decreases in specific Ministries. Information was circulated. I think Sen. Ameen you are trying to make certain points. You can make the points with reference to the Bill. I do not think you need to go into such detail to the information that had been circulated.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President.

I just want to point out to share with you that the variations as listed in the Bill, and as I touch on the ones that I have concerns about I am also touching on

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the transfers, and most of it has to do with what was mentioned by the Minister. I understand your concern, Madam President, and I want to go to an Item in the Variation of Appropriation, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government where there is a reduction, a decrease of \$8 million.

Madam President, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government has been the subject of much debate and much anticipation. I think the present Head of Government Business was the Minister at the time when so much was spoken about in terms of reform of local government. I expected that you would have had some direction, that the Ministry would be going in some direction with regard to putting things in place for that reform, and for the additional responsibilities, and empowering regional corporations. From my investigation this decrease from local government is going to ttconnect.

There are many instances within that Ministry where delivery has been hampered because of lack of resources. To have this \$8 million listed as going out of the Ministry, is only the tip of the iceberg, because there are many key areas in terms of contracts or infrastructural development that has a direct impact on citizens that is also reflected in the transfers. For instance, you had a promise by the Minister to employ over 100 municipal police officers, for example, and this is something that the Ministry was not able to deliver on. They only recruited about 50. This is reported as a saving, and they compliment themselves for not being able to deliver on what they should have done. It was mentioned in the budget, it was mentioned in the manifesto, and it ought to have been incorporated as part of your delivery, but unfortunately because of your failure to deliver you now report it as a saving.

There are a number of vacant posts in that Ministry and in several regional

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corporations that are not being filled. I say this because I am familiar with local government, where regional corporations require the guidance of the Ministry because those positions are not filled within the regional corporations. There are so many delays in the recruitment and selection process. In one area it was reported at about \$5 million, and that is just the one area. I am saying again that delays in the recruitment and selection process, and the failure to hire the officers required is not a saving, it is not an achievement, it is a record of inefficiency and incompetence. [*Desk thumping*]

One of the things that local government is often measured by is its ability to build roads, drains, pavements, and I saw where several regional corporations, it was listed that there were savings from Port of Spain, San Fernando, San Juan/Laventille and Tunapuna/Piarco corporation, and the reason given was not all their planned works were implemented and not all the contracts for goods and services were awarded. I know that the Minister cannot be happy that \$25 million could not be utilized by those regional corporations.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, at this juncture we will suspend the sitting and we will return at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ameen, you have 15 minutes. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. And I am a bit happy that we went on a break because the Members opposite were getting so agitated, and I think now that they have refreshed themselves, I think we could go forward so much better.

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And, Mr. Vice-President, before we went on the break I was sharing my concern for what is listed as “savings” to the tune of \$25 million in several corporations namely, Port of Spain, San Fernando, San Juan/Laventille and Tunapuna/Piarco where not all planned works were implemented.

There is a total decrease of \$8 million in variations under the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and this \$25 million is a reflection, in my view, of a disempowerment of local government, and it is in line with the type of bastard child behaviour, if I may call it that, that local government has experienced over many decades, not only this PNM administration, but many decades under the PNM.

And I am asking: Has support been provided to these regional corporations? Have they been provided with the technical expertise to ensure that they utilize these moneys? I am almost certain—I am very certain that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, that the mayors and chairmen of these regional corporations cannot be happy with this lack of achievement and these planned works not being done.

Mr. Vice-President, I mentioned earlier that one of the promises with regard to this Ministry had to do with where it was budgeted for 100 municipal police officers to be recruited. And the explanation is that there is a lengthy recruitment and selection process; and you have over \$10 million that is now being used for something else, but you have a shortage of municipal police officers. These are areas that I have concerns with.

I really feel that this \$8 million that is being moved out of this Ministry under Head 42, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government that part of this or, at least, all of it perhaps should have been invested in regional corporations

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in improving their capability to handle whatever reform is going to bring in terms of further responsibilities, bigger responsibilities.

I see no indication that the Ministry, that the Government is heading in that direction to further empower local government. So while much ado has been made about local government reform, I see no work being done in that direction, and I feel more and more every day that passes, Mr. Vice-President, I feel more and more that local government reform is talk, and I am eagerly anticipating their bringing that Bill.

Mr. Vice-President, there was, way back in 2013 there was an Act, there was a Dog Control Act, and since that time there were discussions and so on about rolling out the implementation of that. I was very surprised that in the 2017/2018 budget, a sum of close to \$2 million, it was just over \$2 million was allocated for that.

There is still no Memorandum of Understanding established by the Trinidad and Tobago Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and something like that has to be established before you spend this money in its implementation. And if this—to me, this is poor planning because the Ministry must have known that they do not have a Memorandum of Understanding, and after so much time to come forward and say, “Look we do not have an MOU therefore, we cannot utilize the money”; to me, this is poor planning.

At the beginning of the fiscal year they would have known, and the process should really be, establish the MOU, you would have a budget of how much it would cost to implement, and then allocate the money, so that when you get the money you could execute. But here, again, you have a failure on the part of the Ministry not to build a road, or drain or fix a bridge, you know, failure to have a

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Memorandum of Understanding done, and this is after how many years, since the beginning of this Government's term in office. I am saying that, even in your budgeting, you should be showing your priorities.

Mr. Vice-President, another area that I feel this \$8 million should not have been transferred out of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government has to do with personnel expenditure and that is money to hire people. There are a number of vacant positions in the Ministry. Some are on the establishment, and there is a procedure for those to be filled. However, in the meanwhile there is a lot of contract employment going on, and to me this weakens the institution of local government. It weakens the institutional memory within the various regional corporations and so on.

So apart from the municipal police officers which I mentioned earlier, there are also a number of other positions in all regional corporations, and I feel that these moneys could have been utilized to strengthen the human resource side of local government and of regional corporations. There is a need to attract qualified people to regional corporations so that they serve even at that level of government that interacts best with the community.

When you have persons who are experienced in urban and planning design, in financial management, in public health safety, who are well-qualified in that as professionals, you have efficiency at the regional corporations, and then you will not end up with \$25 million being removed from four regional corporations for infrastructure that could have been better spent delivering to people; so that is an area. And I see that while you have a shortage of people, a shortage of human resource, you have savings being listed because you have so many people retiring, the vacancies not being filled, and the additional money that you would have

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catered for that is being considered as a savings.

Mr. Vice-President, through you to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, wherever he is at this time, he is not in the Chamber, I want to plead with him that, that is not, that is a sign of inefficiency, that is a sign that things are not working well within your Ministry, and I want to plead with you, Mr. Minister, to pay attention to that.

Mr. Vice-President, this is another Ministry where the recruitment—under the university graduate recruitment programme was stopped, a total of \$1 million was allocated to that so that \$1 million is now considered as saving.

I recall that there were times when under the People's Partnership term in Government when graduate trainees were deployed to various regional corporations. And initially, you know, they were just being sent to make photocopies and do minor errands, but these young people in some cases had Masters and they were able to be better utilized in, for instance, I recall specifically the planning division, where you had the 14 regional plans for each regional corporation, and that, of course, was tied to a national development plan. But that these young people were able to work in their specific field where they were qualified, give service to the community and national service.

So there is a need to continue to engage those people, and what was a particular point of pride was that some of them, even though they abroad to study, they were able to come back and to contribute to projects that would make huge differences in the very community that they came from. So that is an area I think should be explored. I know the Minister of—

Mr. Vice-President: Member, you have five minutes.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you. I know the Minister of Rural Development and

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Local Government often talks about inspiring young people. He speaks of himself and how he first came in as young person, and I hope that that is an area, the university graduate recruitment programme, that he would be able to make, to advocate for that programme to be utilized to bring young professionals into the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to end by saying that in every area in this variation it is very clear, and I think the Government has made no secret that their purpose for doing this variation is really to supplement the Ministry of Finance. It is not that they, I mean, the speaker before me spoke about making things more efficient and have savings and so on, but I want to urge this Government that as you speak about savings, it is not enough to just blame the previous administration.

You have served out—you have crossed the halfway mark in your term in office. This is an opportunity for you to account for what you have achieved, and if you continue, then your achievement would, at the end of your term, would be to blame the UNC, to blame the Partnership, to blame Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Every one of you when we speak about legacy as the previous, as the hon. Minister of Public Utilities indicated, ask yourself what would be the legacy of this Government? What will be the legacy of each Ministry? What have you achieved?

And the truth is that there is very little or nothing to show. There is very little infrastructural development. There is very little maintenance of even simple things like watercourses. I mean, selling sugar cake and tamarind ball on Caribbean Airlines cannot be an achievement of a Ministry.

So, I want to say, Mr. Vice-President, that the thing is, I know that these Ministers are very hard-pressed to share achievements, because this PNM

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Government has no achievements to show. [*Desk thumping*] All they have done, their achievements include Petrotrin, sending home thousands of workers. And, in fact, I have a list of all the Ministries where workers contracts were ended; that is their legacy. Every time this Government comes into office, they hit and they damage major state enterprises. In the last PNM incarnation it was Caroni (1975). This time it is Petrotrin, and they have already started on T&TEC.

I did not hear the Minister of Public Utilities make one mention of the 500 workers that were sent home from TSTT; he did not say anything about that, but yet you are accounting for your time in office. So your legacy is to tax the people of Trinidad and Tobago, your legacy is to send people on the breadline, your legacy is to shut down and hurt and harm Trinidad and Tobago. That is not a legacy to be proud of, and certainly the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are watching. I thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Dillon-Remy.

Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy: [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for allowing me to contribute to this Bill, the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2019. I will restrict my comments to the section that deals with the—I would say, the “savings from the Ministry of Health of \$211 million”. And I say in inverted commas, because though moneys may not have been spent, my question is: Was it the appropriate place to be sending the money to the Ministry of Finance, when there were so many other needs still occurring within the Ministry of Health? [*Desk thumping*]

I do thank the Minister for showing that there could be creativity within the Ministry in terms of finding solutions to situations that you did not face before. In other words, you have less money to spend, and you were using creative means of

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trying to get to the population the services that they needed.

For instance, the section that deals with drugs and other related materials and supplies where 119 million, I would say dollars, was not spent. The Minister talked about a rationalization of the formulary listing. I do applaud that action because it allowed for medication to be provided for the diseases that they were supposed to be addressing, but you had a decreased number, but in other words, what they were trying to do was to make sure that you had a consistent supply of medication rather than having a larger number and less medication available; so I do applaud them for that.

There was also a discussion in the Lower House where the Minister of Health talked about the significant increase in the drugs that were provided through the CDAP system. And, again, that is applaudable because CDAP allows the population to have medication available to them from the pharmacies that are closer to their homes rather than having always to go into the public health care system to get medication, and that is applaudable. So the fact that they were able to creatively increase the amount of medication being supplied through CDAP, again, is applaudable.

There was a specific reference in the Lower House to increase the number of tablets of a drug called Nifedipine. Nifedipine is one of the drugs that is used for management of hypertension. And the statement was made that instead of giving 750,000 tablets, that amount has been increased to 1.1 million, a 46 per cent increase and, again, that is applaudable. However, the question is: Is it enough?

And from what I understand from the public sector pharmacies, certainly in Tobago, they do not have enough Nifedipine for the management of hypertension. And when I spoke to the pharmacies in Tobago that handle the CDAP medication,

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they also say that what is supplied to them is certainly not anywhere near what the public requires.

So my question is, the increased efficiencies that have been obtained by making sure that you get more CDAP drugs; it is applaudable, but we have to look at whether it is meeting the need. And I am saying that specifically because hypertension is a significant problem that we have, it is a major cause of morbidity, strokes, et cetera, and therefore, while we are talking about savings, we should be looking at making sure that the population gets what they need.

I would also mention the second area where the medical treatment of nationals in institutions; \$20 million was not spent in that area. And the explanation is that there were higher number of patients treated in the public health care institutions during that year. I would like to point out specifically as it relates to cardiac care within the public health sector.

Another point was made that they were able to—the waiting list for surgery. There was another point made later down that said that \$7 million was saved in that area, and they specifically mentioned specific surgical procedures were also increased, namely cardiac surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and cataract surgeries performed by Cuban doctors; but I am talking specifically about the cardiac surgery. Within the health sector, as far as I am aware, cardiac surgery is provided by company called Advanced Cardiovascular Institute (ACI), and they were providing two open heart surgeries at the Port of Spain General Hospital, two open heart surgeries, I think, per month.

And since the problem with the earthquake and the closure of the central block at the Port of Spain General Hospital, there has been no cardiac surgeries performed within the public sector. It means therefore, that there may have been

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savings, I am not too sure whether that is where moneys would have been saved from, but my concern is the people who are waiting for cardiac surgery, and specifically as cardiovascular diseases are the most common cause of death within our population. And as anyone knows, it is a very important area, and my recommendation here is that we should be looking, in more detail, at what happens with that particular area.

I certainly would not like to know that if I have to access cardiac care, I will just have to wait indefinitely because it is not provided within the public sector. I do know that the Ministry of Health has done a lot of work as it relates to the non-communicable diseases policy that was put, and a lot of emphasis in that policy is being put on prevention of cardiovascular diseases, and that is very laudable. However, we have a population of people who are in need of care now, and we have to put emphasis on them.

Again, in the area of cardiac care, if a person comes within the public sector today, and you have an acute myocardial infarction or a heart attack and you come the public sector, the care that you receive is far from standard, actually it is way below standard. You may be able to get what is called a thrombolytic, where they give you medication to try to dissolve the clot, but standard says that within a certain time, some people say 90 minutes, some people say certain within a couple of hours you should be having an angiogram done, and the possibility of angioplasty where your arteries are opened. That is not available within the public sector.

So, I am saying, while we are talking about savings from the health sector, we still have a lot of stuff to do, and these specific areas are mentioned because of the morbidity and mortality that are caused by these diseases.

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My understanding is that there was a proposal for angioplasty—acute angioplasty—that was sent to the Ministry of Health in 2016; I not sure where that is. And while I am talking about this here, I would also mention that there was a specific programme that was set up by a previous—I think it was a PNM administration, I think it was 2010, where there was a relationship with the Johns Hopkins Medicine International, and they were providing Trinidad and Tobago with a service where they were helping us to put together a comprehensive system in place to deal with cardiac problems.

It may have fallen in-between governments, as we like to do, where something was set up by one government, and the next government comes in and puts it out, I do not know. But I know it was a significant intervention where they dealt with prevention, they dealt with what happens as you come into the institution, they even dealt with training of persons, training of doctors to deal with cardiac care. Some hospitals like San Fernando General have benefited from and they have, at least, shown some improvement in their care since that time but, again, we are far from where we should be in an area that is so important in Trinidad and Tobago, and I would like the Minister to look at this.

The other point I would make is in relation to the regional health authorities not spending, I would say, not spending rather than saving, \$26 million. The filling of vacancies was not finalized as the recruitment and selection process for doctors and nurses from Cuba is ongoing.

While I do appreciate the services that have been given by the medical and nursing professionals from Cuba over the years, to see something like that in Trinidad and Tobago today where we have so many doctors coming out university and not being employed.

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And though I know these doctors are mainly junior doctors that are not employed, I also know that there are many of our professionals who have been trained abroad and are specialists, when they come back into the system, they do not stay very long. And that is because we—our system does not tend to provide them with what they need to be able to work efficiently and therefore, they go away. And as a result we still have a situation where we are employing people from other countries, when we should be employing our own. And I would just like to say that there, and note that the \$26 million, we have to think of what else we could be doing with that, instead of getting people from other countries.

I must say, again, it has nothing to do with people coming from Cuba because they have provided us with excellent services over the years. I am concerned about longevity and sustainability over the years with people providing the services for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Finally, I would just like to make one comment on what happens in health care services between, let us say, between governments. And I am saying that because many times our sector has been done a bad deal because of how we manage our services. A system is started with very good possibilities, somebody else comes and they just throw it out. And I am saying that as it relates to important care concerning our—the things that are concerning us, morbidity and mortality.

The current Minister of Health has done something which I think was excellent where, when he came into office there was a problem with maternal mortality. There was something that was started by a previous government, and he took the recommendations that were made by professionals who understood the system, understood what needed to be done, and recommendations were made, and

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then he took it and put it into effect. I commend him and systems like that, and the reason for that is, when you do, you are looking long-term. You are looking at the nation rather than looking at the politics. And I just want to commend the Ministry of Health for that. And I just want to say thank you for contributing, Sir. [*Desk thumping*]

5.30 p.m.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I rise to speak on a matter before us, which is a Bill entitled the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2019, which is under consideration by this honourable House. The Bill seeks to approve the variation following the final review of the 2018 accounts. As of this result it was identified under Head of Expenditure 43, that the Ministry of Works and Transport had a reduction of \$43 million.

Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of Works and Transport's core responsibilities are to provide public infrastructure and transportation for the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago, and under the Ministry of Works and Transport there are several agencies that fall under the ambits of the Minister of Works and Transport. Two of these agencies were identified in the Bill of having a reduction, and in one instance a savings: They are the Public Transport Service Corporation and the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. And in my brief remarks this evening I will give an indication and a report on these two agencies. But before I go, I see the hon. Sen. Ameen saying very good, which brings me back to her contribution, and I just want to put on the record that Ms. Ameen spoke about—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ameen.

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Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sen. Ameen, sorry. Sen. Ameen spoke firstly about Mr. Calder Hart, and I just want to remind Sen. Ameen and the bench of the UNC, and the national population that the UNC was given a report on the entire fiasco, as they called it, with Mr. Calder Hart, and they had five years in Government, and they spent billions of dollars in legal fees. Billions, not millions, not hundreds of millions, not thousands, billions, and I remember reading the newspaper, Mr. Calder Hart begging to come to Trinidad, and today, today, after billions of dollars were spent we have to hear Khadijah Ameen still talking about—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ameen.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sen. Ameen talking about Calder Hart, after five years of UNC reign.

Sen. Ameen also spoke about savings as incompetent. The fact that there was some savings described as incompetent, I just want to again, draw Sen. Ameen's attention to the 2013 report, where under Mr. Howai, there was also a significant—he laid in the House an Act to provide for—same Bill—the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago, financial year ending September 30, 2013, where there also was a significant reduction of a total close to \$2 billion.

Sen. Ameen: We had achievements to show.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: And this was under Mr. Howai. And again, in 2012 under the hon. Minister Dookeran where again, they had a saving, and if incompetence is the reason for saving, then the incompetence started in 2012 and 2013. [*Interruption*] So, this is a normal process in budgeting. [*Desk thumping*] It is a normal process and it has to come back to the House so we can do the final debate, and we can close the accounts. So it has nothing to do with incompetence

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as Sen. Ameen was trying to tie the Government to.

Mr. President, let me go straight into the—I would go straight to the Port Authority, and at the Port Authority there was a saving of \$15 million. And it is a simple explanation for the saving. It is a simple explanation. If we want to start and suggest that it was incompetent then I will have to give a history as to how we got to the savings. We got to the saving because the two vessels were budgeted for dry docking. Two vessels. Unfortunately, Cabinet took a decision after the dry docking of the *T&T Spirit* that we should not dry-dock the *T&T Express*, for a simple reason. We spent close to 70—65 to 70 million—on dry docking the *T&T Spirit*. The *T&T Express* was in a worse condition, and there was no guarantee, just like the *T&T Spirit*, that after you spend 65, 70, \$75 million, that you would be able to get any guaranteed service. The reason for that is simple: In 2013 a decision was taken by the Port Authority after having Bay Ferries who are the maintenance of the *T&T Express* and the *T&T Spirit*, when these vessels came in they came in with a management contract from Bay Ferries; 2007, that contract was for three years. It went on to 2010. In 2010 the Government changed the contract—or just before the Government changed it was renewed up to 2013, for another three years. In 2013 a decision was taken, and it is important that we put this on the record, because we keep hearing about the vessels break down in 2016, and we have problems from 2016. It is important to know how the port reached to where it reached.

In 2013 that contract, a decision was taken to terminate these people, and the contract was renewed for two years rather than three years. And in 2015 a decision was taken to renew the contract for one year, and to hire someone at the port to have that transition done, so that our locals will be able to manage the boat. So the

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decision was to renew it for one year, and they told Bay Ferries after that one year, “You gone, we taking over.” Nothing was put in place for us, and when that one year in 2016, when that contract ended, Bay Ferries departed, there was nothing in place to manage the ferries. But what was significant, the record shows that from 2013 they started to have problems with the providers. Because the providers knew that they were going to send them home. And as a result of that, the both ferries had challenges with the maintenance, and we had nobody in Trinidad who was capable—

Hon. Senator: Or Tobago.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Or Tobago, who was capable of managing these ferries. And that is why we were left in a position where the both ferries virtually collapsed on us at the same time, and that was the fiasco on the passenger side of the sea bridge.

But it is important to understand why that happened. It happened because of a bad decision, from 2013, to get rid of the maintenance team, who have been managing the ferries from 2007, where we had no problems at all, and putting nothing in place. And based on that decision and the conditions of the ferries, the Cabinet took a decision not to dry-dock the *T&T Express*. We would sell it as is, where is. And, as we speak, there is a tender out, which is supposed to close by next week, a public tender, under the guidance of the Port Authority and the CTB, for the sale of the *T&T Express*.

So, the money that was derived from that saving, and I say a saving because it is in truth, a fact, a saving; it would have been spent on the *T&T Express*, we did not do it. What we did with the money? It is just 15 million here.

Hon. Senators: Just 15 million?

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Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Because the amount that was saved—I say “just 15 million”, because the amount that was saved that was allocated to it was way more than that. What we did with that money is, on the “crust” of the election again in 2015, a decision was taken to give the port police a significant pay increase. That went on with negotiations for about three years, because as much as they promised it to them they did not sign off on it. We took some of that money and concluded the negotiations and we paid the port police. So, from the savings that we had, we utilized some for the port police, to pay them their back pay, which was about \$23 million, and other funds from that was distributed to other areas.

Unfortunately, there is a process to utilize to move money from one Vote to another. You have to actually write to the Minister of Finance, you have to do several things, and sometimes during that financial year that time may lapse on you and you lose some of the money. So, it is not that we just saved the money—the money was a saving. We tried to utilize it to pay other bills. I can tell you we move money around in the Ministry from these different areas. We had a Desilting Programme where we got an allocation of \$1 million for desilting. Now, \$1 million might be able to desilt maybe two rivers. Right? What we did at the Ministry is that we moved around money in 2018, and we were able, from these savings and so, and we spent close to \$35 million on desilting, and we were able to desilt 298 projects in 2018—[*Desk thumping*—a phenomenal achievement, because I remember when we had the mid-year review and I announced that we were going to attempt that, Members on the other side were saying that was impossible, we will not get nowhere close to that. We did 298 projects by just moving the money around [*Desk thumping*] and that was a great achievement, and a significant amount was done in central and south Trinidad. Mr. Vice-President—

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Sen. Ramdeen: Which part in south?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Vice-President, I can—the way forward for the port: yes, we did not dry dock the *T&T Express*. The Port Authority went out, through NIDCO for the tender for a fast ferry to substitute the *T&T Express*. In 2018 we also brought in the *Galleons Passage*.

Sen. Ameen: “Um-hmm”.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: And I know my friends on the other side are saying “Hmm.” Let me just give you again an update on the *Galleons Passage*. With all the bad-mouth that they tried to do on the *Galleons Passage*—

Sen. Ameen: “All the what we do?”

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—the *Galleons Passage* has done 98 trips.

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, one second.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Vice-President: Members, please allow the Minister to make his contribution. As much as there is crosstalk and mumbling going on it is getting a lil bit loud, so much so that I cannot hear the Minister when he is making his contribution. Minister continue.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, with all the bad-mouthing on the *Galleons Passage*, the *Galleons Passage* did 94 trips to and from Tobago. Ninety four. One trip was aborted, and the vessel came back to Trinidad. One trip, and that was because of rough seas, which is normal at this time of the year. Because when the *T&T Spirit* and the *T&T Express* were in service for that period, several times we had to take them out. This is a normal thing, and it is something called the spring tide. It is at this time of the year when the seas are normally rough and catamarans cannot operate at

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waves at over 3.5 metres. On that day the captain recognized that the waves were high and he turned back and came back to Port of Spain. So of 94 trips, one trip the *Galleons Passage* did not complete.

And the *Galleons Passage* to date has took across to Tobago backward and forward 24,551 passengers and close to 5,000 cars successfully. [*Desk thumping*] And I must say that the passenger load on the *Galleons Passage* the confidence is there where it is almost doubled from the first and second month that it started. The *Galleons Passage* was a vessel that the port had to bring in because of the effect of the removal and the conditions of our vessel. I am happy to announce that NIDCO at this point in time is about their final negotiation with the vessel that came out of the tender to substitute the passenger vessel.

So very soon we will have three vessels, three passenger vessels operating. That way we would be able to take out the *T&T Spirit*, send it on dry dock, and we will still have two vessels operating. So, once we take one vessel out, we will have two. That vessel is coming in on a two-year—one year plus one year time charter, by which time the two vessels, two passenger vessels that were ordered by this Government, will arrive. So, with the plans in place at the port, the passenger transportation to and from Tobago will be a thing of the past. What we will have is brand-new vessels operating. So, we have three vessels coming in. We have the *Galleons Passage* that is here, we have the *T&T Spirit*, and we have two new vessels coming in, and this is part of the rebuilding at the port.

At the port as well, there is no secret that there are a lot of challenges at the port. The Prime Minister spoke a lot about it at the joint select meeting. But the Port of Port of Spain really and truly has to refocus its energy on how to become a modern port. We still operate the Port of Port of Spain on a schedule with our

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labour force, where we are probably one of the only ports in the world that operates like that, where if you bring somebody out half an hour before, you have to pay them for four hours, and things like that. And if they work on Saturdays and Sundays it is double time, triple time and things like that.

So the port is making a presentation very soon to the Ministry. By the end of this month that will go to Cabinet as the way forward for the restructuring of the Port of Port of Spain. Because the Port of Port of Spain, at least the commissioners recognize, and I think the national population recognize that, that the port cannot be business as usual. Because our port is seeing less and less cargo. Because, one of the reasons for it is that we are very inefficient at the port. Our equipment is outdated. The Government can no longer afford to just be pumping money into the port. So, the Port of Port of Spain will be going through an exercise to get it a lot more efficient than it really is. There are a lot of security challenges at the port. That is no secret. We keep hearing about it all the time. Things missing on the port, vehicles missing on the port. But I must say, the commissioners at the port have recognized the challenges and they are coming with a way forward.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of the deficiencies at the port, again I just want to reiterate that we expect the things like the dredging of the channels and so to be addressed shortly. I understand a recommendation is coming to the Ministry shortly for the contract for the dredging which would allow the movement of the boats in the channel to be a lot easier. It would allow vessels to actually berth in their correct places and so, and that would help us significantly with the—when the tourist boats come to Trinidad, which affects the cargo boats going to Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, the other area that we had some saving—well, some reduction was at the PTSC. The savings at the PTSC was about \$29 million. And

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I use the term “saving”, the reduction in their budget was about \$29 million. A significant portion of that came from the parts. PTSC got 25 new buses last year, and they have another 35 new buses coming in shortly. A decision was taken by PTSC that most of the buses that we have were very old, and the cost to repair these buses was significant. And even when you repair—because PTSC’s challenge is that PTSC had 24 brands of buses on their fleet. Twenty-four brands. It is impossible to store parts for 24 brands of buses. A decision was taken in the past to rationalize the fleet, and bring it down to about four brands. Having taken that decision, a decision was taken by PTSC, rather than keep refurbishing these old buses, where you could not get the parts for—the parts would be down, and even when you get the parts, they are very expensive—PTSC took a decision to start to bring in new buses, bring the fleet down to four, and have a proper system for managing the maintenance of the buses.

What they decided to do is to refurbish some of the buses using parts from the older buses. And that has worked quite well, PTSC informed me that their fleet is up to 260 buses right now, just by getting new parts and using some of the parts from the older buses. Cabinet took a decision to bring in 300 buses. It is a simple reason for that. PTSC, the average fleet—the average bus in PTSC is about 15/20 years. The average lifespan for a bus should be about eight years. If every year you bring in 25 buses but you take out 40 buses out of circulation, there is no way you could get that fleet up to where you want it to reach. The PTSC fleet, if it has to do all the routes, has to be up to a minimum 500 buses. So you need 500 buses to do your route, you have 260 buses. It is impossible to service the required routes. And if you bring on 25 buses every year and you are taking 40 off, you will eventually end up with no buses.

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So, Government took a decision to put 300 buses into the fleet. We are negotiating now with PTSC as to how they would acquire those buses through a government-to-government arrangement with the Chinese Government. That process has started. But more than that, if you just bring 25 buses and throw it into the old system, very soon you would be back to square one, because, again, we do not have—in Trinidad we do not have a good reputation for maintenance and training. We hire a lot of people, and say, okay, come and train. Same thing with Bay Ferries. Bay Ferries came in 2007 with a contract to manage and train, Bay Ferries left in 2016, nobody was trained. Nobody was trained, but we paid them to train people.

So, what we are negotiating with these buses, and with PTSC, is to have a proper maintenance contract. If I am buying 300 buses from you, I want more than 300 buses. I want a system where I can have a guarantee you can have mechanics here training my people and everything at least for a five-year period. So, we are working with the supplier, whoever that supplier will be, we will have to have a proper maintenance plan and a proper scheduling, and everything for these buses. We also want to work with the UTT on a proper training process for a diesel mechanic, and the mechanics for the different types of buses. Because, you cannot be talking about a public transportation system, bringing in new buses and think that would solve the problem.

We are also looking at a proper IT system for PTSC where we can manage the fleet and manage the timing. People will go to PTSC and wait for three and four hours, and the bus just would not turn up. And you know the bus just was not going to turn up because the bus break down in San Fernando, and nobody would tell the people that the bus not coming. We want to have a system where you can,

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with technology now, know exactly where the bus is, at what time, where the bus coming, even at the bus stops.

So what we are doing with PTSC, in their plan, is to improve from the bus stops, the sheds, and everything, technology must be able to tell you at any point in time, what time the bus coming, where the bus is at right now, and everything about the bus service in Trinidad and Tobago. So, even if a tourist comes to Trinidad and they want to know where the bus is passing, what time the bus is passing, once they have access to a phone or the Internet they can be able to identify that. Because public transportation has a lot to do with tourism, and app, and PTSC.

Right now PTSC is working on their app. Simple things. We are not reinventing the wheel, and this is what we are working with the supplier of the buses, because these things are done all over the world. So, we are just moving away from just buying buses, sending them to PTSC, and when you look at them it is like a graveyard all over Trinidad. Carlsen Field has one. You look at the Port of Spain terminal; you look at the San Fernando. There are more derelict buses than good buses, and that is the vision for PTSC.

Sen. Obika: There are some good ones for excursions.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well. So, Mr. Vice-President, the two areas that we have to account for, again is the PTSC and the Port Authority, both of which is not business as usual. Both the commissioners at the port understand fully what they have to do, and I must compliment them for using the saving that they would have gotten from the docking of the *T&T Express* to pay some of the old debts that they would have had, including the port security back pay, which really was a rope around the neck of the port. Because security at the port is very, very important.

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And we were able to utilize the money, we were able to transfer some of the money to other areas in the Ministry, and at PTSC, who I know the board at PTSC is working vigorously to ensure that the public transportation system in Trinidad is the number one choice.

What we are looking at is improving from the bus station all the way to the bus stops, both on the eastern part of the country, the Priority Bus Route and the southern side of the country. We are looking at—PTSC is working with the Director of Highways to look at things like park and ride, and all these things. Because if we have to work on the traffic, the answer cannot be to build more roads. You cannot build your way out of traffic jams. The answer to that is mass transportation. Unfortunately, the country is not in a position where we could talk about rapid rail and so. But surely we could talk about an improved bus transportation service.

And I can tell you we are doing the studies right now, through the IDB, for that high occupancy lane from Port of Spain to Arima, and Port of Spain to San Fernando. And I can tell you that it is looking very, very possible at a cost that would be significantly less than anything like a rapid rail, where you can have high occupancy vehicles operating on one lane, from Port of Spain to San Fernando, and Port of Spain to Arima—meaning buses and maxi-taxis. And I can tell you that studies are looking very, very possible, because we do have the space on the highway, all the way to San Fernando. So, very soon, I mean that would be one of the projects that we would be looking at at the Ministry.

Mr. Vice-President, I would not want to delay this debate, but I think I would have accounted for the two areas in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ramdeen? Oh, Sen. Obika.

Sen. Taharqa Obika: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, and as I rise to join this debate I want to remind us of the documents that are in front of us regarding the variations.

I want to start where the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance left us, regarding a variation of \$517 million for the Ministry of Finance. Now, the issue that I have here today—and I will give a synopsis of what my contribution would look like—is we have a situation where the Minister has come to this House and has not explained what that means, so I would seek to explain what that means [*Desk thumping*] in technical language, with some backing from the European Central Bank, with some backing from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago's annual report, also with some backing from the Central Bank's Economic Bulletin. So that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will understand exactly what this \$517 million means.

Sen. Mark, in leading off this bench's response, would have outlined some issues regarding the interest payments, and why it was allowed to be so high. And where Sen. Mark did not get an opportunity to finish, I want to make this point. The issue that we have is to pay over \$900 million in interest charges, the question really arises, what was the size in—the actual size of the overdraft? And if one were to engage in simple maths, because clearly the Government has not given us the opportunity to interrogate figures, one would determine, well at 4.75 per cent, which is the repo rate of the Central Bank, an interest payment of over \$900 million, you are facing, possibly, an overdraft size that borders 15 to 20 million dollars—[*Interruption*]—billion dollars— unless, of course, there are other expenses in there, but, again, we are left to speculate because the Minister in the

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Ministry of Finance gave no meat on the bones of this Bill.

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So that is the problem that we face in Trinidad and Tobago. We do not know, we can only speculate that the Government has broken the law; that the Government has engaged in an unlawful act by running the overdraft beyond its legal limit, notwithstanding coming to this House to get an increase to 20 per cent of estimated revenue. So we do not know.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago, the travesty, Mr. Vice-President, is that at the end of this debate unless the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance were to correct the record and fill this gap of information, the people of Trinidad and Tobago would not know what was the size of the overdraft during the fiscal year gone; they would not know if this Government has breached any laws and they would not know really and truly what corrective measures would be taken in this current fiscal year. So that is the travesty of this entire process. [*Crosstalk*] And the problem is the people of Trinidad and Tobago are the ones that have to pay.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I want to rely on some information that is in the public domain that was a subject to, a presentation made by the Minister of Finance regarding the benefits that accrue from an overdraft of such a size.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Now, one would have expected that having cried from pillar to post about the size of the overdraft during 2010 to 2015 that this Government would have humbly subjected themselves to public scrutiny and would have probably even apologized for such a large overdraft. But the Minister of Finance is on record as saying that this has some benefit even—and I am paraphrasing here—indicating that there is a commercial benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago because as

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we should know, when Central Bank conducts their affairs at the end of the fiscal year, their financial year which ends on September 30th, their surpluses would return to the Consolidated Fund.

So the Minister of Finance was basically trying to insinuate that it is good financial management for a Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and for a Government of Trinidad and Tobago to be engaged in such a significant overdraft, because the profits of Central Bank return to the State. Now, if that is not hypocrisy and double speak, nothing is.

So, let me return to the—before I continue on the Minister in the Ministry of Finance's submission. The document before us directs us to the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, No 77, Volume 57, dated 12th June, 2018, and also another Volume 56, dated 11th of October, 2017. Now when one turns to this—and I am basically explaining what this means, Madam President, for the listening public and also for my colleagues here who may not have had the opportunity to look at that particular issue of the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*. It basically shows the allocations or the movements of departments of Government under different Cabinet Members. So Ministers may have had agencies moved from or to their line Ministry by virtue and it is recorded, those movements are recorded in those two issues of the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*.

So now having dealt with that I want to the return to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the submission. Now, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance indicated, Madam President, that the deficit was in actual fact \$5.351 billion. Now I could not disagree with the Minister any more than this figure. I want to turn to the Central Bank's document, the *Economic Bulletin* that they issued and the issue is of June 2018. And when one turns to that document there is

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a table that is headed: “Public Sector Debt Outstanding”. And I am not going to go through the entire table. I want to put two points on that table. “CLICO fixed-rate Bonds” and “CLICO zero-coupon Bonds.” And these are listed, Madam President, under Central Government Domestic Debt.

So, why is it that these two bonds are listed under Central Government Domestic Debt and the National Investment Fund is not and why am I raising that here? I am raising that here because the hon. Minister in submitting, in piloting this Bill began a presentation with a deficit figure of \$5.35 billion. Now we all know that the NIF would have incurred a debt to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, implicitly, of \$4 billion. Now the Minister of Finance is on record, at least on his Twitter handle, as stating that whilst the NIF, the Government is not explicitly guaranteeing the NIF, there is an implicit guarantee. And why did the Minister seek to do this, to say this; why did the Minister of Finance of our Republic of Trinidad and Tobago find it fit to say this? Because there was a need to assure the public that whilst the Government is not backing, as they say, the \$4 billion issue of debt. The Government would be backing it on an implied manner. So it is not overt, it is implicit.

And when one turns to our international watchers and the IMF to whom this Government seeks counsel, they have made it abundantly clear that whether it be implicit or explicit a Government guarantee is a Government guarantee. And that means that the \$4 billion that the Government implicitly guarantees on the NIF, that \$4 billion of borrowing is in actual fact considered by the Government debt. So, when the Minister in the Ministry of Finance starts off her presentation with a \$5.35 billion deficit, really and truly this cannot be true because even those from whom they seek counsel, the IMF, includes the \$4 billion. So really, the deficit

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would have been 9.35 billion. So I wanted to make that very clear from the onset.

Now, the presentation that I have before me I want to also refer to the Central Bank's Annual Report. And why am I referring to the Central Bank's Annual Report, Madam President? Because the main item of variation in this Bill: "An Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized"—et cetera, has to do and it is centered around a \$517 million variation for the Ministry of Finance which has to do with the overdraft facility which is housed at the Central Bank. And when you turn, Madam President, to the Annual Report of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, they do not have 2018 on their website, but we have 2017. So this is a public document and I would encourage all persons serious about our economy to visit and peruse the financial statements therein. You would see that in 2015, \$714 million returned to the Consolidated Fund; and in 2016 1.047 returned to the Consolidated Fund.

However, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance did not seek to enlighten us as to how much would be or has returned—surplus has been returned to the Consolidated Fund from the Central Bank in the fiscal, just ended, September 30th. And I think that the population of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Minister, through you, Madam President, I think the population of Trinidad and Tobago deserves to know what that figure is. So I would leave that there and I hope the hon. Minister will address that in winding up. Because really and truly when we move further along the hon. Minister's submission, there is mention made of lower receipts from the BIR and there is mention of the non-tax revenue and there is also mention of goods and services taxes having a negative effect in terms of not being able to collect what they anticipated.

Now, Madam President, that is a symptom—it could be a symptom of two

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things, one of which the obvious would be the economy. Because, of course, if there is less movement or purchase of goods and services, there would be obviously a reduction in tax collected. But however it can also be a symptom of another creature, which is because the economy may not be favourable to some, there may be under-reporting of transactions and therefore the Minister of Finance should be challenged to increase and improve efficiency in the Ministry so that we will not be here making apologies for lack of performance.

Now, Madam President, the hon. Minister made a very startling assertion that the expenditure for our fiscal ended was not 48.879 billion, but rather 47.601 billion, 1.278 billion less. But when I heard that I listened attentively and I typed verbatim as best as I could, the explanation that the hon. Minister ventured, because this explanation is not in any of the documents that would have been before us. And, Madam President, I want to deal with each point in detail, because to me it is disturbing, these revelations; \$564 million less in interest expenses. Lower expenditure on domestic loans due to unavailable funds.

Now, I think the hon. Minister should expand on that in winding up. That is not sufficient information. It is not sufficient information that can solicit an educated response from anyone who is listening. The Minister should give some more, there was much time available to the hon. Minister to give some detail to that statistic. And therefore it is not doing this process any favours to just state statistics as line items and not give a background so you can understand what you are hearing.

The second point, \$515 million less for current transfers regarding the IDF, the Caricom Development Fund and I would stop at the Caricom Development Fund only to say that when you turn to the notes, Madam President, and if you

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would allow me to visit the notes that this House has been furnished with by the Secretariat for the Senate, there is some mention of the Caricom Development Fund. And it is disturbing what you read there. When you go there, it is just two lines, and it states:

The Caricom Development Fund, the administrative requirements to facilitate payments to the fund were not finalized in fiscal 2018 and as such the contribution will now be made in early 2019 of \$70 million.

There are many questions that spring from that. The first question, why? Why were the arrangements not finalized? I mean, that is an honest question and think the hon. Minister in winding up, I think we deserve a response to that. Why they were not finalized? Because this is Caricom and we are all citizens of this great region and we would want see that the development fund in Caricom gets what it deserves.

And, Madam President, if you would understand what the Caricom Development Fund is, you too may be very concerned as to why that \$70 million was not paid. Because just in one line:

“The...Fund is an institution of the Caribbean Community which mandate is to provide financial or technical assistance to disadvantaged countries, regions and sectors in the community. In this capacity, the CDF is central to addressing the disparities among the Member States of CARICOM, which may result from the implementation of the CSME.”

And if we are one of the more wealthy nations in the Caribbean region, one would expect that we would be the last country that they should look for to be tardy on any payment to a fund that addresses the disparities of income and development in our region. It must not be that the more developed countries of the Caribbean are

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stifling a fund that allows for bridging the gap in this our great region. And I think because of that, because of the purpose of that fund which was established in 2008, located in Barbados, I think because of that purpose of that fund, this Government, the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve an answer as to why we did not finalize those institutional arrangements. Is it that the Caricom was okay, they did not need the money or is it that some paperwork was not filed? What is it? We should not be reporting that we have not done that.

There are some other points and I want to stick a pin there because I need to get back to those. The Minister mentioned the Business Stimulus Programme, the Fiscal Stimulus Programme, Public Housing Construction Programme. And I want to return to that because I have to respond to the Minister in full and using that as an opportunity to make my contribution on the Bill. I want to get to the Business Stimulus Programme. And, Madam President, would you know that \$70 million was available on the Business Stimulus Programme. And in this economy where the TTMA has been screaming at the Government to get the wheels in motion, where the Chamber of Commerce, not to mention the Chamber in Tobago, has been explaining and expressing their challenges, this Government has found it fit to withhold \$70 million in a Business Stimulus Programme?

And, Madam President, if you turn to the Government—the Ministry of Finance to understand what this programme is about; if you turn to the Ministry of Finance to understand what this programme is about and you look to a “Request for Expressions of Interest Notice”, dated 25th of April, 2018, titled, the project is the:

“...Business Development Incentive Programme for Small to Medium Sized Businesses.”

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And I would depend on the hon. Minister to correct me if I am referring to the wrong programme.

Madam President, through you, can I ask the hon. Minister if this is the correct programme that I am referring to for the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Crosstalk*] I can give way. [*Crosstalk*] I can give way because I want to respond—[*Crosstalk*] I would then make the point and then I guess in the wind up the hon. Minister will correct the record or agree with me that I am referring to the right programme.

So, Madam President, I want to just state two things on this programme. The programme for which there was an expression of interest in the second quarter of 2018, calendar year 2018, states that:

“...Trinidad and Tobago needs a diverse economy that is innovative, competitive and has the foundation and support to encourage businesses and entrepreneurs to succeed and become more competitive both locally and internationally.”

Who would not want that? I mean, to me that would be an excellent initiative.

“This programme is expected to assist at least 500 small to medium sized businesses throughout Trinidad and Tobago.”

And there will be a panel of experts, self-made businessmen and so on. So this is here. I hope I am referring to the right programme.

But the point is, whether that be the correct programme or not, if there is some 70 million available for this programme and there is a programme for farmers, the fiscal incentives for farmers, and, Madam President, before coming here, I had the pleasure, or is it the privilege to speak to the President of the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago.

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Madam President: Sen. Obika, I have to ask you now, where exactly—can you tie-in what you are now talking about to the Bill, please.

Sen. T. Obika: Thank you very much, Madam President. So, Central Bank. I will get back to the notes that were circulated, but Central Bank is the key issue in this Bill. The overdraft payment is a key issue in this Bill, and the argument advanced—the \$517 million, and the argument as advanced by the Minister of Finance, that a high interest payment on the overdraft facility is good business for Central Bank, which means we get a higher profit statement at Central Bank, which means we get a higher surplus remitted to the Consolidated Fund, is the entire flaw in the Government's narrative.

So I want to just make a little case as to why that logic, whilst it happens, in fact in terms of flow of cash may not be the best, in terms of the interest of the economy and of the Central Bank as an institution. This is the reference to the Minister in justifying—which is the point of this Bill, the increased interest payments, the \$517 million on the overdraft facility. And the narrative being perpetuated by the Government is that this will result in more money for the Consolidated Fund, more money for Central Bank, it is good for Trinidad and Tobago, for the Government to run the overdraft to a possibly illegal level, because they did not tell us what the level of the overdraft was. That precipitated this \$517 million increase in variation.

So, Madam President, I want to refer this honourable House to a document titled: "Profit distribution and loss coverage rules for central banks". It was covered—edited April 2016, No. 169, European Central Bank EUROSISTEM. The authors are Daniela Bunea, the other names I cannot—so Daniela Bunea. The other names are in a language that are unfamiliar to me.

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And there are just two points I want to lift from this document, Madam President. And those points are very pertinent to this entire discussion and they have not been raised and I do not think, if I do not raise them I do not think they would be raised in either House.

“The profit made by central banks, unlike that of private companies”—and I am quoting—“The profit made by central banks, unlike that of private companies and commercial banks, is not an indicator of policy performance or operational efficiency.”

It is necessary for Central Banks to make profits. They are positing because:

“...central banks”—can—“construct appropriate reserves to protect themselves against the materialisation of the risk exposures contained in their balance sheets.”

What does that mean?

When the Government comes with this Bill and there is \$517million figure for the Ministry of Finance, interest payments and saying that that is good for the country, because we gave Central Bank more business, almost like if we are talking about Petrotrin taking a loan from Republic and Republic getting more profits from it. And then saying we are going to cream off the profits anyway from Central Bank so it does not matter, is himself to himself. We have a school of thought, at least in the European system, where it is not necessarily correct to say that the profits that accrue from a Central Bank really should be targeted by the State. That is the whole issue of this article. I would not go into the entire article because it may be too much reading for persons here but they can follow.

So, Madam President, that is the crux of this matter and that is the point I want to revisit at the end of my contribution. Could I ask at what time should I

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finish?

Madam President: 6.37 p.m.

Sen. T. Obika: Thank you very much. I only have about 14 minutes again to make this argument. So, Madam President, the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance continued to say that transfers to statutory bodies, \$215 million and \$127.4 million less in CAPEX regarding the Consolidated Fund. The issue that I have with that would be borne out in a short while. But needless to say I wish to spend at least five minutes of my time, not a significant amount, just perusing some of the line items of expenditure, reason for savings that were given to us in the explanations for the transfers. But I also want to make a point regarding the Bill and these transfers. It is not correct in my opinion to say that the transfers are not connected to the Bill and I want to say why. Because—

Madam President: Sen Obika—

Sen. T. Obika: Sorry.

Madam President: Is anyone saying that?

Sen. T. Obika: Okay, let me rephrase. I want to make a connection to the transfers and the variations in the Bill. And this is the connection I want to make: for example, if the Government did not withhold the 70 million for the business stimulus and the agricultural incentives, the 70 million for the Caribbean Development Fund which they constituted as savings, I am not sure the lesser developed country would see it as such, the Public/Private Housing Construction Incentive Programme, 50 million as savings, if they did not constitute those as savings and they actually spend them as they should have, really the variation would have been greater for this Ministry of Finance. So the point that I am making is that it is very necessary in debating this Bill to interrogate the reasons

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given for these savings—

Madam President: Okay, Sen. Obika, I have spoken on this issue before, a few times, and I think what you are trying to do is to rationalize why not to take my advice on how we proceed with this matter. I would advise you to desist from that and finish your contribution, please. You have a few more minutes.

Sen. T. Obika: I would be guided, Madam President. Now, I want to—I have decided to limit my contribution to the Ministry of Finance for obvious reasons. And the main reason is the Minister in the Ministry of Finance did not give us information that we could have gone by. There were some other issues that I had with the Minister's presentation and it was, the Minister introduced those reasons to seek to explain why there is a \$517 million interest payment and that is why I want to deal with that.

Now, the Minister tried to—and also there was a contribution from the Minister of Public Utilities, himself, someone in finance, tried to talk about the amount of money they had to spend and the amount of money that the Government from 2010 to 2015 invested in education, invested in health care and so on. I want to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago that by the end of this fiscal year, which ends in September this year, just a few months from now, this Government would have spent over \$210 billion. And it strikes everyone I am sure, except those in the Government, as strange that this Government after approving funds and spending in excess of, by now, 180 billion, they are coming to complain about spending in the past. And saying, that is because of that spending in past that they had to borrow so much more from the Central Bank and supermax the overdraft to the extent of having to come and ask this Parliament for a variation of \$517 million.

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Now, \$210 billion, that is the figure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago need to keep in front of them because this Government really and truly would have spent enough money to make things better but they have made it worse. There is another statistic I want to also raise because the Minister mentioned a lot about taxes and taxation and that shortfall that would have precipitated again, reverting to the Central Bank to borrow. And the hon. Minister, the Minister of Finance, the substantive Minister would have also made some points which are in the public domain. And I want to correct the record using the documents from the Ministry of Finance, Madam President, would you believe it, and if you turn to this document, the *Review of the Economy 2018, Turnaround*, you turn to page 99, Appendix 20 in a table entitled, "Central Government Fiscal Operations". One would see under column, the road that is titled, "Current Revenue" of which Energy Sector Revenue, you would see that in the fiscal year 2016, their first year of office, the revenue from energy sector was \$8.3 billion which lay waste, the statistic that was peddled by the Government of \$1 billion.

So now the people of Trinidad and Tobago can see the fact is clear, 8.3 billion. What the Government would try to tell the persons is that, the public, is that they went from 17 billion to one billion and they refer to tax revenue. What they would not tell you, that what the Government obtains from the energy sector is an actual fact, the figures that are cited here in the Ministry of Finance's document. And one would find it strange that the Government would rely on a line item that is a contributory statistic. So it is a detail. It is not the whole picture.

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So it is a detail. It is not the whole picture. The whole picture from the energy sector is what is more relevant to the moneys that are coming to the

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Government from the citizenry, because the Government would have tried to tell you that it went from \$17 billion down to \$1 billion from 2015 to 2016, but it really went from 19.8 to 8.3. So it did not decline by \$16 billion in absolute figures. It did not decline by 80 per cent as they would tell you, or 90 per cent. It did not decline by that. What happened is it declined from 19.8 to 8.3. All right? And it has steadily rose from there. So you have 2017 fiscal, \$9.1 billion and 2018 fiscal, \$12 billion. So the Government needs to be a little more forthright with the population because this information is contained in documents that are published and printed by the very Government that they are part of.

Now, Madam President, I will take the last five minutes of my time—I think I have six minutes left—to revisit some arguments and to remind the Government as to the people that they must serve. There is a project that is contained in these documents that is very important to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on service delivery. And I think the Government would have done well if they had considered the public/private housing construction incentive programme which just said:

Funding was not required during fiscal 2018 as the policy guidelines for the programme were not fully developed to allow for implementation.

And that is the crux of many of the issues that are contained in this document. So is it that the Government is saying that they simply decided not to finish a proposal, get requests for proposals in, complete a framework? Is it that they decided not to, or through incompetence they did not get it done?

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

Sen. T. Obika: Thank you very much, Madam President. So that is the question one has to ask. And then also, in the Ministry of Finance there are some savings

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they mentioned in food card—18,000 names removed from the food card.

Madam President: Sen. Obika, please, you are—

Sen. T. Obika: I am guided, Madam President. So I want to leave this debate on this note—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you.

Sen. T. Obika:—notwithstanding the thanks from the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, under whose watch graduate unemployment has increased significantly—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Hush your mouth.

Hon. Senator: You cannot say that.

Sen. T. Obika: Madam President, the Minister is inviting me to shut up. Should I comply? I am not sure that is part of the proceedings.

Hon. Senator: That is unparliamentary. You cannot say that.

Sen. T. Obika: I am not sure if she is allowed to invite me to do so.

Now, Madam President, I want to close by reiterating a point that I made at the beginning of my contribution. The Government has a duty to inform the public. The Government must inform the public as to the expenditure that they engaged in. The Government must inform the public as to what are the details surrounding the size of the overdraft. The Government must come clean on the amount of money that they received in surplus from Central Bank into the Consolidated Fund. That should have been part of this debate. So I invite the hon. Minister of Finance, in winding up, to clear the air; indicate what was the size of the overdraft at its highest point in the last fiscal year that contributed to this significant increase in interest payments by the central government. And is it that that was done so unlawfully? And I close on that point, Madam President. Thank

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you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Is anyone going to—Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, for the first half of Sen. Obika's contribution I was planning to, on conclusion, congratulate him and to indicate it might be the first contribution that he was going to make without the Chair having to interrupt him on several occasions. [*Laughter*] I genuinely was going to say that. But then, as per usual, you got convoluted and you started to stray off course, and that is your karma and your character, and you became extremely confusing.

But having said that, the large overdraft—there is overdraft and overdraft. The UNC—Sen. Mark talked about—he said we were running on fumes. The former Governor of the Central Bank said, we have three days of money. They racked up 97 per cent of the overdraft limit in a scenario—and I have said this over and over, and it has been said over and over again—when they had record revenues. Oil prices were approximating \$100 per barrel. Gas prices were almost \$4 to \$5 per MMBtu. With those significant revenues, they still went and borrowed to take the debt to GDP ratio to 60 per cent.

Sen. S. Hosein: “Nah, nah nah”—

Sen. Mark: That is not true, man.

Sen. S. Hosein: That is not true.

Sen. Mark: That is not true. Where is the evidence?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Added to which, it was so bad, Madam President, under the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Act, if you budget an oil price of \$70 and oil

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price averaged \$90, the excess revenue, you have to take 50 per cent of that and put it into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. They spent everything and they went and borrowed to put in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. It is the only entity in the world that I know borrowed to save.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: UNC logic.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: You are borrowing at high interest to save at a lower interest. That is UNC style. They maxed out the NGC. That has been repeated over and over again. So I was just—

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, 46(1).

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: No, no, I was responding—

Sen. S. Hosein: I am raising a Standing Order, 46(1). In terms of NGC, that is not part of this debate, Madam President.

Madam President: Minister, continue please. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: And I just want to correct Sen. Obika again on—the Prime Minister said—and I have the graph here. [*Laughter*] Energy taxation revenue, not energy sector revenue, you know. It is clear. I cannot do it, sorry. It dropped from \$17 billion to \$1 billion, because the basis for energy taxation is something called the petroleum profit tax. And when you give more than concessionary write-offs to the oil companies, which I have already stated here, it must happen, and we have corrected that. So the less I say about Sen. Obika, the better for this debate.

Let me deal with the Variation of Appropriation for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and to respond to Sen. Mark's wild assertion that we are doing something wrong and something illegal on the subsidy. Petroleum products are priced in two ways. There is a market-related price, which is a posted price,

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you are referenced blend and it is commercial. It is free market. That operates in Barbados; it operates in Jamaica. So in Jamaica, every month the prices at the gas station—the rubic or whatsoever they have—changes based on the price of petroleum products. In Trinidad, we do not have that. We have prices fixed by order, the Price of Petroleum Products Order, which is part of the Regulations under the Petroleum Act, and the price is fixed by the Minister under the Act.

So we are not floating. The Minister of Finance in the last budget said we are considering that, but there are pros and cons to that, based on a society like ours. The petroleum subsidy has a unique evolution in Trinidad and Tobago. Prior to 1974, for those of you who were born before that—I was in high school, upper forms—there were three service stations in Trinidad: Shell, Texaco and Esso. “Put a tiger in your tank”, the big bright Texaco star, and I cannot remember what Shell was. They had a floating price system because gasoline was cheap. That was the days of the gas guzzlers in North America. And you competed, based on largely the quality of service, and then you used to make up a story and say you have an additive in your gas that gives you superior performance. How true that is, I do not know.

But something happened in 1974, and for those of you who can recall, it was called the Arab oil embargo, and the formation of OPEC. And within one year, oil prices jumped from \$6 per barrel to \$36 a barrel, a 600 per cent increase. The world went upside down, for those of you who could remember that era. There was a guy called Sheik Yamani of Saudi Arabia—some of you will remember his name—if he belched, the oil price goes up. That was the power of the gentleman. Trinidad now could no longer have afforded Texaco, Shell and Esso to float price. So Dr. Williams, in his wisdom, in 1974 introduced something called the

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Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act of 1974. What that did was fix the price by order, of what the Government wants the subsidy to be and ask the oil companies to cover that subsidy, because they were making money out of the high oil prices coming out of the Arab oil embargo and the formation of OPEC.

Up until 1992, the oil companies had to cover 100 per cent of the petroleum subsidy. So the issue of a government subsidy on petroleum products did not arise. However, by that point in time oil production was falling in Trinidad and Tobago, and the companies made a claim—and with some justification—that they could no longer afford these high subsidies, especially as their production was falling. By that time the economy was moving to be a gas-based economy.

In 1992 and later on in 2003, the Government put a cap on the subsidy, which is equivalent to 4 per cent of your gross revenue. But 4 per cent of your gross revenue is still a large sum of your gross revenue—only for crude oil; it was not for gas; it was only for crude oil. In the '70s and '80s crude oil production in Trinidad was over 250,000 barrels a day. As we speak, we are struggling to make 65,000 barrels a day. So it was in the era of the early 2000s and into this second decade of the 21st Century that the issue of a subsidy became a government liability. And it is in that context the Government has been struggling to support the subsidy.

We have gingerly increased the price of fuel. We targeted firstly, premium, because it is claimed the upper middle class are the largest users of premium. We have now, because of the quantum of the subsidy, gone after—not gone after, but targeted super. But we have still left diesel with a very heavy subsidy because diesel is the transport fuel for goods and it is the transport fuel for the public sector transportation system, largely buses and maxis.

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So, Sen. Mark is right, that if the oil price is low for a particular month, the price of super, as presently posted, may be slightly higher than if the price was a free market price, or premium may be higher. But it normalizes itself through time. Oil price suffered a dip last month and this month, but it will go back up in two months' time. So to take one month and use that as the basis to say we are robbing the people, is flawed logic, and that is the basis in which we are.

The Minister of Finance has indicated, the Government is seriously considering having the free market-type price as exists in Jamaica, and because the oil price is low, we might say, let us go that way. But it is not an easy thing to get up every first of a month and watch at the fuel pump and see prices going up. It is a calculated risk based on the needs of the society. And at this point in time, while in principle, we are committed to eventually going there, we have to watch the market, read the market and time it, as a Government that cares about the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

With regards specifically to the subsidy, the budget crude oil price for fiscal 2018 was \$52 a barrel. Based on that price, no money was budgeted for subsidy because subsidies are really taken care of for once at these low prices by the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act. Because still money comes into that. It approximates 300 to \$350 million per year. However, the crude oil price for 2018 averaged \$64 per barrel, which means there is a fairly heavy subsidy; \$100 million was allocated in the mid-year review. That was shifted to the Ministry of Finance because we were doing a reconciliation, because the subsidy is paid through NP and Unipet, ultimately to Petrotrin.

As we speak, the subsidy the Government owes to Petrotrin is approximately \$900 million. However, the Government has been funding Petrotrin over this last

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period. As a matter of fact, Petrotrin owes the Government \$3.4 billion in taxes, royalties and other interest payments. Because Petrotrin is now closed down in its previous form, we will be writing off the debt—this subsidy debt—against the debt to the State for the consolidation of the books. And that is how this will be handled so you would not see any subsidy payment coming out of the budget in the context of the State paying Petrotrin.

So that is the explanation I have to give. It was said in the debate— and as I close, Madam President—

Sen. S. Hosein: Already?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Yes. It is only the subsidy I come to talk about. I “doh” have to prove anything. I come to talk what I have to talk, 10, 15, 20 minutes. Sometimes I will speak for 40 minutes. All right? But for those of you who just start, have your fun. [*Laughter*]

Positive things are coming out of the energy sector. All the reports are telling you, the growth that we will experience, whether it is 1.9 per cent, 1.7, 2.1, is largely because of energy sector growth. But I want to make the point of Petrotrin and the restructuring in the context of Heritage. I answered a question in the House on Friday and I want to repeat that, very briefly. Petrotrin started to export crude. They have exported five shipments of 500,000 barrels each. The price they got—bearing in mind Petrotrin’s crude has never been exported for 60 years. So while it was referenced on a transfer price to the refinery, nobody knew what the true market value of the crude was.

When we restructured Petrotrin and we say we will export crude—I will call them by name here: the former Minister of Energy of the UNC, Kevin Ramnarine, said, “You would not get no money for dah crude. That crude has no value. It is a

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high sulphur, heavy oil crude.” The now head of the COP, Caroline Seepersad-Bachan, former Minister of Energy, forecasted the same narrative. Even the head of another political party, the MSJ, David Abdullah, a former executive officer of the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union, said we would not get value for the crude. I am pleased to announce today—I did announce it in the House on Friday—that we got WTI plus \$2 for a barrel of Trinidadian crude. [*Desk thumping*] You know what we used to post that crude price at in the transfer from the E&P to the refinery? WTI minus \$7.

That is positive number one. Positive number two, because of this very said drop in revenue on petroleum taxes because of incentives that they gave to the oil company, we took the position that you cannot have the taxation of a depleting asset only on a profit-based tax, because it is not renewable. We introduced the royalty on gas. Mr. Imbert, in the 2018 budget, introduced a 12.5 per cent royalty on gas. Royalty means you take it from the top with no deduction.

I am pleased to announce again, Madam President, that for calendar year 2018, the Government collected \$2.250 billion in gas oil—[*Desk thumping*] That is money that would have been in the pockets of BP and Shell. But the media does not cover that, you know. The media covered some pipeline burst by the Curepe roundabout and “ah man house geh flood”. That was the headline on an *Express*. And these are the narratives and the stories that have to be displayed.

And thirdly, very briefly before I close, Madam President, is when we held the spotlight on energy, largely because, again, of the same Prime Minister's graft, from \$17 billion to \$1. We knew what the problem was. We were being short-changed on transfer pricing on LNG and, again, more than lenient tax concessions offered by the UNC. We went to the Hyatt and the Prime Minister and myself

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articulated the position. We got no support. The hon. Leader of the Opposition said, “You are threatening bp and Shell? You have to honour the sanctity of the contracts.” We got no support from the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union. Even the Energy Chamber did not support going public with a matter like that. The Prime Minister, Minister Young and myself, went to London, met with the President of BP and Shell, articulated our position, and today I want to say we set up a negotiating team which is led by myself and Minister Young. We have concluded the first rounds of negotiations with BP and it is very, very—[*Desk thumping*]

We have already recovered in excess of TT \$1 billion. We have got a new pricing formula for Train 1, LNG. So a lot of good things are happening. A lot of hard work is being done, but I must say, in matters of strategic energy negotiations you cannot give the nation a ball-by-ball commentary. You are shooting yourself in the foot. And I want, in particular—not the first Bench—the higher Bench to understand that.

Sen. S. Hosein: You give up on us?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: On matters of strategic energy negotiations and discussions, it will be imprudent and irresponsible of the Government to give ball-by-ball commentary. And sometimes when you are not getting the ball-by-ball commentary, you will get a summary of the day’s play. And that is the position we are in and we are happy to say things are going well. It could get better, but your Government is working and working to the benefit of the people of Trinidad.

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

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

Sen. Anita Haynes: Thank you, Madam President. The Minister of Energy and

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Energy Industries ended on a very interesting note, I think, which is a plea to the Independent Bench of the Senate not to ask for a lot of accountability on energy deals in this country. And that, I think, is the essence of what we are dealing with here today, a Government that likes to say that they are accountable and transparent, yet will refuse to answer questions; will refuse to give details and will come here and tell us it is not our role and responsibility to ask questions, but just wait and see what will happen.

And, Madam President, I start there because the Minister and several other Ministers, you know, would come here and give a lot of numbers and talk about 2014, and will not say that in 2018 public debt was at the highest in our recorded history. And, therefore, you have to ask whether or not they are coming from a genuine space when giving these statistics, or whether or not they are just trying to paint a picture that serves their narrow interests.

And I have said this time and time again, Madam President, that this Government seems to live in their own world, their own version of reality, that they are trying to convince us, the citizens of this country that the reality we live in, our day-to-day lived experiences, are something that we have made up. So this debate has taken on a very surreal nature, where people are coming here and telling us about savings and how much they have saved. And I go straight into the Senate documents, because as I was reading through it, it talks about the provision of additional funds in the sum, in order to meet the payment of interest on the overdraft of the Central Bank account. So when you go to a population and you say you have saved money, you assume that the money is not being spent elsewhere.

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So my question is, what—and I noted it because every Minister, one after the other, got up and made a point to talk about these savings, they saved the nation this money, and except for the Minister of Works and Transport. Because you see, I think the Minister of Works and Transport was just the most honest person we had here today because he said it was not savings, but it was spent elsewhere. The money was just spent elsewhere. So my question was, what really happened here? Did we go through a budgetary process? We had the allocation for fiscal 2018, there was a Standing Finance Committee, money was allocated to certain things, midyear review time and time again, and we had this, again, going through the stages for accountability and transparency in how the Government is spending our money.

And what we have here today is not that—now you are telling us it is savings, but is it really that you promised to do certain things and then at some point in time during the fiscal year decided those were not the things that you were going to do, and then you took a decision, as a Government, that you will not do these things and you will do something else with the same money? So you are reprioritizing. You are taking money from one place and “yuh” putting it somewhere else. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: No, no.

Sen. A. Haynes: Well if this is not the case, Minister of Trade and Industry, you can get up right after me and tell me that is not the case. I have no problem with that. [*Desk thumping*] Is it that you have decided that these are no longer your priorities, and outside of the glare of the public eye that you have reallocated and reprioritized the money?

As I go through, and I will go through, and look—I take particular note of

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the health care changes because this is a Government, Madam President, that had no qualms about telling us, the citizens of this country, that we have access to the best health care in the Commonwealth. A kind of madness that I could not believe that I was hearing on national TV.

Sen. Ramdeen: Only for the PNM.

Sen. A. Haynes: Had to be, because again you have to not be using any of our health care facilities to genuinely believe that we have access to the best health care in the Commonwealth. So when you come here today to tell us—and that is why I said the debate took on a very surreal nature as I am hearing Ministers of Government stand up and praise a sector that for all intents and purposes has collapsed under their tenure. Down to the Central Block at this point in time literally and figuratively collapsing around them and they stand here and tell us, “Look at how we saved you money by not spending it in the health sector.”

I mean, Madam President, I just—to contextualize my contribution here today, I would like to say to this PNM administration, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not numbers on your balance of payment sheets, so you cannot just write-off certain things. You were elected on a mandate to provide services to the people of this country. It is your responsibility. That is what you are meant to do as a Government and, therefore, when you do not do that, you cannot come here and spin it and tell us you did a good thing. I will go straight into what was done with the Ministry of Health.

So let us go to the fiscal 2018 and see what they promised, what they said they were going to do. As I looked back at that budget, there was this promise of a health care construction programme to improve the availability of quality health care in Trinidad and Tobago, and then they went on to list a number of things

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including construction of the Arima Hospital, the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital which is supposed to be completed in 2019—this is a good one—a suitable operator for the Couva medical training facility which would be commissioned in 2018.

So these were the things that they said they were going to do to improve the access to quality health care in Trinidad and Tobago. Then they brought this document and I will go to this hospital refurbishment programme where they said they saved \$15 million. Not all projects were able to be fully implemented as planned. What projects did you implement then? What did you actually do? Because none of these things in the hospital construction programme came to fruition, but you went so far that you were unable to just even fix the ones we have now. So you cannot refurbish the hospitals that you have now, but you promised in 2018, and promised in 2019 and probably come again.

As a matter of fact, in the same graphs the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries pointed out, in that lecture series that the Prime Minister hosted, the last six or eight minutes they talked about the projects they were going to complete. These were in those as well. So it is a constant mamaguy of the population that these things are coming. They will come. But I will go back to this hospital refurbishment programme because in my mind I have no idea how a government could stand up and pat themselves on the back for something like this. There were tender issues for the prenatal and chemotherapy rooms and the electrical upgrade of Building 24 of the Eric Williams Medical. Listen, the most basic elements of governance is where they are failing. So the most basic elements, you are telling me that you saved \$15 million because you were unable to facilitate a proper tendering process to upgrade facilities that the people of this country have to use?

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Madam President, I am telling you there is a level of shamelessness, I think, in standing here and patting yourself on the back for these kinds of things. They talked about, again, the upgrade of the Regional Administrative Centre and those were delayed due to OSHA non-compliance issues. Again, if you cannot fix these things to provide the services that you were elected to provide to the people of Trinidad and Tobago is one thing, but on the other hand to come here and be proud of that fact and say, “Look at how we saved you Trinidad and Tobago. Look at the help we have given to you”, again, it is a—I had said it in the budget contribution, it is gas lighting the population as in telling us what we are seeing, what we know to be real is not a real thing. The Government is waging psychological warfare on this population time and time again.

Imagine, Madam President, repairs to the roof of the labour ward were delayed due to contractual challenges resulting in a second bidder being hired to undertake the process. This is your incompetence again. The Government is standing here, telling us, in the next year and a half they are going to build four hospitals, but in one year they could not refurbish the hospitals that we have now. They could not get a contract to repair the roof. I could do that in my house. I could do that now, but they cannot. They are unable to do these things.

Sen. Ramdeen: A whole Government.

Sen. A. Haynes: Imagine. But on top of that, the Ministry of Health was singled out for praise by the Minister of Finance, which is again why I said this debate has taken on a very surreal nature. I am going now to the rationalization inclusive of CDAP drugs, but in terms of the drugs.

We held budget consultations for the fiscal 2018 as well as fiscal 2019, but because of the narrowness of this budget I am going to stick to what was done for

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fiscal 2018, and I can assure you in terms of the issues being raised by persons across communities is this access to CDAP drugs. I had people come to us with their prescription, how much they are now paying that they used to be able to get it, and they were not able to get it. We brought these concerns in 2018 to the Minister of Health. The Minister of Health said there is no problem with CDAP drugs, there is no problem, and that they were going to improve availability, et cetera. Now I have no problem if you are making improvements to a system, if you said you are making improvements to a system, if you are actually monitoring and evaluating the changes that you have made and see if what you have done is serving the people of this country. Because, Madam President, the fact is, there is still a problem with people being able to access the drugs in the health care system.

So you cannot, again, come here and say that you have saved money and that the savings is meant to be that is what we are supposed to look at as efficient when the system itself is not operating as it ought to be, because if you are telling me that you have reduced the number of complaints—if any of these Ministers could say, “Listen, we have done an evaluation in the health centres, in the pharmacies, we have met with people, we ran surveys and we said these changes have benefited the people of this country, have benefited the users of the programme, by all means we have no choice but to agree with the Government. But they are not doing that. They are coming here and they say, “Look we did not spend \$119 million.” It does not matter how the system is running, does not matter if people are benefiting from the system, all we know is—“slash and burn economics”. We cut out this money and we are using it for something else, but not for health care because as far as they are concerned health care is the best in the Commonwealth. That is madness.

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Sen. Dillon-Remy raised the point on the surgeries and I raised a matter, a Motion on the Adjournment here, a matter that the Minister sought not to answer my concerns at all, but the fact is the surgeries are not being performed and they know that, and for you to come here and tell people that what you are experiencing in terms of the wait list, in terms of these atrocious wait lists for surgeries to tell us that that is not a real thing. Just because the Government says so, again it is madness. So I am seeing here where they spoke about an increase in surgical procedures undertaken at public health care institutions and I want to ask the Government, bring the numbers, bring the facts, bring the numbers. [*Desk thumping*] Do not write in a document like this that you saved us money and that there is an increase in surgical procedures without providing the numbers to back that up, because as far as you are concerned these are all savings. You saved all this money and we have concerns about how are you framing these things. So it may very well be that there was an increase in the number of persons signing up, it could be all kind of things, but I do not believe that there was an increase in surgical procedures undertaken, and that is from our interactions with persons who have to use the public health care system on a daily basis.

The filling of vacancies was not finalized and the recruitment and selection process for doctors and nurses from Cuba is ongoing, and then they said it is expected to be finalized in 2019. So is it fair then to say that this \$26 million was saved or simply deferred because “ent yuh” going to have to spend this money anyway, or are you not filling these vacancies? Again, are you being truthful with the words that you are using, or are you participating in one big kind of mamaguy for the population? Twenty-six million dollars saved, but now expected to be finalized in 2019. I looked at this and this is also going back to the contribution in

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that budget where I noted that the Government has formed a system of what is almost URP for doctors at this point in time, 10 days, short-term contract for doctors. These are people who went to school, did the right things, your parents—I mean, this is Trinidad. Unfortunately, we still exist in a system where doctor, lawyer, engineer—great things, right—they come out of school, the Government says here take a three-month contract, then the Minister of Health came here and told me in a response to my question that the reasons the doctors cannot get hired is because nobody wants to work in rural communities and they are not taking up the jobs there. So it is their fault, not the Government's fault. All right. That turned out not to be true.

Madam President: Sen. Haynes?

Sen. A. Haynes: That turned out to—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Ramdeen: Not be supported by the evidence.

Sen. A. Haynes: Yes—not be supported by the evidence when you speak to the people waiting for employment. Thank you.

So, Madam President—*[Interruption]* Political Science—what we are looking at is a Government that is aware that there are vacancies and shortages in the health care system which creates a problem with the end product that is being provided to the citizens, and has still bold-facedly listed \$26 million as a savings here and say, “Hey, we did a with really good thing”. It may not be a good thing at the end of fiscal 2019, because it probably would not be a savings unless they plan to create this system of vacancies throughout.

You go down one step and you talk about in terms of the savings for \$5 million, the use of overtime was more efficiently managed. Tell us how. How did you more efficiently manage the use of overtime? Were there spaces where you

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just did not pay the people the overtime? Because you know this is a Government that has a problem with things like back pay when they call back pay wastage and a burden. The back pay was a problem. So I feel like they look at overtime and say, "Look, we do have to pay that you know". So my question again, you listed it, the use of overtime was more efficiently managed, efficiently like how you manage the hospital refurbishment programme where you just did not do it? So it did not matter whether or not we needed it. You are just not doing it.

Madam President, when we look at all of these concerns within a health care sector, when you rank the concerns of people in this country, you rank national security as number one, followed very closely by health care in terms of access to quality health care, and when you talk about things like your social contract in terms of what the Government is ought to provide with, what the citizens are provided and how we live in harmony, you have to question what is the legitimate expectation of citizens. And I think we, as citizens, have a legitimate expectation for quality health care to be provided by the Government because that is the nation that we live in now. Now if you want to change that system you could say that, but as of right now what you ought to provide is quality health care. Not just tell us you are providing quality health care.

I went into San Fernando General Hospital three weeks ago and there were dogs walking through by the reception area, the San Fernando General Hospital. Just this idea of keeping the surroundings clean and treating people of this country with some kind of respect and decency because these are our public health care institutions, and that you can do simple things to upgrade the system instead of coming back here and telling us that you saved a total of \$211 million. Go back to the people and ask them if you would prefer this money be spent on health care.

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Do they feel like it was okay to move this \$211 million from our health care because you are getting quality health care as is.

Madam President, this is a Government that you can have a Minister of Public Utilities or a Minister of Works and Transport come here and talk about that not enough time is spent on maintenance. Amazing. Because as far as we know, the road system in Trinidad and Tobago is the worse that it has ever been. [*Desk thumping*] I had to send pictures of the roadways to my house to the Minister of Works and Transport. He did not take them on either, so the potholes are big as ever on that side. So that you could tell us maintenance is a problem and you are in a position to do something about it, and you are not doing anything about it, but you will tell us that you are saving money. You are not saving money you know. You are not prioritizing properly or you are doing whatever you wanted to do without a care in the world for what the population actually needs and that is not good governance. It is not good management, it is not effective management.

All it is, what you are trying to do is govern outside of the glare of the public eye. The Minister of Public Utilities came here and talked about—I think the line he likes to use is “doing more with less” and I assume he meant more with less competence, less ideas, because what you are looking at is not doing—you are talking about doing more with less and all of us are suffering. We were speaking to some people in Mayaro, apparently they have had no water for, I think, something like three months, and the Minister came here today to tell us that the system is being made more efficient. We have water shortages facing the country now and you are telling us about your \$62 million savings. No! Spend the money wisely, deliver services to the people of this country, and then we would be grateful. Do not tell us that you have saved this money and we have to be happy

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with the way that you are governing this country.

And, Madam President, the space of my intervention here today was to say to the Government that when you think about how you are allocating the resources that you have, think about the people of this country, think about what their needs are, have a kind of sensible idea in terms of delivery and delivery of goods and services to the people of this country because they are tied. We are a beleaguered population at this point in time, and a population that should be quite offended to hear any Government come and tell us they have saved \$211 million on health care when we have the worse health care ever. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): Thank you very much, Madam President, for giving me the opportunity to make a short contribution on the Variation of Appropriation Bill for the fiscal year 2018. We got an \$8 million decrease recorded for the Rural Development and Local Government Ministry in relation to ttconnect. This is because ttconnect was transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. As noted in *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, Volume 56, No. 108 dated October 11, 2017, ttconnect was removed from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications with effect from October 02, 2017. That was the beginning of the financial year 2017/2018.

The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government had already received \$8 million in allocation for ttconnect in the year 2017/2018. So all requisite payments to ttconnect was made during that fiscal year. After the end of that year, November, an inter-department adjustment voucher was done by the

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Ministry to transfer the expenditure to the Ministry of Public Administration. So we would have done all the necessary arrangements to ensure that this process was handled administratively.

Some may wonder, Madam President, what is ttconnect. TTConnect is a platform through which the public can access variations of Government information and services. It has an online mobile portal, service centres, express buses, kiosk and your hotline. There are seven service centres, three express buses, five self-serving kiosks, ttconnect online, ttconnect mobile toll free contact number 800-8826. It is a one-stop shop for the public, part of a whole of Government approach bringing services closer to the people with employment ads, disaster management services like grant application, making public health complaints, seeking out public health and sanitation services, e-Tax, housing application, T&TEC e-bill service, TTBizLink, vehicle registration verification, online tender notices, WASA bill payment, GATE eService, BIR application, info on how to get your birth certificate, list of public holidays, laws of Trinidad and Tobago. So we can see the services on the platform come from central government and local government and spans across all Ministries.

TTConnect was transferred to the Ministry on September 23rd, 2015. It was envisioned at a municipal corporation transition under local government reform. TTConnect services would be set up in every corporation and, therefore, it will make sense for the Ministry to manage the ttconnect platform that brought these services closer to the people. Madam President, a lot of people might say every time I get up to talk it is about local government reform, but this year is about local government reform and local government elections. So I will be speaking a lot about local government.

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iGovTT remained the technical host and managers for the platform throughout this time in regard to the operations and infrastructure specific to the management of online portal, business development, project management, support services. In July 2016, the Public Management Consultation Division of the Ministry of Public Administration provided a brief explanation that it was not feasible for ttconnect to remain at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and transferred staff and the \$8 million towards the Ministry of Public Administration. It was therefore recommended that the review of this initial decision to transfer ttconnect to the Rural Development and Local Government Ministry to be made. Following this advice and after careful review, ttconnect was reverted to the purview of iGovTT which falls under the Ministry of Public Administration as previously mentioned in 2017. Even though this revision has happened, Rural Development and Local Government Ministry, together with ttconnect and local government services, are available on the platform and have continued unhindered.

Madam President, this is the short contribution that I have made towards the \$8 million that has been decreased at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Saddam Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam President, and I come after my colleague, Sen. Hosein also. I am grateful to join this debate on an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017 and varied by the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Act of 2018. Madam President, every time an Appropriation Bill is brought to a Parliament the main reason is to provide goods and services to the people of

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Trinidad and Tobago, and various Ministries will be allocated various sums of moneys in order to provide these goods and services to those persons and the responsibility that they have, under the Cabinet responsibility in terms of the duties delegated to them by the Prime Minister.

But, Madam President, time and time again we come to this Parliament, ever since this new Government took the reins of power in 2015 to bring budgets, but does not provide for the goods and services of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because you continue to have a lot of suffering, and you continue to have a lot of persons being starved for resources in this country. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, this did not happen overnight. It happened due to the poor planning because we had warned the population prior to the general election that this Government does not have a plan, and we come here in their fifth month of their fourth year and they have no plan. They have continued to mismanage every single sector of government, be it finance, be it the education sector, health, national security, and works and transport. Works and transport, Madam President. They have continued to collapse the economy and they collapsed the sea bridge, and this is because of financial imprudence by this Government.

7.30 p.m.

But, Madam President, they like to talk about the UNC and they like to blame the UNC but I just want to look at the economy which we left in 2015. Let them blame us for this. I want them to blame us for this. Let them blame us from moving from a minus 4.4 per cent growth in 2009 to that of a positive in 2011. Real GDP growth in the non-energy sector moved from minus 28 per cent to 2.7 per cent in 2014. Non-energy revenue increased by over \$13 billion between 2010 and 2014. We have GDP per capita US dollar increased from \$16,000 in 2010 to

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\$20,900 in 2014. We want you to blame us for that.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. When we were in office in 2010, the fund was at US \$3.1 billion. When we left, we left it with US \$5.6 billion. Foreign reserves were currently at \$10.8 billion. Now they barely have reserves for, I think, about six to eight months, Madam President, and that is the fiscal imprudence, the irresponsibility and mismanagement of this PNM Government [*Desk thumping*] headed by Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley.

And the reason why they are able to take moneys out of—let me call out all of the Ministries—Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Works and Transport. The reason why they took moneys, millions of dollars from these Ministries, is because they could not get a single project off the ground. [*Desk thumping*] This Government has been in power for over three years and what have they built? Not a single thing. We must remember, while we were there, we were the Government responsible for opening the Scarborough hospital in Tobago. We started the Point Fortin Hospital. We built an entire Couva children's hospital. These are the improvements that we made to the health care system. We increased CDAP across the board. Now you know what they are doing? They are cutting CDAP and saying “Well, we want to save”. How many more do you want to suffer the poor people of this country?

And one issue that is very topical, you have hundreds of persons outside of the health centres, namely in Cunupia where I live, waiting for a swine flu shot.

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And you know what the Minister of Health is going on CNC3 Morning Brew to say? “We have vaccines, come, take your vaccine” and “when yuh go there”, there are no vaccines for the people. I do not know what misleading narrative this Government is giving to the population. This Government clearly shows by their plans and their policies that they have no care for the small man in this country.
[Desk thumping]

Because when you take moneys out of the Ministry of National Security and you have police officers saying that they have no money, you have the army saying that they have no food, but you are taking how much? One hundred million dollars to service what? Interest on an overdraft? Madam President, this interest on the overdraft, let us get this clear. This interest on the overdraft, the Minister of Finance was saying in other place that this is a good thing. You know why? Because when we take up all this millions of dollars and give it to Central Bank, they will use this money to run Central Bank and whatever else remains from what the Central Bank utilizes will be profits to the country. Madam President, so we must take money from all of these essential Ministries, load it up in Central Bank, you suffer the Ministries for over a year, two years, because you want to service this interest. Why do you not bring some sort of legislation so that there is a waiver of this interest rate so the Government does not have to pay this so that these Ministries can have the moneys to continue to do its work? But, Madam President, the point is that even if these Ministries had the money, they still can do nothing *[Desk thumping]* because of the incompetence of this Government, because this incarnation of the PNM is probably the worst. I thought the incarnation of the Manning-led PNM was bad, but clearly, this one led by Hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley is the worst, the worst PNM Government we have ever

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seen in this country.

Then you have, Madam President, the Minister in the Ministry of Energy talking about the overdraft, how we had this overdraft, the country had three days of money; it is fumes. We had the Prime Minister going and doing a PowerPoint presentation to some unknown audience with a garbage truck and money flying up and saying “Well it ha no money”. Central Bank Governor “come” smiling, “We ha money for three days”. I do not know which Governor will do that but these are the figures.

In 2014/2015, that was the last year of the Partnership Government. The overdraft stood at—this is from Auditor General Report, page 173, the 2015 report. The overdraft stood at \$9.7 billion. “Buh yuh quarrel with we, yuh cuss we, yuh tell we all kinda thing for that, for the overdraft.” Madam President, for fiscal 2017, do you know what the overdraft is? \$10.5 billion by the PNM Government. The hypocrisy. They are the same ones who over-utilized the overdraft. But the difference between the Partnership Government and the PNM Government is that we have projects, we have tangible items to show for what we spent the money on. [*Desk thumping*] What did you spend the money on?

Then, you talk about borrowings. One of the first things that this Government did, in 2015, was raise the ceiling of the overdraft from 15 per cent to 20 per cent. “Then yuh know what yuh went and do? Yuh went and dip into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, take money out of that too.” You know what you did also? The Minister of Energy talked about NGC. Well, let us talk about NGC. In four months, September 7, 2015 to December 31, 2015, this Government took \$3.68 billion, four months from the NGC. You know how much the Partnership utilized? \$12.3 billion in five years. But this Government took—let me repeat it

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again—\$3.68 billion in four months. Four months and this is the hypocrisy of this Government that they continue to say that we did this and we did that but they are doing the exact same thing with no benefit to the people of this country. None whatsoever. [*Desk thumping*]

And then the Minister, again, I want to reply to him, he talked about a ball-by-ball commentary, that you do not need to give the country a ball-by-ball commentary on the energy affairs of this country. But this is not only for the energy affairs, you do this in every other sector. That is why you all got bowled out with the Sandals deal. It was a lack of transparency, Madam President, a lack of transparency.

Then the Minister of Public Utilities, he is not here right now, chastised us, chastised the UNC, you all waste, waste, mismanagement. But you know what the Minister did not do, Madam President? The Minister could not account for how much pipe he would have laid in this country. If the Minister could tell this honourable Senate 10 villages that did not have water that have water today since he came into power. They could not say that. What they could account for is the loss of hundreds of jobs, the firing of hundreds of contractors, but they cannot say how they have provided water for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You will talk about the Beetham waste water plant, well “talk about it how much yuh want”. How much are you going to blame us again? You are in power for so long. The people are fed up. The people are fed up with you blaming the past administration. What are you doing about it? They gave you the mandate, well do something about it, it is your responsibility. You said you are red and “yuh ready”, but come 2020, you might be red and not—[*Laughter*] I would not go down that road, Madam President.

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But in terms of the water supply, Madam President, in 2010, when we got—
[Interruption]

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 14(5), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until the completion of the business at hand inclusive of the matters on the Motion for the adjournment.

Question put and agreed to.

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Sen. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam President. When we look at water supply, in 2010, the water supply was about 18 per cent in this country. When we left office, there was water supply for over 70 per cent of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, almost 80 per cent, Madam President, but the Government continues to say that they need to cut. The Minister of Public Utilities say “Let us cut, let us cut, let us cut” and they will get things done cheaper. But, Madam President, my mother always told me that “good thing not cheap and cheap thing not good”, so I do not know what cheap services this Government is going to give the people of this country.

And when you look at what is happening with WASA that they would have accounted for a lot of leaks in terms of WASA, this Government has sought it prudent to hire an Israeli company called Utilis. Utilis to detect water leaks from Israel using a satellite over Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President, if you just take a drive around this country—the Minister could pay me “eh know”. I could drive around this whole country and probably outline all the water leaks it have

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right here in Trinidad and Tobago. Why you going to get an Israeli company to do a satellite assessment of the water leaks right here in Trinidad? You have an app. The Minister boasted about the WASA app; you report a leak. Madam President, would you know what when you report a leak on this app, nothing happens? Nothing at all happens. I do not know where the information goes, who are the ones servicing this information, passing it on to the relevant bodies in WASA. But this Government is clearly out of touch with the realities of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. People, in 2019, Madam President, you have still filling barrels of water, going by a stand pipe and filling a bucket to get some water to take a shower or to wash their wares in their homes. This Government, you need to start acting in the best interest of the entire country.

Then I go on to my friend, the Minister of Works and Transport. The Minister of Works and Transport, I would like to read because I was confused after the Minister's contribution. I want to read what the explanation for the variation in his Ministry and the explanation given is that:

“Funding was allocated in fiscal 2018 to enable the *T&T Spirit* to undergo two (2) routine dry docking services, however, the vessel was only placed once on dry-dock this resulted in the sum of \$15 Mn being unutilized.”

Now, Madam President, when I read that, the literal interpretation, my understanding is that the *Spirit* has to undergo two dry docking. The Minister comes to the Senate to tell us that the reason for the savings is because you had the *Express* and you had the *Spirit*, but the reason why we saved \$15 million was because the *Express* did not undergo dry docking. So there are two conflicting stories with regard to the information being presented to this honourable Senate by the Minister and the documents provided by, I believe, this is the Ministry of

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Finance. So I do not know what it is.

But then the Minister went on to give an entire history of Bay Ferries, a history of Bay Ferries, and he said in 2013, we wanted to get rid of Bay Ferries. But, Madam President, if this is so, why did we give Bay Ferries a renewal of a two-year contract? So Bay Ferries was operating until 2015. Then when 2015 came, another renewal came for 2016. Correct? 2016, the PNM was in power, not the United National Congress Government. You are the ones who got rid of Bay Ferries. You cannot come now and blame us for getting rid of Bay Ferries [*Desk thumping*] and it was because—there is a Joint Select Committee, the Fourth Report of the Land and Physical Infrastructure Joint Select Committee on an enquiry into the collapse of the sea bridge and that report clearly stated that the reason for the breakdown of the entire sea bridge was—one of the reasons attributed, besides the corruption and incompetence—that of the maintenance of the vessels. So if you are not properly maintaining these vessels, how can you expect to deliver results so that there can be an efficient flow of transportation between the islands of Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister said it was Cabinet who took a decision not to dry dock the *Express* and I could probably understand that because of the age of the vessel. But the reason why the *Spirit* could not undergo the required dry docking is because if the *Spirit* was taken out of service, what you would have been left with is nothing. Because you know what they did to this country, Madam President? They collapsed the sea bridge when they “tell the *Superfast Galicia* get out of here”. That is basically what this Government did. So you expected the sea bridge to function when you terminated, effectively terminated the contract of the *Superfast Galicia*? You had no vessel in order to back up or service the sea bridge. This

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Government must take responsibility for that. You have suffered the people of Tobago, you have collapsed the Tobago economy. Imagine people in Tobago were complaining that their grocery shelves were empty.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, you have been speaking for quite some time and I understand that you have been responding to what has been presented by other speakers but you need to tighten up your contribution a little bit.

Sen. S. Hosein: I oblige, Madam President. Just for clarification, I was on clause 5, Part II.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, I did not ask for clarification, I am just asking you, as you continue, to tighten up on your contribution.

Sen. S. Hosein: I am guided. Madam President, these are all issues directly related to this \$15 million in terms of a variation to the servicing of the interest on the overdraft from the Ministry of Works and Transport, and this money, Madam President, instead of placing this \$15 million into servicing the overdraft, would it not have been more prudent that the Minister could have allocated this money in terms of fixing the roads? And recently, I was driving home on Friday evening and I saw a protest on the highway because persons were complaining that a bridge—the contractor would have pulled out of the bridge, I do not know if it was because of non-payment of moneys but I ask the hon. Minister to please look into that because a lot of persons have been inconvenienced in the Endeavour Area. And these are the two Ministries I wish to address in detail, Madam President, that of the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Finance.

The other Ministry that I would like to just touch on, Madam President, is that there is something revealing in terms of the \$100 million so-called savings from the Ministry of National Security, and I listened attentively to the debate in

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the other place and I read certain articles in the newspaper today, and I understand that there have been some issues regarding the tendering process used and alleged interference with respect to the tendering process for the CCTV cameras in Trinidad and Tobago. I understand that the matter is going to be referred to the Integrity Commission and I hope, Madam President, that those who are involved are brought to justice so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago do not lose \$100 million because of favouritism in this country.

And that is not the only issue. If there is any interference with respect to the bidding process with respect to those CCTV cameras, Madam President, it is only the national security of the country will be affected because you will have crimes going undetected because, as Sen. Deonarine would have raised, definitely there must be some of those cameras that are currently not operational and the Minister must account for which cameras are not operational in this country because we already have a high murder rate. I believe it is how much for the year? About 30—[*Crosstalk*] 29 for the year and you come to tell us that you cannot properly procure these cameras in a timely efficient manner.

But, Madam President, this is the juncture that we have reached. This Government is at the end of the road. I do not know how far they have to go again. Maybe this year might be a very alarming year in terms of we may have a shake up for a general election. But I can inform the country and those who are listening that the United National Congress is strong and we are ready to take Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We are ready for a snap election. We are ready to take Trinidad and Tobago into Government again, Madam President, because this Government has halted the wheels or the gears have come to a halting stop. Let us on this side get Trinidad and Tobago working again.

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

Sen. Gerald Ramdeen: Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) 2017 Act and varied by the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2018.

Madam President, this is a very important and critical debate for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand the manner in which our country has been run by the administration that is in Government. And the hon. Minister of Public Utilities—I am sorry he is not here now—took a large part of his contribution to remind the country about the performance of the Partnership between 2010 and 2015. I would like to use my time to deal with the Ministries that the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance indicated that there were savings: the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Health, Public Administration and Communications, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Works and Transport.

I want to start off by just putting, if I can have the opportunity to just put a few things into context. And the first thing I want to put into context is that the Minister of Public Utilities prefaced his contribution by talking about wastage and wastage and how much spending and wastage, but I have the figures here of the expenditure by the PNM administration between 2002 and 2010. I want to slowly dealing with this issue because this incarnation of the People's National Movement does not exist before 2010. So, in 2002, the expenditure of this country was \$14.2 billion. Fourteen, 1-4, not 40, 1-4, 14.2 billion, and when they left office in 2010,

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the expenditure of this country had grown from \$14.2 billion to \$46.1 billion.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries told us, in his contribution, that between 2010 and 2015, the price of oil was \$100 a barrel and the prices were high and the revenue was high. But, Madam President, between 2001 and 2010, the price of oil was \$150 a barrel. They grew the expenditure of this country by almost 300 per cent. No other administration over any period of time has ever accomplished that. That is PNM [*Desk thumping*] and they want to tell us about spending and wasting. Three hundred per cent, they grew the expenditure of this country by and they come to talk about between 2010 to 2015; no problem.

One of the issues that the Minister of Public Utilities spoke about, respectfully, in my humble view, Madam President, is not covered here but there was an article on the *Express* yesterday, “he talking” about Beetham waste water and how much money was spent. Madam President, there is a project that had to be delivered by the People’s Partnership between 2010 and 2015. It was called the Scarborough Hospital, the sod turning of which was done by the hon. Prime Minister now and when the sod was turned, the people of Trinidad and Tobago were told that that project will cost \$135 million. Well, during the time that the sod was turned and the material left and material was brought in and the contractor left and a contractor was brought in, under the People’s National Movement, the Scarborough Hospital cost the people of this country from \$135 million, it ended up costing \$735 million. So for 100 beds, the PNM will keep their legacy of building a hospital at \$7 million a bed. It was said to be the most expensive hospital bed in the world, 7 million “ah bed. Dem want to tell we about spending and wasting.” That is how it operates, spending and wastage, but before 2010—perhaps the hon. Minister was not aware of that.

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Madam President, we, on this side, have a serious difficulty with this idea that the Government has come today to the Parliament and has told the country that they have saved and their version of saving which is like their version of governance, right, is to deliver nothing because they have saved nothing. When you look at what has been put in here to us: \$586 million, \$586 million, \$586,161,666, they said that was saved. And what they do? They spent \$586,161,666. So if the country wants to understand governance PNM-style, their idea of saving is that you spend the same amount that you get and that is their definition of saving. It is a very unique kind of concept but that is how the PNM does it.

It does not go unnoticed that the one Ministry for which money has been taken out more than any other Ministry is the Ministry of Health and I want the country to understand that what has been taken out of the Ministry of Health, what they call “saved”, is \$211 million; \$211 million. That is what they saved, according to them. And they say that, Madam President, with a straight face to the country so let me put this \$211 million that was “saved” by the PNM into context and before they say, “Is the UNC, is UNC saying that”, let me just quote from an article:

“Hospitals at crisis point”

Madam President, I want to take this slowly and I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to listen carefully to where we are in the health sector. This is an article from the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, July 17, 2016:

“There is a ‘tremendous shortage’ of staff, especially skilled medical staff including both doctors and nurses, at the public health institutions in this country, the Sunday Guardian has learnt.”

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So, Madam President, let me just get down to this one time because I want to be very relevant in my contribution that in the documents that have been provided to us, under the Ministry of Health and the explanation that has been given to us, one of the issues that has been addressed by this \$211 million is that \$26 million was saved according to the—that is their concept of saving because the filling of vacancies was not finalized as the recruitment and selection process for doctors and nurses from Cuba is ongoing. So, Madam President, let me inform you what is the position at the health sector.

“The issue has reached ‘crisis’ proportions throughout the country resulting in a ratio as high as 22 patients to one nurse...”

Twenty-two patients to one nurse.

“currently existing at San Fernando General Hospital...”

8.00 p.m.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, is it that you are back to quoting from the newspaper article?

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am sorry, Madam President. I apologize, I am back to quoting from the newspaper article, and I do apologize.

“Hospitals at Crisis point”—*Trinidad Guardian*—“The situation at San Fernando General...”

—Sorry, Madam President, let me just complete this part about the ratio—

“...resulting in a ratio as high as 22 patients to one nurse currently existing at San Fernando General Hospital – as opposed to a ratio of six patients to one nurse suggested by the World Health Organization...”

So we are at 22:1, the World Health Organization says 6:1. This is like the ratio of prison officers to prisoners at the Port of Spain prison.

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“...staff shortages are among a list of growing concerns plaguing the public health sector. Among the other issues are drug shortages at the ...(RHAs), medical staff from Tobago staging a sickout over arrears and confusion over Yellow Fever vaccines.”

—And listen to this, Madam President, when we are told by the Government that they saved \$211 million in the Ministry of Health, listen to this:

“No jobs for doctors.

Even as the shortage of specialists exists, more than 150 nationals, who have already completed their internship as doctors at the public hospitals...still remain unemployed.”

How could you be telling us that you saved \$26 million because you did not hire nurses and doctors from Cuba, but you have 150—

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, I have to, at this stage, just caution you a little bit about tedious repetition. Sen. Haynes, in her contribution, spoke a lot about the health issues and the health—what is in the Bill, and spoke a lot about what—you are now repeating some of the things that she has said. She may not have referred to that article but she would have raised these issues. So I just want to caution you.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am obliged, Madam President, I thank you and I am obliged. I just want to cite one more figure and I am off this.

“According to the official statistics, in the NCRHA there are at least 650 vacancies to be filled, and in the South West Regional Health Authority...”

—I am sure this is not an error, Madam President:

“...there are 3413 vacancies, 922 of them being nursing vacancies,”

—and I am off that.

So, Madam President, this idea of telling the country that you saved money,

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we want you to spend that money on hiring some doctors and nurses in the public health care institutions, so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the poor people who cannot afford to go to St. Clair, Medical Associates, Westshore and Gulf View, could go to a proper health care institution and get proper health care for once. [*Desk thumping*].

The Minister of Public Utilities, together with the Minister of Works and Transport in both their contributions, commended the Government about how efficient they were and how good the Government is being run and all the things that the Government is doing. So I just want to go through what the information provided to us and show the country what efficiency, PNM-style, is.

Under the Ministry of National Security, they “saved” \$100 million. Sen. Deonarine very correctly asked, well, this CCTV, the absence of this CCTV coverage, where was it? Well, I want to ask too. How many crimes were committed, how many prosecutions were put in jeopardy? How many people who robbed, murdered, raped, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, would, could or have walked free as a result of this \$100 million savings by the Cabinet?

Hear why it was saved, Madam President, hear why it was saved. A contract for the provision of CCTV coverage expired with effect from July 01, 2017. So I just want to understand how this works. As I understand it, there is an existing contract that was started on a particular date and expires on a particular date. So the Government did not know that it was expiring on July 01, 2017; they did not know that. So they could not put things in place to understand that we have to renew this contract before. Let us make arrangements so that the National Security apparatus would not be put in jeopardy when the contract expires and we do not have any contract in place. But you see, that is what you call governance, PNM-

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style.

Go down to the Ministry of Health, Madam President. Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies, I am coming back to that. “The filling of vacancies was not finalized...”, well, that is efficiency, PNM-style, \$26 million on that. Hospital Refurbishment Programme, I am not staying long on it, Madam President, because Sen. Haynes dealt with that.

But you know what this demonstrates, Madam President? In five years, between 2010 and 2015, the record of the Partnership was that we delivered Scarborough, we delivered San Fernando, we built a hospital in Couva, we started one in Arima, and we started one in Point Fortin. So five, in five years. [*Desk thumping*] Under this administration, in three years and five months, “they cyah build ajoupa”, if you ask them. [*Desk thumping*] “They cyah build ajoupa.” They would not open an ECCE centre, they would not open a health centre, nothing. But that is governance, PNM-style. That is what the PNM refers to as efficiency.

So they failed to operationalize the refurbishment programme. Well, that was for prenatal and chemotherapy. So, look at who is suffering because you know, there is a picture behind all of this, you know, Madam President. And the picture behind all of this, is that one has to ask themselves in the scheme of governance under this administration, when you look at the Ministries for which money has been taken out of, and you look at where it has been put, there is one picture that becomes very clear: the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago are continuing to suffer at the hands of the PNM. Because, every single Ministry, the deliverable Ministries: the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, the Ministry of Works and Transport, those are what you call the

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deliverable Ministries, those are the Ministries that the poor people look to for some kind of comfort, for some kind of provision and what do you do? You do not study them, do not worry about them.

The Water and Sewerage Authority in fiscal 2018, \$62 million. “We cyah done hear” about how many contractors have not been paid. Well, you know, Madam President, we on this side, we do not boast about not paying people for the work that they do. We will pay people for the work that they do. If the PNM does not want to do that, let them do that, because at the end of the day, who suffers? The poor people of Trinidad and Tobago are the victims of the PNM; that is what they are.

Well, the Minister of Works and Transport told us that they are using old parts in new buses, so that is the new philosophy of the PTSC, they are using old parts in new buses and that is helping the transportation system. Well, that is perhaps the inefficiency at the Ministry of Works and Transport. No problem with that. You see, Madam President, we were told—I want to dwell on an issue that has been not been touched at all, that deals with this Ministry of National Security.

Madam President, I do not know if the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand. We have a problem in this country where under the Ministry of National Security and more particularly the prison service, we have some scanners up at the prison. And this \$100 million that was saved under the Ministry of National Security, one good thing that this could have done that could have contributed to the national security of the country—and one of the main problems that we hear about every day when you hear the whole country is in uproar when a prison officer is killed and they talk about “de shot call from behind de bars” and all of that—is that the scanners at the prison could have been fixed.

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So that the people who are trafficking things in the prison, that money could have been used to fix that, because months on end when you visit the maximum security prison, the scanner is not working. And the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the prison officers, who this Government claims to—their comrades, and they claim to care about them so much and legislation is coming, and every time a prison officer is killed they claim to care. But at the end of the day, to do the basic things with the money from the Ministry of National Security, they cannot do that.

But, let me tell you what is an extension of the efficiency at the Ministry of National Security. In 2018, Madam President, the Minister of National Security told us that in 2018, after three years of the People's National Movement, the Minister of National Security woke up one morning and realized that there were 14 coast guard interceptors to protect the borders of our country, that they talk about the porous borders. One of their manifesto promises was that they would have something called a border protection agency. And I took my time every single budget that was delivered by the PNM, to look at that line item in the Ministry of National Security that says Border Protection Agency. And every time I look at that line item, there are two things that happen, it is like ice, it was melting over the three years. So it went from \$3 million, to \$2 million, to \$1 million, and then it disappeared. So, it lasted perhaps a little bit longer than a snow ball in hell.

But the people of Trinidad and Tobago will never see a border protection agency under the PNM. But if you look in the manifesto of the PNM, a big picture with a big ship and saying "Border Protection Agency", that is governance PNM-style. But after three years, the Minister of National Security woke up one day and realized that—listen to this Madam President, the porous borders of Trinidad and

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Tobago, there are 14 interceptors that are not working, it is costing \$6 million to fix, \$6 million, you are saving \$100 million according to the PNM, \$100 million. But out of the \$100 million, it was not important enough to take six out of the 100, and fix the 14 interceptors. So that the borders of Trinidad, where the migrants are coming in, the drugs coming in, the guns coming in—the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries told us last week, the cattle and goats coming in, the agouti and lappe and everything coming in, but the 14 interceptors after three years, we cannot get that fixed.

But, in an article, *Trinidad Guardian*, 08 November 2018, this is what we were told:

“Speaking at Thursday’s post-Cabinet media briefing, National Security Minister, Stuart Young said the initiative to get the interceptors active again will cost \$6 million.

He added that this will accompany the upgraded 360-degree radar system which is already in place.

‘As soon as these...’”

—And this is the Minister being quoted, Madam President—

“‘As soon as these interceptors are up and running, we can add them to the four or five that we have, to give us 19 interceptors that can be strategically placed based on intelligence reports. They will go a long way in assisting us to make our borders less porous, ’...’”

They like to talk about that, porous borders.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, did you say where you were quoting from?

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President: I am sorry then, okay.

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Sen. G. Ramdeen: *Trinidad Guardian*, 08 November, 2018, I had quoted it before—

“Young said that Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley visited the”—Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard—“headquarters and was told”—after three years, was told—“that out of 25 interceptors not many of them were working.”

And that is the emphasis that this Government places on national security of our country.

When in a year, in 2018, when we had 519 citizens murdered, the highest in a decade and the second highest ever in the history of our country, that is the kind of signal that we get from the Government with respect to the priority of national security.

You see, Madam President, there are two things, the two most essential things that a government has a duty to do. The first is to protect, and the second is to provide. And over three years and five months that the PNM has been in office, the one thing that the country is sure about is that they have no protection and as we can see now from this Bill, there is little provision for them as well.

But you see, Madam President, that is the way that this country is going to operate. And I have kept saying over and over that these things, Madam President, have a direct impact on the poor people of this country, right? You see why I raise this issue about these 14 interceptors, is because—look, in my hand here I have a host of articles, about what? About the people, from Otaheite, Fullerton, Point Fortin, La Brea, Icacos, Bonasse, Moruga, Erin, and you know what, those are people who, their families go out every day to make an honest living in the Gulf of Paria. And when you ask the Ministry of National Security, “Why you doh put a Coast Guard vessel out there and put the interceptors to protect those honest

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fishermen who going out there, not plying drugs between Venezuela and Trinidad, but going out there to put their lives at risk”? You know what they tell you Madam President, with the saving of \$100 million in the Ministry of National Security, they tell you, “We doh have diesel to put in the Coast Guard vessel to go out there”.

So that—you have articles here, Vishnu Ramkissoon and Ronald Seenath gone missing since 2018, not to be found. And the lives of the citizens of the country are not important enough to spend some money on some diesel and put the Coast Guard vessels out in the gulf. But you know what they want to do, buy more vessels. Today there is an article in the *Guardian* about it, buy more vessels, right? You buy more vessels but 25 interceptors you have, and you cannot operationalize that out there but you are telling us about spending, right? And at the end of the day the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago have to suffer for that.

You see, Madam President, we have come from a time when people of this country used to lament the idea that somebody comes to rob them at home, somebody comes to invade their house, somebody comes to commit a crime at their home, and when you call the police station, before 2010, you used to hear police officers telling you, “We have no vehicle”, right? “We have no vehicle to come to your home.” We fixed that between 2010 and 2015, because we ensured that during that period of time, that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service was properly equipped with over 500 new vehicles to fight crime on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And that is how we brought crime, serious crime down to the lowest in 33 years. But you know where we have reached now, Madam President? After three years of the PNM, when you call the police station in 2018—you know what they used to tell you, they are not telling

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you “We doh have a vehicle” anymore, you know. They say, “We have no diesel and we have no gas to come by your house”. So they have vehicles but they have no diesel and no gas to put it in. That is where you all have brought our country—

Hon. Senator: That is the savings.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Right, that is the savings. That is the consequence of the \$100 million that you all saved us. You know, Madam President, when the Minister in the Ministry of Finance was piloting the Bill today, we were told that the Ministry of Health saved money because this list of drugs on the CDAP list, they followed PAHO and the list was reduced. But, you know, I have an article here, Madam President, where the Minister of Health was telling us in 2018, that one of the—I have it right here, that one of the things that the Ministry of Health was going to do to—look, I have it right here, Madam President. It is an article 12th of May, 2017, *Trinidad Guardian*, and this was an article that was written based on a press release by the Ministry of Health, where the Ministry of Health was responding to an article in a *Guardian* newspaper where the *Guardian* was reporting people could not get CDAP drugs.

Madam President, you really have to live in a bubble in this country to tell this country and expect this country to believe that all is well in the health sector, and the supply of CDAP drugs over the past three years has been smooth and unhindered to the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not say so pejoratively, Madam President. But, I do not think any of us in this Chamber depend or have, or are blessed or are put in a situation where we have to depend on CDAP drugs. I think everyone in this Chamber will be able to access proper health care one way or the other.

But, you know, the CDAP drugs, Madam President, was a programme that

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was designed to help the very poor. It was a programme that was designed to help people who could not help themselves. And it was designed because—it was a programme that was designed to help people whose lives were at risk, who needed medication on a daily basis, who depended on the public health care system for their survival; it was a matter of life and death. And in 2017, the Minister of Health said that drugs would be added to the national formulary, he added that the national formulary would be revised to add needed drugs. What are we told today, Madam President? We are told that the list—the Minister of Health said we are going to add drugs to it, we are told today that the list moved from 730 to 580. That must be arithmetic, PNM-style too.

You see, Madam President, this is a Government—the experience that this country has had over the last three and a half years is that this is a Government that prides itself on not providing. They are a Government that prides itself on depriving; that is what they are about. Because, what have been the accomplishments that they have done? They have taken away the subsidy on gas. So, they tell you, “dey eh riot yet, so, three times we could raise that”. They deprive the fishermen of this country of regular, so \$100 million saved but no regular for the fishermen. Well, too bad for them because you know what they could do, they could do like Tobago fishermen and run the engine on super; that is the answer to that. They have deprived more than 100,000 people of food cards; that is an accomplishment too. So they have deprived a large part of the population of proper health care, no CDAP medication. We have been told today that the waiting list—under Waiting List for Surgery, there has been a \$7 million decrease, why?—savings, according to the PNM. “There was an increase of surgical procedures undertaken at the Public Health Care Institutions.”

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Can I be allowed, Madam President, to join my leader in the Senate, Sen. Mark, in asking: How difficult would it have been for the Government to tell us, well, how many are waiting now? Since you have done all of these operations in the public health care system and all of these people have benefited, why did you not tell us how much you did and how much remains to be done? Has it increased or has it decreased?

Well, I want to say, Madam President, that for the people who speak to the ordinary citizen every single day, and the people who read the newspaper on a daily basis, almost every single week in this country there is an article in the newspaper where some citizen of this country is crying out for an operation. Some child has not gotten proper health care. Some child, some elderly person does not have the money go to a private institution to be able to save their lives. Every single week you read it on the newspaper. And what the Ministry of Health is telling us is that they saved \$7 million. Well, you know what we want to tell them to do, Madam President? Take that \$7 million and spend it on the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, this issue about the treatment of nationals at institutions, this \$20 million “savings” that the Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Health wish the country to believe, that there is some saving, let me say this, Madam President: there is no saving to any citizen of this country if one citizen of this country is deprived of proper health care because they cannot access it on a daily basis at the public health care institutions. When they walk in to San Fernando, or they walk in to Port of Spain, or they walk in to Mount Hope, the idea is they are being put on a bench, sometimes they are being put on a chair, sometimes they are waiting for a serious operation to be done for 10 and 20 hours.

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There is no savings about that, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, you have a few minutes left, and I would advise you to move on to some other points because you really are now seriously into tedious repetition, because everything that you are saying now has been said before by previous speakers, so please.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Madam President, I will wrap up my contribution here because it is very clear from the last three years and five months of this administration that the poor people of this country, the middle-class and the under-privileged will continue to suffer. This \$586 million that is going to be spent on the Ministry of Finance, 517 and 69—Madam President, I just want to remind this country about one thing. In the second budget I raised in the midterm review, right here, that what this Government was doing was breaching section 46 of the Central Bank Act, because of the increase that was being done to the overdraft. And right after that was made in the midterm review, the Government brought legislation, to do what? To increase, to increase the amount that could be used by the Government under the Central Bank Act.

And this Government could talk as much as they want, Madam President, about 2010—2015, the people of this country are tired and they are weary. And what I want to say to this Government is that they are testing the patience of the people. We are a people of this country that endure a lot, and the people of this country have endured a lot over the last three and a half years, and it is time that this country returns to proper governance where the priority of the administration in power is the people and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is time for us, Madam President. What this Bill has demonstrated very clearly, is that the PNM is really a representation of not the People's National Movement, but

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poor national management of our country. [*Desk thumping*] It is about time, I will say it all the time, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve better from an administration. I thank you, Madam President.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West): Thank you, Madam President. Just to bring back the focus of this place as well as the people listening in, this debate this afternoon is not about accounting for the stewardship of the Government over the last year or even prior to that. You will recall that we would have brought a budget and done a whole budget presentation. We would have brought a mid-year review to indicate and to get approval for what money we are spending and how we are spending it. What we are required to do at the end of the year is to indicate whether there were any variances on how Parliament agreed we should apply the funds that they gave us permission to spend, and that is what we are doing. We are saying to you today there were some variances between what you approved and what we actually spent, and we are explaining what those variances are. There will come a time in the not-too-distant future where we will come again and give a stewardship of what we have done and how we are doing it and why we are doing it and so on.

So that is the reason and the basis for this debate, notwithstanding the fact that my friends on the other side took it all over the place as though it was a budget debate. So let us deal with the specific issues raised by the speakers, Madam President.

8.30 p.m.

Sen. Mark started off, and I will deal with this briefly because I think my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities, adequately dealt with the issue of the Water and Sewerage Authority adjustments, but Sen. Mark mentioned, on more

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than one occasion, the issue of retrenchment of WASA contractors, and I would hate to see a headline in the newspaper tomorrow morning saying, Retrenchment at WASA. Because as Sen. Mark, as a former practitioner in the labour field would know, you do not retrench independent contractors, you engage them for a purpose and when you no longer need them for that purpose you do not engage them any further, and that is all that we have done. Anybody who builds a business model on the basis of an inefficient state organization needs to rethink their business model. I will say no more on that, Madam President.

He moved on and he was supported by a couple of his colleagues to the issue of the maxing out of the Central Bank account, seeking to contradict our comments that we met a maxed-out Central Bank account, but we in turn have maxed it out, so let me give some of the figures supplied by the Central Bank. When the People's Partnership came into Government on the 24th of May, 2010, they met a credit in the Central Bank account of \$6.5 billion. The account was in credit to that extent. When they demitted office on September 07, 2015, they left a deficit or debit of overdraft of \$8.047 billion.

In addition to that they left a significant number of cheques written just before the general election that were cashed shortly after the change of Government. So the overdraft went from 88.9 per cent on September 07, 2015, to 97 per cent within a week. That is what we met. In contrast, where we stand today under this Government is that the current overdraft, which, as I said, started out when we came into office at \$8.04 billion and rose significantly within a week of that. The current overdraft figure, as of today, is \$8.981 billion which represents 14.9 per cent.

So we are well shy of what we can borrow. So although we came to the

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House and sought an increase in the borrowings from 15 per cent to 20 per cent in order that we can manage our cash flow, and we would have from time to time gotten close to that, at the moment it is 14.9 per cent of what we are allowed to borrow. The reason for the increase—the most significant reason for the increase in the interest payable over what was anticipated was, if you will recall, we had expected to secure the Clico assets much earlier in the year than we actually did, and we expected the NIF to be issued and funds received in respect of that issue much earlier than it actually was. As a result of the delay in that process we had to use Central Bank funds until we got those cleared up. So that was the most significant reason for the increase in the interest payable on that overdraft.

Much heavy weather was made of the fact that the Ministry of Finance was usurping funds from other Ministries for its own purpose—to pay the interest. That is not at all the case. What happened was that, for the reasons I have mentioned, the Ministries did not utilize the funds allocated to them. It is not that the Ministry of Finance said, we need more funds so you cannot spend this. The Ministries that we mentioned, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Works and Transport, and so on, did not, for the various reasons, use all the funds and so they were available for application in the way it was applied to settle the increased interest liability at the Central Bank.

Sen. Mark made some allegations about a preferential service provider in respect of the National Security CCTV; there is no such thing. This Government goes through its normal procurement processes. It is in the process of doing that, and as and when the preferred service providers are identified, on the basis of ability to provide what we need and value for money, we will engage that person.

In the interim the coverage that we have was not compromised. We would

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have paid less based on other things, and I would suggest to you that you raise the question that you have to get a more specific answer from the Minister of National Security, who is currently out of the country, in respect of national security. But we had not, during the period, compromised the national security coverage that we had during the period that we have been operating on a month-to-month contract.

Sen. Mark: Minister, can I seek a clarification, please? Can you explain to this honourable Senate why the process for tendering was aborted for the same contract on four occasions?

Sen. The Hon. A. West: Sen. Mark, that is an allegation that you have made that we have not established as fact so I will not answer that question. I would suggest you put that to the substantive Minister on his return.

In terms—Madam President, through you—Sen. Deonarine asked some very specific questions with respect to the Ministry of Health. Before I go there let me just state clearly that this again is not about boasting about savings. So when we do not spend as much as we should spend because we have not completed a project, it is not that we are boasting that we have not completed a project. As I said earlier, we are reporting to you about how we spend, what we were supposed to spend and how we did not. There are areas that I think we need to give the relevant Ministries credit for. They were, for example, the Ministry of Public Utilities who transferred their operations from outsourcing to insourcing and saved 62 billion that way; I think the Ministry deserves credit for that.

The Ministry of Health that saved because they eliminated the distribution cost and went to PAHO to secure a more efficient and cheaper supply of drugs. Their removal of duplicated drugs, not a reduction in the list of effective drugs that we need but removal of duplications in the list of drugs, and dealing with

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procurement processes and abuse of overtime, all of these things the Ministry should get the credit for, in my view. However, where it is a situation where for the various reasons that we outlined, we were not able to spend the money because we had to defer a project, or something did not materialize. It is not that we are saying that we saved, what we are saying is that we did not spend the money in this period, and I remember specifically saying, during my piloting, that a lot of these costs would be rolled over into 2019 because we do appreciate that there are costs that need to be incurred to get us, in the various Ministries, where we want to get to. So we are not celebrating failure to deliver, we are not celebrating differences, we are just recognizing that they happened.

Sen. Dillon-Remy, Madam President, raised a couple of issues in respect of the performance in the Ministry of Health, and, again, the best person to tell the story of the performance in the Ministry of Health is the Minister of Health. He has been doing it in the Lower House, and I am sure an opportunity will be created for him to do it in this place. But the Ministry of Health is not seeking and has not sought to compromise, to save money by compromising the level and quantity and quality of service as being provided. He has done a shift to more internal operations, but not at the expense of the people who are coming to the Ministry for assistance. For example, just a couple of weeks ago, he came to the Cabinet to say that while we continue to build out our capacity in respect of treatment for cancer patients, we have to continue outsourcing those services, and Cabinet gave the approval. So his approach is, this is the plan, this is where we are going, this is how we are spending, this is how long it will take, but in the meantime we have go, continue with the private sector, either for the full level of services that we are currently getting from them, or in the cases I mentioned with the cardiac surgery

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and the heart surgery, reducing the quantity that you are outsourcing.

Again, Madam President, Sen. Dillon-Remy acknowledged and applauded our approach in respect of infant mortality, and the issue that she raised which struck home with me, and I think it is important for us to make a comment on, was that she congratulated the current administration for not abandoning the study that was done prior to our coming into office, and I would reassure the Senator that this is not the approach taken by the PNM. Any expenditure done of government funds by whichever Government, we would not abandon; we would look at it, determine whether it is still viable, determine whether it needs to be updated, and once it is, we will proceed with it. So we are not about throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Madam President, we keep hearing the same comment about the NIF being an expense of the Government because the Government has indirectly or directly guaranteed the payment and therefore it should be reflected in the size of the deficit; and to start with, somebody who came out of banking should recognize that there is a double-entry approach. So if you are recognizing the liability, you need to recognize the asset, which was not done.

Secondly, we have been at pains to explain that the NIF is not regarded as government debt because the NIF is securitized to twice the value of what was borrowed. So although in theory the Government is responsible for any liability in terms of government bonds issued, even though it is issued by a corporation owned by the Government, because in effect there are sufficient assets to cover that liability they are not recognized as government debt in our books because they are covered. So the Government does not expect to have to bear any burden in respect of that, of the repayment of NIF bonds. Sen. Obika again, Madam President, misrepresented the statement made by the Minister of Finance in respect of the

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interest payable to the Central Bank.

Madam President: Minister, could you just rephrase what you just said, please?

Sen. The Hon. A. West: Thank you, Madam President. Sen. Obika indicated, in interpreting the Minister of Finance's comments about the interest payable to the Central Bank, that the Minister said that the more money we pay the Central Bank the more money they will have to give us dividends at the end of the year and therefore it would benefit Trinidad and Tobago. I listened to the Minister's presentation and what he indicated was that the investment to the Central Bank is being better managed and therefore we are having a better return—*[Device goes off]*—I am sorry, Madam President, I do not know what happened there, apologies. We are getting a better return from the Central Bank because of its investments and therefore he was giving that as the other side of the picture in respect of the increased expense paid to the Central Bank. He was not, by any means, encouraging the Government to keep paying high interest to the Central Bank, and that is reflected in a report I have from the Central Bank which shows the return on investment and therefore the income received by the Government from the Central Bank.

In 2015, the profits paid to Government from the Central Bank was \$700,000 based on their investment and other earnings. I have the figures throughout, but in 2018 there has been a steady increase in that; by 2018 the amount received from the Central Bank as a distribution on profits is \$1.471 billion. And that is what the Minister was saying that, yes, we are paying more in interest but we are also managing the Central Bank so that its return on the investment is better, which we benefit from. So let us look at the whole picture; that was all the Minister was saying.

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Again, we have a repeat of the information in respect of the energy revenue, and my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, indicated that that was incorrect; but let me give you the figures that I have that came from the final report issued in respect of the years in question. The 2016 estimates have the actual revenue outturn for the two years prior—that is 2014—and the 2018 estimates will have the actual outturn for 2016. So that the actual income from taxes on oil companies in 2014 was \$16.97 billion, essentially \$17 billion. The revenue received under that same Head in 2016 was \$1.04 billion, a reduction of \$15.9 billion in revenue from taxes on oil. If you look at, if you add royalties to that, which is the main component of the item missing between taxes from the energy sector and revenue from the energy sector, you have the royalties received in 2014 was \$2.4 billion. In 2016 it was \$.5 billion, so \$500 million. So when you take the global figure you will see a drop in revenue from energy companies from \$19.37 billion in 2014 to \$1.578 billion in 2016. These are the final figures, not the estimate of what was projected and is being focused on by the other side.

You may recall that in my first budget debate, which was 2017, we had to explain a \$7 billion reduction in the actual revenue versus revenue projected, and that may explain the \$8 billion that the other side keeps quoting, but these are the figures that were actually received in the relevant years. Sen. Haynes, Madam President, lamented that they did so much in the health sector and we have done nothing, let me remind Sen. Haynes that the Point Fortin Hospital is almost done, that the Arima Hospital is well on its way, that the Couva Hospital, we have found a service provider and that is being negotiated and built out. Very recently, she said, we have not opened a health facility. I do not know if she does not read the papers, but a week or two ago the Minister of Health actually cut the ribbon for the

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Sangre Grande Health Centre. So we are doing things, it is just, as I said, [*Crosstalk*] this is not—the purpose of this debate is not accounting for our stewardship which is why we did not focus on those things. I am merely seeking to respond to some of the specific allegations raised.

Madam President, those, in my view, based on my notes, are the issues that I needed to respond to that were not responded to by my colleagues on this side. As I said, this is about indicating where we have varied from the allocations and appropriations that were approved, indicate what was changed, why it was changed, how the money was spent in the circumstances in which money was not spent. This is what we have done, Madam President, we have outlined the situation to you. I think that it is noteworthy that this is not a variation so there was no increase, and we need to acknowledge that. This Government continues to manage the affairs of the country. We are trying to get value for money, which is why sometimes it may take longer to issue a contract than we otherwise would like, because we are trying to ensure that we get the best deal for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, Madam President, this is where we are, we ask for the support of the other side in respect of this matter. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Sen. The Hon. A. West: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 57(2), I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, January 22, 2019, that is tomorrow, at 1.30 p.m., and we will be doing the Private Members' Motion, Motion No. 1, which is the Motion on Petrotrin. We will continue debate on that Motion.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for two matters to be raised. Sen. Mark.

**Collective Labour Law Framework
(Comprehensive Employment Rights)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago was the first English-speaking Caribbean country to enact comprehensive, collective labour legislation to manage the employment relationship between management and trade unions. However, it has not yet enacted comprehensive employment rights or standards legislation in support of its collective labour law framework.

Madam President, under the International Labour Organization Convention on Freedom of Association, No. 87 of 1948, and the Right to Organise and to Collective Bargaining Convention, No. 98 of 1949, workers enjoy the right to join and form trade unions of their choice to represent their collective interests through the collective bargaining process and thereby arriving at collective agreements which would reflect their terms and conditions of employment, as well as other critical procedures, for example, grievance and grievance handling. However, Madam President, the process at arriving at this collective bargaining process requires recognition and certification.

This process of recognition and certification is conducted by a body called the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board. However, the process is extremely and painfully bureaucratic and may take an average of maybe a year, sometimes beyond a year to have certificates issued to trade unions. Madam President, in fact, I know of two cases where it took six years for a union to gain its certificate of recognition only to be tossed out by the courts of Trinidad and Tobago on a point of law.

And in the second instance it took a trade union, the OWTU, 10 years to become the legally recognized union for BP Amoco, before they too were stopped by that transnational body. So, Madam President, what the experience is telling us in Trinidad and Tobago is that we need to promote a simpler process of recognition to speed up the rights enjoyed by workers, not only under the Constitution but given our signatory as a member of the International Labour Organization and our recognition and almost signing off on two very important conventions—87 and 98, respectively.

9.00 p.m.

Madam President, our process should not take one year six months just to get certified. We should have a process that could be concluded as quickly as possible, and no more than six months. It should not take more than six months for a union to be recognized, once it satisfies certain procedural matters or, let us say, arrangements. For example, the union must command more than 50 per cent of the members in the bargaining unit in order to be recognized, and that should be obvious, and that is what I think is in the law to some extent.

The hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has taken a considerable period of time to get to this point of what is, what I would like to

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describe, as the amendment revision of the Industrial Relations Act, because housed in the Industrial Relations Act is the RRCB.

I am sure the hon. Minister would be aware, and I myself am aware, that there is model legislation on the recognition of trade unions in the Caribbean. The model legislation was developed by the International Labour Organization. This model legislation which I have in my possession is titled, Model Harmonization Act Regarding Registration Status and Recognition of Trade Unions and Employers Organization.

Madam President, this is a very, I would say, advanced and relatively aggressive approach to dealing with this matter of trade union recognition in Trinidad and Tobago. I would ask the hon. Minister whether she has seen—I believe she has—this model ILO legislation on trade union recognition, and why this has not been adopted in order to speed up the process of recognition of trade unions. It takes too long for trade unions to be recognized in this country. I believe that the organized labour force, in terms of trade union representation, is just under 20 per cent and we have a labour force of close to 638,000 or 639,000 people and less than 20 per cent of organized labour is captured in that 640,000 work force. It has to do with the fact that the procedure is too difficult and too challenging, and sometimes it does not support the easy recognition process that is required.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have one more minute.

Sen. W. Mark: Now, in Grenada after the revolution in 1979 the process was simplified, where you just go to a place and once you have 50-plus, a poll is conducted and once the numbers are recognized, you issue the certificate of recognition to the trade union movement or the trade union. So I am calling on the

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Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to really adopt a speedy mechanism to bring about a situation where it does not take that length of time to bring about trade union certification. There is model legislation available, it is in my possession. The Minister is aware of it, and I want to ask the Minister to look at it and see to what extent this thing could be addressed speedily.

I thank you very much, Madam President.

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus): Madam President, I am very grateful for the opportunity to settle the fears of my comrade and my fellow Senator, Sen. Wade Mark. While I do not disagree in essence to some of points he has raised, it seems as though so much expectation lies on the shoulders of this Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, but my years' experience in the arena prepares me for that. I would like to share the following information with this honourable House and, by extension, the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government recognizes the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board as a vital actor within the local industrial relations ecosystem, given its statutory role in certifying trade unions as recognized bargaining agents as it is only upon being certified by the RRCB, as Sen. Mark has pointed out, does a trade union obtain the right to bargain exclusively on behalf of the employee at any particular workplace.

Madam President, Government's official policy framework articulates its commitment to a comprehensive review in consultation with the trade union movement of all labour legislation. It is recognized that labour legislation has not been amended in this country for over 20, 30 years, and I would resist the temptation to remind my friend that he had a lot of time in changing the legislation.

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But I will not follow that temptation.

The amendment of the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01, is identified as a key priority in fulfilling this commitment, particularly with respect to achieving an appropriate balance between all the parties involved in the employment relationship, and upholding the principles of decent work.

Recognized as the centrepiece for the management of the industrial relations system in Trinidad and Tobago, the Industrial Relations Act of 1972 as amended, is also considered as being limited in keeping with modern industrial relation practices and the principles of decent work as enshrined in the international labour standards.

My colleague a very short while ago, Sen. The Hon. Allyson West, in responding to the recently debated Variation Bill, gave the assurance to a fellow Senator that this Government in coming into office will not throw the baby out with the bath water. Any project that we have met we will review to determine the sustainability of those projects. Likewise, when I was honoured with the privilege of leading the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development upon assuming office, the last Industrial Relations Advisory Committee appointed under the previous Minister, a fellow comrade in the trade union movement, former Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Errol McLeod, appointed an Industrial Relations Advisory Committee headed by—chaired by Dr. Hyacinth Guy.

When I assumed office I met a report of that Committee dated 2014 that was never implemented by the very administration. And when I read that report it made absolutely perfect sense, the recommendations were highly commendable, and as a consequence as Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, I

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accepted those recommendations, reappointed the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee chaired by Dr. Hyacinth Guy, and we proceeded to work forthwith with regard to the implementation of the recommendations made in the 2014 report.

One of the recommendations has to do with shortening the period of time for recognition. In that context it became a priority of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. We held a consultation, more than one, one on the 22nd of February and another on the 23rd in Trinidad, and in Tobago on April the 8th on the amendment of the Industrial Relations Act. The focus of the consultations were the 25 recommendations made within the June—I am sorry, Madam President, I just want to correct it, not 2014, but June 2013 report and the background papers. In addition to the consultation, we offered stakeholders the opportunity to submit written comments and suggestions, and several of them obliged and we welcomed those recommendations.

Madam President, of the 25 recommendations of IRAC, Industrial Relations Advisory Committee, considered during the consultative process, there was consensus among stakeholders on 19 of those issues, with consensus for the amendment of the Industrial Relations Act on 11 of the said issues, while eight issues had consensus for no reform at this particular time; with further discussions and consultation needed on seven issues, and two issues on which it was agreed would be more appropriately treated with, via the enactment of legislation to protect workers who are not protected by the IRA or who are not allowed to be represented under the IRA.

Stakeholders identified a number of areas for reform which were carefully considered along with the best interest of the national community by the Ministry, in preparation of a draft policy paper for the amendment of the Industrial Relations

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Act. Madam President, within that recommendation there was a recommendation for the institutional strengthening of the RRCB as this would increase the RRCB's effectiveness to the benefit of the system of industrial relations as practised in this country.

The draft industrial relations policy was submitted to Cabinet in January, Sen. Wade Mark, in January 2016, and the Cabinet forwarded that policy statement to the National Tripartite Advisory Council for its consideration, and it is still before that Council. One of the objectives of the said policy is the amendment to the Industrial Relations Act to treat with the following: one, the reorganization and transformation of the RRCB; two, the reduction of the time frame for recognition and, three, the use of the criteria of worker in good standing.

With regard to the reorganization and transformation of the board, at present the IRA does not provide for the position of Deputy Chairperson, and the addition of a Deputy Chairperson would enhance the current structure and organization of the board. With regard to the reduction in the time frame for recognition—

Madam President: Minister, you have one more minute.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:—it is recommended that an application for certification shall be processed and the result of certification, as the case may be, shall be issued not later than six months after the date of receipt of application by the board. Should more time be required, the board must call the parties and give an explanation for the delay and projected time for a decision in the open forum.

So, Madam President, it is very clear that this Government through the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, where I am very fortunate to be working with a very hard-working team of public officers, we are focusing on what is important. As such, proposals to the amendment of the Industrial Relations

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Act of 1972 as amended, to ensure a more effective and simple alternative to the current registration and recognition process, are being assiduously considered by this Government.

I thank you.

Point Fortin Borough

(Need for Long-Term Urban Planning)

Sen. Taharqa Obika: Thank you very much, Madam President. I rise to raise this matter which is the need for the Government to ensure better long-term urban planning, including housing development, in the borough of Point Fortin. One of the source documents I am using is the Caribbean Local Economic Development Programme, Borough of Point Fortin, Trinidad and Tobago, Local Area Economic Profile, which has data which is within this decade, and there is some data that is 10 years old.

I am looking at the need to have planning that includes Point Fortin's specific focus, because if one looks at the data, even though it is dated, so I must lay that apology, it is 2009 data here, it shows the level of educational attainment at that time was 20.5 per cent for tertiary and post-secondary attainment, and 56.5 per cent at secondary level and higher.

Where you have a country which at 2015 would have marked two-thirds, 66 per cent plus in terms of tertiary level educational attainment, I am hoping that Point Fortin would have advanced. But let us assume it did not advance up to the level of the national population, there are certain things the Government must do to bring things up to speed.

What are the opportunities in Point Fortin? We have the significant disaster that happened with the closure of Petrotrin in terms of jobs being lost. Many of the

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persons who would have lost their jobs would have been on temporary employment and so on, and therefore you have some issues regarding income, and the fallout, the negative impact it could have. Even for those who received severance packages it would be very alarming to you, I am sure, Madam President, to know that there was no exit interview, for the simple reason the persons to conduct the exit interview were themselves exiting from Petrotrin. So you have a situation where persons need, in addition to emotional counselling, financial advisory and guidance and some level of hand holding so that they could make good decisions that could redound to the benefit of their generations to come.

One thing I want to advise the Government in terms of a low hanging fruit that they can look at is the creation of a growth pole regarding manufacturing. We have a situation where the eTecK park which this Government took charge of a few months into their term, remains vacant. While it may be tenanted there is no construction on the site. So where the purpose of eTecK park is concerned, it is vacant. So the Government would want to look at that, and probably look at more stringent penalties for businesses that do not utilize their leases, bring the term of the lease in terms of operationalization forward so that they cannot have the lands there idle on a speculative basis, so it gives them an impetus to really invest, or maybe look at the incentives that they have and, possibly looking at creation of a manufacturing shell where it serves as a business incubator for persons from Point Fortin.

There is a gap also in terms of SME development. I want to commend and congratulate the people at Atlantic LNG for their creation of a programme called LED. It is similar to what obtains in Mayaro, the MIPED programme. I believe their loan portfolio is about \$45 million to \$50 million, and they give small and

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medium enterprise loans up to \$100,000 in the Point Fortin borough for businesses in Point Fortin. So the persons do not have to be from Point Fortin, but once they are engaging with persons from Point Fortin in the enterprise, they can access that funding. So what the Government may want to do is look at the role of NEDCO in a more serious way, in terms of aligning it with the objectives of development of the board.

There is a point I want to raise regarding an economy of an area when it is considered to be strong. I want to posit that if the jobs engaged are greater than the labour force that is domiciled in the area that is a strong economy. Port of Spain is a strong economy. San Fernando and Chaguanas are strong economies because the jobs that are available in these cities, and borough in the case of Chaguanas, exceed the labour force that reside there. I am saying that without data to support it, but I think we can agree that is the case. But in Point Fortin that is not the case, especially when it pertains to jobs at a higher level of skill, because there are not many companies with significant operations in Point Fortin, neither state enterprises. So you find that the jobs that are available are the low level jobs, so there is not much incentive to stay. And then it comes to the situation of the road.

I think it would be good for the Government at some point in time to articulate when the highway should reach to Point Fortin, because the situation with the road is very bad, and it also serves as a significant disincentive for someone to locate their family in Point Fortin. I will give an example of someone who is a manager at the Central Bank, not naming the person, who really does yeoman waking up, and she does not see her house in the daylight, because she chose to live in Point Fortin where she is from. Many persons really do not want to endure that because it reduces your quality of life and your ability to enjoy time

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with your family. So they may want to look at articulating these things and letting the public know when in fact the highway should reach to Point Fortin, given that that was a commitment when they entered the halls of government.

There is also an opportunity for the Government to provide incentives. Places like Point Fortin and Princes Town, Arima to a lesser extent, Sangre Grande, these places are on the extremities of the economic centre. Whilst Point Fortin may provide a lot of the revenues for the State in terms of job creation, it does not exist in a desirable way. So the Government may want to look at incentives for companies that have their significant high level operations headquartered in places like a Point Fortin or a Sangre Grande, so that you may find entrepreneurs making the decision to go there to take advantage of these incentives.

Madam President, could I ask how much more time I have left?

Madam President: Three minutes.

Sen. T. Obika: Thank you very much. So I want to recap that by saying the Government has opportunities in Point Fortin, in that, they could look at the e Teck park. And they have recognized that while the e Teck parks in Trincity, for example, and Chaguanas might be well subscribed because of the location, close to ports of entry, whether it be the airport or the sea port, close to large urban centres and skill bases, eTeck parks in places like Point Fortin may be considered to be more remote, and the level of incentives may have to be adjusted upwards to attract businessmen to spend their money in those places.

The other opportunity would be to articulate clearly when the Borough of Point Fortin would be connected to the rest of Trinidad by virtue of the highway being complete, and that may allow businessmen who are thinking about investing

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in the e TecK park to make that decision. Also, the Government could provide incentives for such businessmen who decide to locate their businesses in Point Fortin, so that they can make that decision.

I thank you very much.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government to this Motion. I planned by opening with an apology to you in advance. I have been fighting this cough, and I anticipate that it would come in the next few minutes. But I do not expect to be long, so I am not going to apologize. The reality is, Madam President, my friend has not used the expression “long-term urban planning” anywhere in his contribution. I thought this was an underarm ball, because we have just gotten out of the Planning and Facilitation of Development Bill, where I thought I was explicit in saying the improvement of that 2014 Act by our amendment, together with the work that is coming your way in local government reform, will facilitate the very long-term urban planning that my colleague should have been speaking about.

Because I cannot, even at stretching my imagination, which is impaired by the medication, link urban planning to job losses. [*Laughter*] I cannot link it to the Petrotrin not having the exit interviews; I am trying; the financial advisory services for the employees; the e TecK park. I would think that in urban planning, urban planning will lead to an e TecK park, and the fact that you have an e TecK park tells me that somebody has been following because in 2009 the Government produced a spatial development plan for Point Fortin.

And perhaps you are not aware of my ties to Point Fortin, Sen. Obika.

Sen. Obika: I would be glad to hear.

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Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: But my ties to Point Fortin takes me to Point Fortin many, many times a year. I have to go see my in-laws. [*Laughter*] So I am well aware of what is happening in Point Fortin. Business incubators and SME development, MIPED, I am happy for the recognition to my community and to BP. In fact, BP is celebrating a major anniversary of MIPED on Saturday.

NEDCO—I am trying to draw the link, Madam President. My cough is gone, [*Laughter*] and I want to say that the most I could do tonight in the circumstances is to recognize that my colleague's intended subject matter is something that has engaged us on this side. We have committed to use the combination of the amendment to the Planning and Facilitation of Development legislation and local government to try to improve, because as we discussed, my colleague and I were discussing before we came in here, the issue is not lack of plans and lack of legislation, but it is a failure to consistently implement development along the lines of a long-term plan.

I thank you for bringing the Motion. I am sorry that you did not defend it, but I think you have saved me having to cough tonight, because I do not have 10 minutes to use. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.27 p.m.