

**SENATE**

*Tuesday, March 26, 2019*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Response of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the Twentieth Report of the Public Accounts Committee, Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament on the Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial year 2017. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North-West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2008. [*Sen. The Hon. A. West*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North-West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2009. [*Sen. The Hon. A. West*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North-West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Sen. The Hon. A. West*]
5. Annual Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Bank Limited and its Subsidiaries for the financial year ended September 30, 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. A. West*]
6. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament on the Circumstances

**UNREVISED**

- Surrounding Trinidad and Tobago's Vote at the Permanent Council, OAS, on the request by the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica for a Waiver of its Contribution to the Annual Budget of the OAS on March 23, 2018. [*The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses)*]
7. Annual Report of the Police Service Commission for the year 2017. [*The Vice-President (Sen. Nigel De Freitas)*]
  8. Delegation Report on the World E-Parliament Conference, 2018 held in Geneva, Switzerland on December 3-5, 2018. [*Sen. N. De Freitas*]
  9. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Administration to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament on an Examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme. [*The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan)*]
  10. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Education to the Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises, Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament on an inquiry into the efficiency and effectiveness of the Education Facilities Company Limited in managing the construction and repair of Government and Government Assisted Schools. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]

## **SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT**

### **(Presentation)**

#### **Sexual Offences (Amdt.) Bill, 2019**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** Madam President, I have the honour to lay on the

table the following report as listed on the Supplemental Order Paper in my name: Interim Report of the Special Select Committee established to consider and report on the Sexual Offences (Amdt.) Bill, 2019 in the Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament.

## **URGENT QUESTIONS**

### **Immigration Officers**

#### **(Acts of Intimidation)**

**Sen. Paul Richards:** Good afternoon everyone. Thank you very much, Madam President. To the Minister of National Security: Given reports that the Trinidad based relatives of Venezuelans who were denied entry into the county, have engaged in acts of intimidation against Immigration Officers, how does the Government intend to address the safety concerns of these Officers?

**The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, this is a matter that only came to my attention last week, when I was on a visit to the Port in Cedros. Immigration officers there told me they had had a couple incidents with persons who were turned away, and it is not relatives on that instance of Venezuelans who were turned away, but rather persons of interest who came to collect them. We immediately discussed it with Immigration with the police there on post, and I am currently working on a plan for the immigration officers at Cedros.

The first I heard about this incident was when the media reached out to me yesterday, and I only saw the message last night. Again, there is a suggestion that it is “relatives”. We are not certain they are relatives, but what we are certain of they are Trinidadian nationals who have followed immigration officers after they have refused entry.

I am going to be suggesting to Commissioner of Police, especially at Piarco and other legal ports of entry where our immigration officers are that we set up some sting operations, some undercover police operatives who would be following immigration officers and around in these areas. So if anyone is found intimidating any immigration officer, they will be charged with the full extent of the law and criminally charged at that.

**Sen. Richards:** Thank you very much, Madam President. Can the Minister of National Security indicate if any additional security arrangements will be made for immigration officials who may have been threatened in addition to the initiatives you have just outlined?

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam President. As I said, at this stage I do not have official report of any immigration officers who are concerned. But I have seen what has been reported in the media. I will certainly speak to the Chief Immigration Officer, and any security arrangements that we can put in place, for example, also utilizing the airport security personnel at the airports of entry.

But there are other initiatives as I indicated that we are going to put in place. And as I said, and this is a warning to any of those individuals who think they can threaten immigration officers who are conducting their duties lawfully, if we find them, I am going to speak to the Commissioner of Police, and if they find them for them to be criminally charged for so doing.

**Sen. Richards:** Thank you very much, Madam President. Finally, Minister of National Security, given what you have outlined as the investigation to be carried out, if family members of Venezuelans who are in Trinidad and Tobago, in whatever immigration status they are, are found to be involved in this, what is the Ministry's protocol for dealing with that? Non-nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. S. Young:** Sorry, Madam President, through you. Senator, can you just

repeat the question?

**Sen. Richards:** Yes. I will. You indicated through you, Madam President that an investigation would be carried out to see who the alleged culprits of these alleged acts. If the persons are found to be non-nationals, and families of Venezuelans on different kinds of immigration protocols, what is the Ministry's plan to deal with those persons who may or may not have threatened immigration officials?

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much. Madam President, all non-nationals who are found to be engaged in criminal activity, once they are criminally charged, and they are convicted, the normal course is that the Minister of National Security, based on the advice of the TTPS as well as the Immigration Division, would sign orders of deportation. So if there are non-nationals who are engaging in criminal activity, if they are convicted, I will sign an order of deportation for them. If non-nationals are found to be engaged in any threats or acts of intimidation with respect to any of our nationals including immigration officers, then again, I am certain that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will take action and criminally charge them.

**Mr. Juan Guaidó Video Conference**  
**(Change of Policy)**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you, Madam President to the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs: In light of reports that Trinidad and Tobago participated in a video conference with Mr. Juan Guaidó, of Venezuela, can the Minister advise as to whether this represents a change of policy?

**The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses):** [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago continues to implement its foreign policy as regards the situation in Venezuela. The participation of our country, Trinidad and Tobago in that meeting, the meeting cited—meaning

between the President of the National Assembly of Venezuela, Mr. Juan Guaidó, and in this case two other representatives, Mr. Carlos Vecchio and Mr. Julio Borges. That meeting took place on March the 23<sup>rd</sup> and our participation is but a manifestation of our continued maintenance of our position. So, the answer to the question is, it does not—our participation does not represent any change, but on the other hand, rather it is not a re-enforcement but a continuation of our policy. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Mark:** Could you hon. Minister indicate whether, Madam President, this conference that the Government participated in represents a tactical response to the Venezuelan crisis and it is not part of a comprehensive, well thought of strategic plan. Could you indicate to this honourable House whether that represents a tactical response?

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, I would not allow that question. You have another question you can ask?

**Mr. Mark:** Could I ask the Minister whether this event that took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> is part of the Government's approach to seek relevance given the fact that the horse has bolted and you are now trying to close the stable? Could you indicate—

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, I would not allow that question. Next question, Sen. Mark. Next question, Sen. Mark?

**Mr. Mark:** Yes, of course. I am hearing you; just taking my time to rise.

**Paria Fuel Trading Company  
(Government's Intention to Sell)**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: In light of Government's denial of any decision to sell Paria Fuel Trading Company to Simpson Oil Limited, is it the Government's intention to sell said Company to Parkland Fuel Corporation of Alberta, Canada?

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. the Hon. Franklin Khan):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, there is no intention by this Government to sell Paria Fuel Trading Company to Parkland Fuel Corporation of Alberta.

**Mr. Mark:** Can the hon. Minister indicate, Madam President, whether this particular company has expressed an interest in purchasing Paria Trading Fuel Company?

**1.45 p.m.**

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Madam President, Paria Fuel Trading Company, that is a company that is not for sale. The Prime Minister was very clear during his press conference, where he articulated that the assets of Guaracara Refinery has been put on the market for sale and/or lease. However, for those of you who understand the refinery, the refinery cannot operate efficiently and effectively without some access to the infrastructure that is owned by Paria, including the tank farms and the port.

He further indicated that Paria's assets will be a leveraging point in the negotiation for the sale of Guaracara assets. Beyond that, the offer for RFPs have now been sent out and we will be pre-judging. We will be jumping ahead of the game to forecast anything beyond that. These are sensitive commercial negotiations and as a country—this has happened with Sandals, we cannot take in front and stymie the process because these are international players and the process and the transparency and the “robustity”, if there is a word like that, of the process.

[*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Mark:** There is no word like that. “Throw way that word”. That is unparliamentary.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** It is very, very, very, very important and I want to warn

the Opposition—

**Sen. Mark:** You “cyah” warn us.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:**—that do not go down that road because it is hurting Trinidad and Tobago.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, may I ask the distinguished—

**Madam President:** May I just indicate, Members, that the time for Urgent Questions has expired, but there has been an agreement today that we will hear all the answers to all the questions. Continue Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Thank you very much, Madam President. May I ask the distinguished Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, having regard to statements attributed to—have been made by Mr. Espinet; Wilfred Espinet, to the extent, and which was supported by the hon. Prime Minister that a joint approach to the sale of the refinery along with Paria, leveraging purposes can occur. Can the Minister therefore indicate whether Simpson Oil Limited along with Parkland Fuel Corporation of Alberta, Canada, can ultimately end up buying both the refinery, as well as Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited? Can you clear the air on that for us?

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question and I just want to remind Members that a supplementary question cannot be longer or should not be longer than the original question. Last question Sen. Mark.

### **Diego Martin Regional Corporation**

#### **(Measures to Rectify Reduced Workdays)**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** To the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government: Given reports that the Diego Martin Regional Corporation has run out of money causing workers to have their workdays reduced, what urgent measures are being effected to immediately rectify this situation?

**The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon.**



**Kazim Hosein):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President, and I want to thank Sen. Mark for this urgent question. The Minister of Finance is making arrangements to provide additional funds to the Corporation to ensure that all workers remain employed and their workdays are not reduced. Thank you.

**Sen. Mark:** Can I ask the hon. Minister through you, Minister, can you advise this honourable Senate how long have the workers of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, the 532 or thereabouts or less, you can tell me if I am wrong on that, can you tell us, how long have they been working on an eight-day and five-day period as opposed to be their normal 10 days per month. Can you tell us how long this has been happening?

**Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:** Madam President, the Corporation, the Council and the administration have been meeting with the union over the last—it was brought to my attention last week and hearing about it, immediately I contacted the Corporation and made arrangements. But to give the specific time, I will have to get the specific answer for you, the period, how long.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can I ask the hon. Minister, can you share with the honourable Senate, what were the factors or maybe reasons for finance, moneys, running out at the regional corporation. Can you share with us what are the reasons for this development that resulted in this situation that I have outlined?

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, that question does not arise.

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the Government is pleased to announce that it will be answering all questions, save and except, question No. 134 and question No. 172. For these two questions we ask for a two week deferral.

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper:*

**Country's Overdraft**

**(Fiscal Year 2018)**

**134.** Can the hon. Minister of Finance indicate the size of the country's overdraft in each month of fiscal year 2018? [*Sen. T. Obika*]

**Firearm Users Licences**

**(Details of Applications)**

**172.** As regard Firearm Users Licences, for the period September 30, 2015 to January 31, 2019, can the hon. Minister of National Security indicate the following:

- i. how many applications were received by the Commissioner of Police; and
- ii. how many of the applications referred to in (i) have been approved? [*Sen. S. Hosein*]

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

**Flooding and Natural Disasters Fraud**

**(Measures Implemented to Avoid)**

**78. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

Can the Minister inform the Senate of the measures implemented to avoid the perpetrating of fraud in the granting/obtaining of state assistance arising from flooding and natural disasters?

**The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, a Fraud Squad investigation into fraudulent activity related to the October flood relief exercise commenced on November 13, 2018. On Saturday November 17, 2018, several persons were charged for fraudulent activities related

to the flood relief exercise, including two members of staff of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and an On-the-Job Trainee.

To date, based on information provided by the Fraud Squad Unit, 18 persons have been charged for fraudulently receiving flood relief cheques. Some of the measures identified to avoid a reoccurrence include: stricter controls on the access to Emergency Relief and Recovery Assistance Forms which are used to assess persons for flood relief; utilization of only duly authorized and trained assessors; thorough and independent verification of the assessments undertaken; review and revision of the policy governing disaster relief; and audit review of the flood relief exercise and implementation of recommendations as necessary. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Mark:** Hon. Minister, can you provide this House with the value in dollars and cents of the total amount of moneys that were illegally taken from genuine persons who required it and which would have been entered into the pockets or whatever of those persons? Can you tell us what was the total value?

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Madam President, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is not in a position at this point in time to give a specific figure. As I indicated, an audit is to be carried out and the matter is also before the Fraud Squad. So I do not think it may be prudent to divulge that information at this point in time.

**Sen. Mark:** How many of those 18 workers—I better rephrase that, Madam President. Can the Minister indicate whether the workers that were involved in this transaction were workers on contract or workers who were permanently employed via the Public Service of the Republic of T&T? Can you tell us how these workers—contract workers or public service workers?

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Madam President, just a correction. All 18 were

not employees of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. One person was assigned to the Ministry by the Public Service Commission, one was on contract and one was an On-the-Job Trainee. Thank you.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, having regard to the measures that the hon. Minister identified in order to avoid any further infractions in the future, can you indicate to this Senate whether the Ministry has undertaken an assessment of the human resource needs that would be required to effect and operationalize those measures? Can you share with us how many persons you would need and maybe you can add personnel that you would need to ensure that we properly police this system from here on in?

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Madam President, the Ministry is currently reviewing its staffing needs. I would have also indicated that we are also looking at the policy that would govern the whole issue of that disaster relief and one of the initiatives being considered is having the regional corporations doing the assessment exercises in the event of a disaster relief, for example, like the flooding. So at this point in time it is not practical to indicate what numbers would be required until we have clearly approved and identified a policy moving forward.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, do I have a final one?

**Madam President:** Yes.

**Sen. Mark:** Having regard to the fact that the rainy season is just about a month or maybe less away, can you indicate, hon. Minister, when would this new policy be effected so that when the time—well when the new policy would be effected, Madam President?

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Madam President, I do not have a specific day but I wish to assure the Senate that things and systems would be in place so that come

rainy season we can deal effectively with any flooding that we have in Trinidad or Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

### **Discovery of Boy's Body**

#### **(Measures to Protect Nation's Children)**

**90. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Prime Minister:

In light of the December 02, 2018 discovery of the body of a 13 year old boy from Longdenville, Chaguanas, what new measures are being implemented to protect the nation's children?

**The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the remit for children rests with the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs. The Office of the Prime Minister is committed to protecting the nation's children from all grievous acts of violence. The protection of the nation's children continues to require multifaceted and multi-sectoral approach and involves several Ministries and agencies of Government.

Some of the measures being implemented include: Building the capacity of the Children's Authority to address the needs of the nation's children by increasing the staff and establishing additional assessment centres and regional offices; training persons in positions of trust with children to recognize signs of abuse and to take action to protect children. Trainees included teachers, social workers, guidance officers, coaches, bus drivers, and parents. Public service announcements in the media, including social media, to sensitize parents and the general public on the signs of child abuse and how it is to be treated; fostering collaboration among child protection agencies namely the Child Protection Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, to send the clear message of zero tolerance of harm to children. This

increases the likelihood of alleged perpetrators being brought to justice while providing the necessary psychosocial intervention and support required for affected children and their families.

To support these measures the first draft of the National Child Policy and a two-year national child protection implementation plan for 2019 to 2020 has been developed in collaboration with all agencies involved in child protection. The plan seeks to improve the coordination and effectiveness of all child related agencies. The plan includes:

1. The development of the national child protection protocol;
2. National child protection research;
3. The development of a national child safe guarding strategy;
4. Capacity development of child protection workers;
5. Decentralization and expansion of the child guidance clinic; and
6. The establishment of a case management system in all agencies.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Yes, Madam President, through, can the hon. Minister indicate what is the number of staff members anticipated in order to build capacity to address the problems that you have identified?

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Madam President, I will provide that information at a later date because it would mean gathering information from all the different agencies, not just the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Sen. Mark:** Can you also indicate to us how many additional assessment centres would you be anticipating in an effort to again provide some further safety, security and protection for the nation's children.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, we would have established a few last year and the one we have coming on stream is

the assessment centre for Tobago.

**Sen. Mark:** Can I ask the hon. Minister when will the first draft policy on children or it is called the first draft of, I think it is, “child policy”, if I did not pick it up clearly, can you tell us whether that policy will be tabled in the Parliament?

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, Cabinet recently approved for the policy to go out for public consultation and then it will be laid in the Parliament. Thank you.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, I just wanted to find out whether this policy was the subject of discussions among the stakeholders who are directly involved in this particular matter of children.

**Madam President:** No, I believe the Minister just spoke about that in her previous answer—

**Sen. Mark:** “Oh” sorry, well, sorry—

**Madam President:** No, no, but you have asked it. Minister.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam President. In developing the draft we would have had consultation with all stakeholders. However, I would have mentioned that Cabinet recently approved for the draft policy to go out for public consultation. We would be going to north, south, and Tobago. Thank you.

### **Displacement of Sea Lots Families**

#### **(Measures to Address Their Immediate Needs)**

**91. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

In light of the displacement of twelve families from Sea Lots as a result of a fire, can the Minister indicate what measures are being taken to address the immediate needs of the displaced families, inclusive of housing accommodation?

**The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President. While the media reported that 12 families were impacted, the Ministry's record indicated 18 families located in Sea Lots, Port-of-Spain, were affected by fire November 30, 2018. Initial assessments indicated that the homes of 12 of these families were completely destroyed and the occupants are being accommodated by family members or friends. The other four families are still occupying their homes since they were only partially damaged.

Representatives of 17 families visited the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry and were informed about the rental assistance, school supplies, clothing and household items grants and the documents required to complete the application process for accessing these services. The families were provided with emergency food support and applied to the National Social Development Programme for assistance to effect repairs to their homes. These applications have either been or are being processed in accordance with existing guidelines.

Four of the families requested counselling which is to be provided by the National Family Services Division of the Ministry and arrangements were made for the conduct of these counselling sessions. Thank you, Madam President.

[*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Mark:** Can I ask the hon. Minister, what efforts are being made to have these families access emergency HDC housing in the interim whilst they are trying to repair their homes? What efforts are being made by your Ministry to facilitate them?

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, based on the answer given I do not think that question arises. [*Interruption*] You have another supplementary question you can ask?



**Sen. Mark:** Yes. May I ask how many of the families have actually accessed and received the grants and the various services that they are entitled to? Can you clear for us out of the 18 families, how many have actually received grants; services?

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Madam President, families applied for the house repair grant, household items grant and school supplies grant. In terms of the household items and the school supplies grant, all grants were processed and are approved and are awaiting payment. In terms of the house repair grant those could not be completely processed because we are awaiting non-objections from the LSA as those victims occupy state lands.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can I ask the hon. Minister, is there a particular time frame for emergency cases of this nature for us to get—the Ministry that is—to get a rapid response from the Land Settlement Agency. Is there a time frame that is normally given for such a response?

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Madam President, there is not a specific time frame, but we work very closely with the LSA and in most instances they tend to provide the documentation within a reasonable time frame.

**Sen. Mark:** Can you indicate therefore, Madam President, can you assure this Parliament or give us the assurance of any definitive time frame when this matter involving the LSA will be settled and addressed, so that these people can gain whatever they require. Can you give us any assurances?

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Madam President, I would not be in a position to give a definitive time frame under which the LSA will act. What I can assure this Senate of is that as soon as we get all of the relevant documentation we will process those grants in the shortest possible time.

**Sen. Mark:** Do I have one more, Ma'am?

**Madam President:** No. [*Laughter*] Next question, Sen. Mark.

**Neonatal Intensive Care Unit  
(Inexperienced Nursing Staff)**

**92. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Having regard to the claims made by the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association that inexperienced nursing staff are being used to replace experienced staff at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, North Central Regional Health Authority, can the Minister indicate the following:

- i. whether an investigation has been launched into said claims; and
- ii. if the answer to (i) is in the affirmative, what are the findings of the investigation?

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, in answer, I am advised that those claims have been found to be totally erroneous and that no inexperienced nurses are replacing experienced nurses at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the North Central Regional Health Authority. Therefore, part (ii) does not apply.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, having regard to the length of time this matter appeared in the press and in the public domain, can the hon. Minister indicate whether he intends to make a comprehensive response to what can be described, based on what you have said, as erroneous statement. Are you going to make a statement to that effect?

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Madam President, the most comprehensive response I could give are the following statistics: A neonate is baby born and lives until 28 days. That is the neonate period. On coming into office the neonatal mortality rate in Trinidad and Tobago was 13.5 per 1,000 live births. That meant under the UNC, 230 neonates would die in this country given a birth figure of 17,000 live births.

Under the tenure of this Government we have dropped the neonatal mortality figure from 13.5 per 1,000 when the MDG goals were missed at 2015, to now less than eight per 1,000 live births. [*Desk thumping*] That represents, Madam President, a 40 per cent decline in neonatal mortality rates. That means, for the public to understand, 94 more babies are going home with their parents having survived in the public health sector due to measures implemented under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] That means 94 more bundles of joy are going home with their parents in the neonate period and we have met our SDG goals, Sustainable Development Goals which we were supposed to meet in 2030, we have met them in 2018, 12 years ahead of schedule. [*Desk thumping*] Not forgetting that when the levels of power were held before we missed our MDG goals of 2015 on neonatal mortality rate and the same goes for our maternal mortality rates, we have met our SDG goals of 2030, 12 years ahead of schedule. [*Desk thumping*]

Last year we had the lowest maternal mortality rate probably ever recorded in Trinidad and Tobago. And this type of news goes totally unrecognized and I want to thank the experienced nurses at the NICU, at Mount Hope for the sterling work they have done in reducing our nation's neonatal mortality rate from 13.5 per 1,000 live births to eight per 1,000 live births [*Desk thumping*] meaning 94 babies are going home. Thank you very much, Madam President.

**Sen. Mark:** You would agree with me before you arrive at the compound of that Ministry, systems, policies, programmes and plans would have been put in place by the previous administration so that you could [*Laughter*] repeat the benefit of what you are reporting today. [*Crosstalk*] Would you not agree with me?

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** They did nothing. [*Laughter*]

**Petroleum Products**  
**(Revenue in United States Dollars)**

**135 Sen. Taharqa Obika** asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Can the Minister advise as to the following, in United States Dollars:

- (i) how much revenue was generated from crude oil exports for the months of December 2018 and January 2019; and
- (ii) how much was spent on importing each of the refined petroleum products namely – Super, Diesel, Premium, Kerosene, Aviation Fuel and Bitumen for the months of December 2018 and January 2019?

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much Madam President. Madam President, in response to (i), the revenue generated from crude oil exports by Heritage Petroleum Company Limited in December 2018 and January 2019 was US \$38,309,368, that is for December, and for January, US \$64,405,490 for a grand total for the two months of US \$102,714,857 or approximately TT \$700 million.

In response to (ii), the total expenditure by Paria Fuel Trading Limited on importing each of the refined products produced for December 2018 and January 2019 was \$61 million or TT \$415 million, broken down as follows:

Diesel, US \$9.8 million in December 2018 and US \$10.68 million in January 2019; Super, US \$14 million in December 2018 and US \$14.2 million in January 2019; Premium, US \$2.1 million in December 2018 and US \$2 million in January 2019; Jet Fuel, zero million, zero total in December which none was imported, but there was stock, and US \$8.2 million in January 2019.

It should be noted, however, that approximately half of the fuel imported by Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited is re-exported to regional markets that is earning additional foreign exchange.

The Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited did not import bitumen in December

2018 and January 2019. The expenditure by Lake Asphalt, however, of Trinidad and Tobago on importing bitumen for the December 2018 and January 2019 was zero in 2018 December and US \$325,000 in January 2019. So from a foreign exchange point of view we are in a significantly better position as we speak with the exportation of crude.

**Sen. Obika:** Thank you very much, Madam President. To respond to the Ministry's last assertion, can the Minister indicate, what is the margin of profit on the crude oil exports?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** The profit statements of Heritage is made quarterly and annually. So I do not have the profit information available. This is gross revenue based on export of crude.

**Sen. Obika:** If I were to be more specific, not net profit after administrative cost, but gross profit when you take away cost of sales.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** I do not have that figure with me but I think that should be easily available.

**Sen. Obika:** Could the Minister submit same in writing if possible?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** I would so do in the shortest possible time.

**2.15 p.m.**

### **Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited**

#### **(Details of Dividends Taken)**

**136. Sen. Taharqa Obika** asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Can the Minister advise as to the amount of dividends taken from Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited over the following periods:

- (i) September 08, 2015 – December 31, 2015;
- (ii) January 01, 2016 – December 31, 2016;

- (iii) January 01, 2017 – December 31, 2017; and
- (iv) January 01, 2018 – December 31, 2018?

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, in response to (i), from September 08, 2015 to December 31, 2015, total dividends paid by PPGPL was US \$20 million. Dividends paid to NGC, which is a 51 per cent owner of PPGPL, was US \$10.2 million.

In response to (ii), January 01, 2016 to December 31, 2016, total dividends paid was US \$70 million. Dividends paid to NGC was US \$35,700,000. In response to (iii), January 01, 2017 to December 31, 2017, total dividends paid US \$69 million. Dividends paid to the NGC, US \$35,190,000. In response to (iv), January 01, 2018 to December 31, 2018, total dividends paid, US \$76,250,000. Dividends paid to the NGC, US \$38,887,500.

It should be noted, however, that no specific dividends paid by Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited to the National Gas Company are, or were taken by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Madam President:** Sen. Obika?

**Sen. Obika:** Thank you very much, Madam President. Given the Minister's submission of consistent and sustained dividends to NGC, could the Minister indicate if this signals good fortunes in the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Madam President:** Minister?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Well, good fortune is always measured by profits, so I think the question is almost self-explanatory and self-answered.

**Madam President:** Sen. Obika?

**Sen. Obika:** Then, Madam President, could it be contradictory to the Government's assertion that they have been making significant losses in the energy

sector, given that we are a gas-based economy and NGC is at the vanguard of that industry?

**Madam President:** Minister?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Madam President, the energy sector in the gas value chain is wide and varied. This is one aspect of it, which is the extraction of fuels from the gas stream that is handled by PPGPL, which virtually has a monopoly position. They extract their liquids. It pays the various shareholders of the liquid and it sells the liquid either to the local market, as LPG, or to the foreign market. And that is good business and it has proven to be good business for many, many years.

**Madam President:** Sen. Hosein?

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam President. In light of the Minister's answer that no dividends from PPGPL were paid to the State, however almost 50 per cent of their dividends were paid to NGC, can the Minister indicate whether or not any of NGC's dividends were paid out to the State?

**Madam President:** Minister?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Well, obviously, NGC has been paying dividends, according to state policy from the Ministry of Finance for many, many years. So every year the NGC declares its profit, it declares a dividend and pays the proportionate amount to the State. That is different from the \$14million you all took out from the NGC. That was not dividends.

**Hon. Senator:** "Yuh walk into dat."

**Madam President:** Next question. Sen. Hosein.

### **Management and/or Licensing Agreements**

#### **(Details of Moneys Paid)**

**170. Sen. Saddam Hosein** asked the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry:

Can the Minister indicate the amount of moneys paid to the respective parties via management and/or licensing agreements in each year during the period 2016 to 2018 for the following:

- (i) Magdalena Grand Hotel;
- (ii) Hyatt Regency Hotel; and
- (iii) Trinidad Hilton Hotel?

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

[*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President. To part (i) of the question, payments made to EFM Hospitality Solutions in respect of the Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort under a management agreement for the period 2016 to 2018 totalled \$4,603,093.18. These are broken down as follows:

2016: \$2,710,155.91

2017: \$1,394,935.86

2018: \$1,137,001.41

With regard to part (ii) of the question, payments made to the operator of the Hyatt Regency Hotel for the period 2016 to 2018 will be submitted by the responsible agency, UDeCOTT, the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago, subsequently.

To part (iii) of the question, payments made to the operator of the Trinidad Hilton Hotel under a lease agreement for the period 2016 to 2018 totalled \$17,751,454.12, broken down as follows:

2016: \$6,046,149.56

2017: \$5,727,687.09

2018: \$5,977,617.47.

Thank you.

**Madam President:** Sen. Hosein?



**Sen. S. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam President. Based on your answer given, through you, Madam President, with respect to part (ii) of the question, Minister, can you give us a time frame in which UDeCOTT will provide this information for the Hyatt Regency Hotel?

**Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Yes. UDeCOTT had indicated that they needed 10 working days, so I would imagine in a few more days we would be able to respond to this question.

**Madam President:** Next question, Sen. Hosein?

### **New Diego Martin Health Centre**

#### **(Details of)**

**171. Sen. Saddam Hosein** asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Having regard to the proposed new Diego Martin Health Centre, can the Minister provide the following:

- (i) the total cost of the project;
- (ii) the name of the contractor(s) awarded the contract; and
- (iii) the scheduled completion date of the project?

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much again, Madam President. Part (i): the total cost of the project is TT \$49,509,165.83, VAT exclusive. Part (ii): Following the outcome of the procurement process, the contract for the design/build works was awarded to Power Producers Limited. And part (iii), the scheduled date of completion of the project is October 31, 2020.

Thank you very much, Madam President.

**Madam President:** Leader of Government Business.

### **SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE**

#### **Sexual Offences (Amdt.) Bill, 2019**

**(Extension of Time)**

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, having regard to the interim report of the Special Select Committee established to consider and report on the Sexual Offences (Amdt.) Bill, 2019 in the Fourth Session, 2018/2019, Eleventh Parliament, I beg to move that the committee be granted an extension of time to April 30, 2019, to complete its work and submit the final report.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**CLEAR AND COGENT ECONOMIC POLICY  
 (GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO PRESENT)**

**Sen. Wade Mark.:** Madam President, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Be it resolved* that this House take note of the escalating levels of job losses in the country since September 2015 and condemn the Government for its failure to present a clear and cogent economic policy to guide Trinidad and Tobago through these challenging economic circumstances.

Madam President, I want to begin my presentation by reminding this honourable Senate of the majestic words of wisdom uttered by the author of the Declaration of the American Independence, Thomas Jefferson, when he said, and I quote:

“The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.”

Failed economic policies combined with the absence of any credible, cogent, coherent, economic plan have largely contributed to escalating levels of job losses

in this country since the “Red and Ready” brigade arrived on the compound of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago—

**Hon. Senator:** Since 1956.

**Sen. W. Mark:** September 07, 2015 I am dealing with. Madam President, the unemployment rate has increased to 4.4 per cent in the final quarter, according to the statistics, 2017, from 3.6 per cent in the corresponding quarter of 2016, and this is according to the latest published Central Bank *Economic Bulletin* dated January of 2019, page 19.

The Caribbean Development Bank, Madam President, has estimated that at the end of 2018, unemployment stood at 5 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago. The Central Bank *Economic Bulletin* also says that there was a reduction of some 12,000 jobs during that period that I have mentioned, whilst the labour force itself saw a loss of 7.6 thousand persons. The contraction in the labour force witnessed a decrease in the labour force participation rate to some 58.3 per cent at the end of 2017, from 59 per cent at the end of 2016. Madam President, in terms of gender, there was a larger increase in the number of unemployed women during that particular period. Some 4.2 thousand lost their jobs. Youth unemployment, persons between the age range of 15 to 24 years, the unemployment rate among them stood at 7.7 per cent, which was disproportionately higher than the average unemployment rate for persons in the 25 to 64 age category, which stood at 4.2 per cent.

Madam President, when the People's Partnership and the United National Congress which was part of that Partnership, were in power, the situation was different and which I will emphasize upon as I move on. But I went to a seminar this morning and the presenter used a nice term, phrase—data deficit disorder—for

the Caribbean, and Trinidad and Tobago also suffers from a data deficit disorder. So, Madam President, you cannot get data from the CSO on basic information. So we have estimated, based on the current reality, that we have an unemployment level, a number ranging between 50,000 citizens to 60,000 citizens since the PNM arrived here on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, do you know the last time we got data from the CSO was the last quarter of 2017? We have no data for 2018 and none for the first quarter of 2019. So even the Prime Minister was forced to reluctantly admit, when he had this exercise called “Mind Your Business” monologue, when we had that recently—the hon. Prime Minister, using the same CSO 2017 data, indicated—and he had to admit, although he was wrong on the numbers. He said that we created—he did not say “we”, but he said 41,000 jobs were created between 2010 and 2015. [*Desk thumping*] But I want to remind him, it was not 41,000, Madam President, it was 56,000 jobs [*Desk thumping*] that we created and not 41,000.

But he had to admit—one of those rare moments when, you know—

**Hon. Senator:** He agreed.

**Sen. W. Mark:**—he is able to agree that that exists. He also admitted that under their watch in the last three years, 20,000 persons experienced job losses between September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015 to December 2017, using CSO data. We “eh talk” about 2018 yet, and we “eh talk” about 2019 yet. And during this period, we are told by the Prime Minister that they supervised and presided over the loss of some 20,000 jobs. Go in the document called “Mind Your Business” and you would see those numbers there.

Now, Madam President, these numbers do not include the shutdown of Petrotrin and the loss of 10,000 jobs. So we have to add that 10,000 to the 20,000.

Madam President, it does not also include the 2,000—Madam President, you remember a document that I took some time to get from the Government? Well, they eventually passed it on. When they came into office I asked: How many contract workers were terminated between the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 2015 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 2017? And the information we got in writing—it is on the public record—is 2,176 contracts were not renewed under this Government during that period. Those people went home. Madam President, in the Prime Minister's office alone, the total between the same period September 30, 2015, to September 30, 2017—125 workers contracts were terminated. Sixty-seven of them alone, came from the Office of the Prime Minister. Those are jobs that were lost during the period that we are examining in this particular exercise.

Madam President, I have not included, but I want to include now, the over 600 workers who lost their jobs at TSTT. And may I also remind you, Madam President, some of the workers who visited the “junk heap” of history as a result of an insensitive, uncaring and almost—well, I would say, uncaring and insensitive Government. Madam President, 700 workers, almost, were sent home when ArcelorMittal closed down. Two hundred workers were terminated at Centrica; 11 workers were sent home at Repsol; 900 workers were laid off at the OAS Construtora. RBC sent home hundreds of workers quietly. Digicel cut scores of members of their staff. The Tourism Development Company closed down; 200 workers were placed on the breadline. The Industrial Plant Services Limited, operating some five methanol plants at Point Lisas, sent home over 100 employees. The Caroni Green shut down; 100 workers gone home. The Government closed down the Human Resources Services Limited. Scores of workers were sent home. The National Gas Company sent home over 20 workers.

Madam President, just recently you would have read, like I did, the Minister of Education announcing that in the next few weeks, 244 workers of the UTT are to be retrenched and sent home. What these things mean to citizens in our country—these job losses—they carry consequences. Madam President, I want to let you know that there has been an alarming—because of these job losses there has been an alarming decline in the labour force participation rate. I told you it fell as soon as the Government arrived. It was almost 61.7 per cent or thereabouts. It went to 59 per cent at the end of 2016, and at the end of 2017, it stood at 58.3 per cent. Now, Madam President, your labour force participation rate, which is declining at such a rapid pace—and this 58.3 per cent is the lowest since 1995 in our country. When you compare other countries in terms of the labour force participation rate, Iceland is 87 per cent; Belize is 70 per cent; Jamaica is 65 per cent; Bahamas is 74 per cent; Sweden, 75 per cent.

Madam President, you know what is causing the decline in the labour force participation rate in our country? We have an ageing population which must be factored into this matter. We have what is called a high-level school dropout rate in this country. There is an astronomical increase in the murder rate which is causing persons who are labourers to disappear. In the last five—between 2010 to 2014, somewhere around there, or '15, some 6,000 to 7,000 workers were murdered in this country over a period of time. *[Interruption]* No. It is between 2003 to about 2016 or '15, we had about 6,000 workers being murdered. Madam President, what that means is that production is being affected. The labour market is being affected. Madam President, there has been an exponential growth in the number of discouraged and/or disenchanted workers in our country.

So when you have a weakening of the level of labour force participation

rate, it is having an impact on our ability as a nation to increase national output, to improve productivity, to expand economic growth and to impact upon social development. But, Madam President, what is even worse is that there is the phenomenon of under-employment in our nation where people who are supposed to be working for 40 hours a week and they are working for half of that. Where they are supposed to be working for five days a week, they are working for three days a week.

So what you have, Madam President, taking place in our country, when you combine the rising levels of unemployment along with under-employment, is that the economy of T&T is losing, based on our estimation, close to \$2 billion annually in revenues because of this phenomenon; Madam President, not to mention that there appears to be a growing disconnect between this country's education system and the labour market. There is a mismatch, what the school is producing in terms of certification and what the industry is demanding in terms of skilled labour.

Madam President, I want to let you know that certified citizens are now, what is called, the educated unemployed strata in our country today. So you have medical doctors who are now selling chicken and chips—

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Yes.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Medical doctors are now pumping gas in Trinidad and Tobago. You have dentists who are underemployed because they cannot find jobs in this country. Secondary school leavers cannot find jobs in this country. There is no employment. The Government of this country has failed [*Desk thumping*] the young people of our nation. Imagine, Madam President, you have a son, or I have a daughter and we invest in our children and we send them to the university, and

they come out as doctors and they have to sell chicken and chips in this country, and to go and sell gas in a gas station, because the Government has no jobs for them? That is a crime against humanity. [*Desk thumping*] That is wrong and we have to correct it. And the Government is brutalizing, if I may say, oppressing, attacking, those workers who remain in the labour force.

And, Madam President, we are being taxed. We are being taxed. We are being taxed. And what is happening is that our quality of life and our standard of living is declining daily in our country. Madam President, would you believe that when we demitted office in 2015, the country's GDP stood at \$170.4 billion? That was the GDP in 2015 when we left office. Madam President, by 2018, under this "Red and Ready" brigade, in three years' time our GDP shrank to \$159.2 billion, a decline of \$11.2 billion. Yet the Government talks about turnaround and recovery. Madam President, where is this recovery? Maybe there is a turnaround, as a merry-go-round. That is the kind of turnaround taking place in Trinidad and Tobago.

But, Madam President, whilst this is taking place, the Government continues to tax the people; and the artificial and cosmetic growth that they are talking about is arising out of taxing the population. It is not about production. It is not about growth in a genuine sense. It is not about value-added. It is about taxes. That is what is generating growth in this country. Madam President, you and I are aware that fuel prices have been increased three, four, five times: Green Fund, small business, business levy, corporation tax, tyre duties, online purchase tax, alcohol, tobacco tax, inspection fee, environmental tax, gaming taxes. Madam President, that is the state of play that we have in our country today.

**2.45 p.m.**



Madam President, our people have been saddled with increased taxes, and whilst that is taking place and there is no real growth in our economy, and no real job creation in our country, and greater and greater job losses, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on what can only be described as a spending spree in terms of borrowings. And these borrowings is contributing to a higher debt burden, a higher interest payment, which is negatively impacting on our country's ability to invest in capital programmes, in capital formation. That is stifling economic growth. It is stifling economic expansion, and therefore, employment opportunities cannot be realized because of the kind of policy that the Government is in fact pursuing.

Madam President, I looked at the *Economic Bulletin* for 2019 published by the Central Bank and would you believe that the net public sector debt increased to \$98.9 billion as at the end of 2018, representing 62.2 per cent of GDP? That is the state of play in our country. In September of that same year it was \$95.5 billion which was 61 per cent of GDP, and in three months the Government increased the public sector debt by almost \$3 billion. According to the *Review of the Economy* public sector debt stood at \$76.5 billion at the end of 2015. So when we left office in 2015, public sector debt was about \$76.5 billion. Today, Madam President, it is \$99 billion. That is the amount of money that the Government has borrowed. When we left in that year, 2015, that represented 47.8 per cent of GDP. That is what we left in 2015 and not the erroneous figures that they tend to peddle on this country.

So we have a situation in our country where our debt continues to rise and to increase. What is even more frightening is not the domestic debt which we can deal with as a nation. What is of concern to Trinidad and Tobago is the rising level

of our external debt. It increased by 74 per cent from US \$2.7 billion in 2015 to US \$3.8 billion at the end of 2018, and this, Madam President, is cause for alarm. It does not take into account the \$1.4 billion that the new owner of Petrotrin, which is called the Petroleum Holding Company, is current negotiating on behalf of the Government. That has not been included.

Madam President, I raise these points to let you know that when we looked at our debt service in terms of interest payment, do you know what that is today. Debt service under the PNM stands at almost \$9 billion every year in terms of the last year in particular, which represents 20.5 per cent of our revenue of \$42.6 billion. In 2015, our total payment on debt, both external and domestic, was just about \$5.6 billion out of a revenue at that time of \$57 billion, representing just about 9.8 per cent. So the PNM has gone from where we were of \$5.6 billion, and they are now paying almost, as I said, \$9 billion.

Madam President, there is a link between that debt payment and the ability of the Government to provide what is called input into our capital works programme, into our capital formation, into the *Public Sector Investment Programme* that is responsible for extending and expanding production, and employment, and growth in our economy. So we, today, are worse off under this Government and we are increasing everyday our domestic debt. So, for example, the Government net domestic debt increased by almost \$1 billion to \$43.3 billion at the end of December 2018. The central government guaranteed borrowings, what you called, Madam President, contingency liabilities, increased by \$1.2 billion to \$29.7 billion as at the end of 2018, and when it comes to the external debt we are now in the vicinity when you convert the \$3.73 billion to almost TT \$26 billion.

So where are we going? We have a lot of jobs that are being lost on a daily basis, and if I may say, the unemployment situation because of job losses is leading to increases in poverty. It is leading to an increase in crime, and insecurity, and violence in our country. The last survey that we had on poverty—which they withdrew—read that we had almost 25 per cent of the people of this country living in poverty in Trinidad and Tobago, and I do not know when the Government is going to table a proper report on poverty levels in our country. So, Madam President, you have psychological problems, you have emotional problems, you have problems affecting families and the community as a result of unemployment.

It has been said that psychologically when somebody is unemployed it is equivalent to murder. When you have somebody unemployed, you are telling that person he or she is not fit to exist in a country, and you have, Madam President, what is even worse, young people in our country who are unemployed. They are unemployable almost, some of them, because the Government is not providing the link between education and industry in our country. So there is a yearning gap, there is a mismatch in our country insofar as that is concerned.

Madam President, what is even more alarming, we are cornered. We have a rising level of unemployment in our nation, 50,000 to 60,000, yet still the Minister and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are saying that they are going to issue cards. We have no problem in people coming to our country, but it must be orderly, it must be regulated and it must be controlled. So we have people competing with nationals for jobs and it is not regulated. We need a migrant labour policy and we need the Government to establish legislation to deal with this issue. So we have a lot of challenges. We have the South American invasion, we have invasion from Africa, we have invasion from Caricom, and we have the

Chinese invasion. So we have four sets of invasions taking place in our country

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, I would ask you please to refine your commentary, please.

**Sen. W. Mark:** I will do that. In other words, we have unregulated persons coming from those various parts of the world and there is no control on the inflows of these individuals, and they are competing and replacing locals in terms of job opportunities.

Madam President, I have nothing against Chinese, I have nothing against South Americans, I have nothing against Africans because they say I come from there too, I have nothing against them. All I am saying is that let us have a regulated and controlled policy on this matter. That is what I am advancing. But what is even more alarming is that whilst all this is taking place in our country, all this is going on, the Government says they have no money, they cannot provide people with jobs in the country, but the Government is involved in all kinds of vanity projects, projects that really are not generating any value to our nation. I want to indicate—and I want to get into the rental business. I want to rent property to the Government and I want to end up with \$23 million within three years, and when I add “meh” family to it I will end up with \$43 million in three years. [*Desk thumping*] I think that is good business, Madam President.

Well you know what, Madam President, we have no money to create employment, yet still the Government could spend \$3 million in paintings; Soca on the tree, on the seas rather, \$500,000; a new Mercedes Benz for almost \$2 million for the Prime Minister; they settle a sexual harassment matter at Angostura for close to \$4 million; they spend \$130 million to repair the Tarouba Stadium; they gave away \$250 million to one of their financiers for a loss making company

called Massy Communications at our expense and we have doctors who cannot get jobs in our country [*Desk thumping*] but we give Massy Communication, that doing very well in this country, \$250 million; then the Government loan to a toilet factory, \$30 million.

**Sen. Ameen:** Toilet paper.

**Sen. W. Mark:** A toilet paper factory. Madam President, we do not know the owners of that toilet paper factory, but we lend them taxpayers' money amounting to \$30 million; jazz festival, \$20 million; the Prime Minister building a house in Tobago. We understand, Madam President, it is estimated at \$15 million.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, please. Please rephrase what you are saying, please.

**Sen. W. Mark:** All right. We understand, Madam President, that the hon. Prime Minister is building a residence for the Prime Minister, in accordance with the laws of the country, and it is estimated at \$15 million. They just opened a sporting complex in Diego Martin, \$115 million, a second phase to come. We do not know what is the value of it, and the thing was given, we understand, without tender.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** Stollmeyer's Castle.

**Sen. W. Mark:** You understand, Madam President. All these things are taking place. Hilton swimming pool, \$7 million; wet lease for LIAT, \$4 million; settlement at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for inappropriate behaviour, \$150,000; four boats, two ferries and two Cape-class vessels, \$1.6 billion. All of these things are taking place.

Madam President, I want to remind you, and I will remind the population when we go on the campaign trail because we are campaigning, because I want to warn the Government as how Mr. Franklin Khan wanted to warn us today, the hon.

Sen. Franklin Khan, we want to warn them. You come with a snap election, “yuh dead”. “Yuh” come with an election in '20, “we bury yuh”. [*Desk thumping*] So we come for any eventuality, a snap election or the “rell” election, it does not matter, Madam President. So we are campaigning for them too, and I am going to tell the people on the campaign trail that \$100 million was stolen from this country and the people in fake oil. [*Desk thumping*] That is money that could have gone into investing in the human capital of our nation, but the Government does not care. They do what they want. But, you know, Madam President, as my grandmother used to say, “Time longer than twine”. You could run as Valley said—may his soul rest in peace—“yuh cyar” hide. How long can you do that?

Madam President, under this Government there is no doubt that this economy has been split into two parts. One part consists of the corporations and the companies that are doing well. The banks are doing well, the conglomerates are doing well, big companies are doing well. They are striving and benefiting from the Government's economic policy whilst the majority of our citizens are struggling and fighting to make two ends meet. This is a tone deaf Government. They have done everything to make big business and giant conglomerates even richer and better in this country whilst the poor people are under real pressure. I tried to get data on the percentage of citizens in this country who are working for \$15 an hour. I cannot get it from the CSO, so I now have to estimate and I have estimated that close to 40 per cent of the labour force work for \$15 an hour which is close to 250,000 citizens in this country. That is the kind of poverty that we have in our country today. So whilst they are doing good, that is, big business, and the conglomerates and the banks, our poor people are under pressure. The working class is under pressure in our land.

Madam President, they have created a bifurcated economy. That is what they have done.

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** You learned that from the AG.

**Sen. W. Mark:** The AG? The AG “have” to deal with somebody else just now, not me. They have created a bifurcated economy in this country. I was shocked. I cannot get data on a breakdown as it relates to—we live in a multicultural society, a multi-ethnic society like the United States, but in the United States you can get data on the African community, on the Caucasian society or sector, you can get it for the Hispanics. In Trinidad and Tobago you “cyar” get no data. Well, we got data this morning—*[Interruption]*

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

**Sen. Mark:** Yeah—from somebody who addressed us, and I was shocked to learn that the highest level of unemployed persons in this country, we were told, are Indian women, and the highest number of persons who are unemployed in this country are Indian men.

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** Source?

**Sen. W. Mark:** The source is the UN and they are about to publish a report on this matter.

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** We will see.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Yeah, you will see just now. I was shocked.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, please address the Chair.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Yeah, Madam President, I will do that. But we want to tell the people of this country that there is hope. There is hope. We cannot continue along this line forever.

So, Madam President, the United National Congress is going to get Trinidad

and Tobago working once again. [*Desk thumping*] We believe the time has come to end the cycle of boom and bust which has been perpetuated for decades by this Government. To take our country out of this vicious cycle, we need to change the way we approach economic growth and national development. The UNC does not believe in the old PNM ideas of turnaround. To maximize the full potential of our people and nation we must embrace economic challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The UNC believes what we need is economic transformation. When the UNC returns to Government, which is shortly, either this year when they call the snap election, or next year if they change their mind, we will immediately implement our national economic transformation plan. Diversification is at the heart of our economic plan. We will encourage strategic investment in niche non-energy sectors where we have strong competitive advantage, market opportunity and growth potential.

We have developed 12 key strategic, prosperity engines, spread across Trinidad and Tobago. These prosperity engines will mobilize and engage the private sector, both local and international, and will have large positive multiplier effects in kick starting economic recovery, fostering growth and supporting diversification, and generating jobs. These prosperity engines will spur a dynamic, sustainable, technological, resourceful economy which allows our people to prosper and fulfil their potential. We consider the East-West Corridor to be instrumental in becoming a conduit for national economy transformation. Three of our prosperity engines will be based along the East-West Corridor. First of all, the Tanama solar tech renewable energy park, the East-West Corridor [*Desk thumping*] biotechnology manufacturing corridor; then we will have something called the Piarco aircraft maintenance repair and operation hub. These are things that are designed to generate jobs, well-paying jobs, decent jobs, for our citizens.



Madam President, if I may, I have a few seconds left, I will tell you we have own natural renewable resource which is the sun and we intend to make full use of the sun under the Tanama solar tech park. We are going to, in terms of the east-west biotechnology manufacturing corridor, we will invite private investors to establish a biotechnology manufacturing zone along the East-West Corridor. And in terms of aircraft maintenance, we will invite private investors to build and manage an aircraft maintenance repair and operations hub in the aero park at Piarco International Airport. We intend to open a new airport, a second airport in Trinidad at Camden—at the campus. [*Desk thumping*] That is the aviation campus.

So, Madam President, we have a plan for the economic transformation and development and diversification of our country. We are not coming here just to engage in rhetorical flourishes. We are coming here with a plan to deal with the people's interest, the people's future, and, Madam President, as I close and I thank you for allowing me to make my presentation this afternoon, I want to leave with you and this country that the United National Congress is the only hope for a better tomorrow and we call on the people to get ready for change. I beg to move, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Someone needs to second the Motion.

**Sen. Haynes:** Madam President, I beg to second the Motion and I reserve my right to speak at a later stage.

*Question proposed.*

**The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West):** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, thank you for recognizing me and giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this Motion. Before I get

into the substance of the debate which deals with Government policy, let me address some of the statistics raised by Sen. Mark, and highlight for the Members of this honourable House and for the public what situation we are in and why the employment rate is where it is.

Let us not forget that under the prior administration Trinidad and Tobago enjoyed oil prices that averaged US \$95 a barrel from 2011 to 2014. The prices dropped thereafter. In contrast, the price of oil declined in 2017 to almost half of what it was during the period 2011 to 2014. It went down to an annual average low of 43.1 per cent in 2016, and in fact in that year the price of oil actually went down at one point to \$28 a barrel. So this is the context in which we find ourselves.

In light of that, Madam President, because the fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago are so significantly tied to the oil prices and gas prices, because until we succeed and diversify, until we stop chasing away opportunities like the Sandals project, we are significantly tied to the fortunes in the oil sector. So the decline in the energy sector prices and production over that period led to a significant decrease in the GDP real growth rate, and it went down to its lowest in the last 12 years, in 2016. However, notwithstanding that decline in our energy prices and in our GDP, I will let you know shortly where we are in terms of unemployment, Madam President. But before I get there, because Trinidad and Tobago fortunes are so significantly tied to the fortunes of the energy sector, the revenue of the Government is as well significantly tied to the energy sector, and we went from oil and gas production giving us 45.1 per cent of our tax income in 2008, an average of 30 per cent of our oil revenue as a share of total revenue in the period 2011 to 2014, down to an all-time low of 1.2 per cent in 2017.

So, Madam President, in 2017 the Government received income from the energy sector that represented only 1 per cent of our total revenue. So that had a significant impact on the fortunes of the Government and what the Government could do. It represented a decline from \$20 billion to a little less than \$1 billion. So these are the economic times in which the Government has been performing since it came into office in 2015. One would be interested in knowing, Madam President, that notwithstanding that fact, notwithstanding the significant decline in the income of the Government in the income of the country, the unemployment rate has remained contrary to what Sen. Mark has been suggesting, has remained fairly constant and has not risen above 5 per cent. It went to a low in 2013/2014 when oil prices were US \$97 a barrel to 3.8 per cent, and there has been some increase since 2015, but it has remained below 5 per cent.

By comparison, let us consider what happened with unemployment during our earlier recession periods. In the period 1987 to 1991, we also had a recession. We had oil prices going from US \$27 a barrel to half of that, of \$13.53 a barrel. The unemployment rate at that time went to an all-time high of 20.4 per cent in 1991, that is, 20.4 per cent, versus where we are currently of an unemployment rate of less than 5 per cent.

**3.15 p.m.**

Let us look at this more globally, Madam President. How does our unemployment rate of less than 5 per cent—and the figure I have which reflects a 2017 figure, because the figure I have for 2018, which is lower, is still unconfirmed by the CSO and therefore I will refrain from raising it. So let us use the figure that we have from 2017 of 4.8 per cent and compare it with what is happening elsewhere in the world. The US, for example, Madam President, is

said to be in a particularly buoyant period of its economy. Its unemployment rate in January of 2018 was 4.1 per cent; the UK unemployment rate, 4.3 per cent; the Indian unemployment rate, 3.6 per cent, and the Canadian unemployment rate, 5.8 per cent, which is higher than ours.

So, Madam President, in countries that are generally acknowledged to be doing relatively well, that are not in recessions, their unemployment level, as a percentage, is not significantly different from ours. We have, despite the severe economic challenges which we faced from 2015, managed to maintain a fairly consistent and steady and reasonably low unemployment rate. Now, while I do acknowledge that any loss of job is not something to be celebrated, I think that we can acknowledge that the management of the economy, the management of the situation was well handled by the Government to ensure that we maintained a reasonable level of unemployment.

You compare that, Madam President, to what transpired in the earlier recession period when not only were jobs lost and unemployment went up to 22 per cent but public servants, for example, had to endure a salary cut and that income was made up in the future. We have sought to avoid either terminating public servants or reducing their salary payments despite the fact that the size of the public service salary bill is the largest it has ever been at \$10 billion following the negotiations of the last contract in 2014, just before the last Government demitted office.

So, we have maintained jobs in the public service, we have maintained salaries at where they have been and we have kept the unemployment rate relatively low despite the very challenging economic times we have faced. And we have done this because contrary to the Motion introduced by Sen. Mark, we do

in fact have an economic policy that is sound, that is keeping the country afloat and that is now allowing us to embark on a path of growth. So what we have been able to do over the first couple of years in office is that we have managed to stabilize the situation, stabilize the economy, get things back in place to lead to a path of growth, and now we are embarking on projects to stimulate that growth.

So, what are the pillars on which this Government has based its approach to the economy? If we look at our *Vision 2030*, it lists five essential pillars. One is putting people first and that is manifested in the fact that we have made every effort to maintain jobs, to maintain people's standard of living at a reasonable level. It is also manifested in the fact that we are seeking in our initiatives, which I will go into later, to foster innovation and creativity among our people.

The second pillar: Improving Productivity. We are demonstrating that, living that on a day-to-day basis by focusing on infrastructural development in important areas. Because this, in our view, provides the economic incentive to public and private sector participants. As was stated in the manifesto, and I quote: efficient and resilient infrastructure enables global trade, powers business, connects workers to their jobs, and creates new opportunities for struggling economies. So infrastructural activity is important as part of our process of managing the economy in a sound manner.

The third pillar: Building Globally Competitive Businesses. Our intention, as stated in the *Vision 2030* document, is to maintain economic stability mainly by pursuing sound monetary fiscal policy, promoting healthy trade and payment balances and taking the necessary steps to contain inflationary pressures. So, among the things we are doing to build globally competitive markets is to improve the pillars, the infrastructure that is in place to allow people to conduct business

efficiently. So, for example, the Attorney General's Office is on the brink of launching its computerized service to allow for e-payments, to allow for e-applications, to allow for e-filings, all to more efficiently allow for the conduct of business, whether it has to do with company activity, land activity and so on.

The single electronic window, as being managed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, is also to allow us to improve our doing business operations. There are several projects, sub-projects in place throughout the Ministries to allow us to more efficiently conduct business. The introduction of the port scanners in Port of Spain and Point Lisas also to allow for easier facilitation of trade. We are in the process now of reviewing our scanner needs and determining whether and how many additional scanners we need at our ports and our airports to promote that.

We are providing export financing and export support through the Eximbank to encourage our exporters, mainly, to do and grow their businesses to operate them efficiently. And we have embarked on a plan to encourage public/private partnerships because this Government is of the view that the role of a government is not to carry the economy of a country but to facilitate activity. One of the ways we are doing that, while not putting the entire risk of certain projects on the private sector, is to engage in public/private partnerships.

So, Madam President, we have embarked on several projects and several initiatives in fulfilment of our policy in the economic sphere to stabilize the economy, as I said, to grow it and to get us to a place where while we continue to take advantage of the benefit that we have in our energy sector, we become less and less reliant on that sector and become a more diversified economy. So let us look at some of the specific projects that we have engaged in and we continue to engage in to fulfil this policy and our approach and our mandate.

In respect to agriculture, Madam President, this Government recognizes that security of land tenure is crucial to the progress of the local agricultural sector and, as such, what we have set out doing very deliberately, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, is to ensure that there is security of land tenure. We have been looking at the lease applications and other requests for land so that we put our agricultural sector operators in a position where they feel secure enough to make investments and grow that sector. We have embarked on a programme of building access roads, improve drainage and irrigation systems in a number of areas across the country, including Tobago.

We have resuscitated, or in the process of resuscitating, the cocoa and coconut industries through the coconut rehabilitation and replanting programme and the cocoa rehabilitation programme. Because as the Minister of Trade and Industry is always proud to indicate, our cocoa is very well regarded and there is a market for it out there, and we are seeking to improve our export and increase our foreign exchange earnings through many venues, but that is one of the avenues through which we are seeking to do it.

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

In addition to encouraging grow the agricultural sector which has been under severe challenge for decades, we have also introduced an agricultural financial support programme which would provide new and existing farmers with grants of up to \$100,000; so, direct injection of cash to help them with their business activity and growth. We continue to provide tax incentives for equipment and raw materials and exempt their profits from income tax and corporation tax. We have subsidized loan programmes; we have purpose-built markets; and there are several other initiatives to improve the activity in the agricultural sector.

One of most significant initiatives in that sector is the Moruga agro-processing and light industrial park which is currently under construction, and it is intended to provide facilities for canning, bottling and freezing of finished product. That is one of the areas where we have not taken full advantage of in the past; we are providing a market for our farmers on one hand and converting our agricultural products into more advanced products, so we improve the saleability, we increase the market and we generate some foreign exchange. So we are focused on that and we expect that industrial park to be opened in the not-too-distant future and to give the agricultural sector a significant boost. We have also turned the sod for the establishment of a next generation hatchery at Brechin Castle, Couva and this project is expected to consolidate the poultry sector.

In respect of energy which we recognize continues to be the lifeblood of the economy, we are focused on that because we need to ensure that in the short term, while we diversify, that we give the energy sector the breath that it needs to allow us the kind of income that we used to earn so that we can develop the other sectors and we can continue to provide support in the areas of social services and so on. So, policies for invigoration.

We are revisiting the tax regime to ensure that the incentives that are given to the energy sector are sufficiently attractive to allow them to continue exploration, and we are seeing that in the activity that is going on in all of the sectors, including Trinity Exploration and Production which recently made a significant oil refinery at Galeota that amounts to 700 million barrels. So we are providing them with incentive; on the other hand, while moving away from the position adopted from the last Government of removing from them any significant tax obligation which negatively impacted the fortunes of the country. So we are



trying to balance earning that decent revenue from the energy sector while encouraging them to continue their operation, and we are having success in this area through discussion with the energy sector players.

So, evidence of the fact that the energy sector players are on board with our new approach and that this approach is bearing fruit, we have operationalization of Juniper. We have an investment programme that BP has embarked on of US \$8 billion over the next 10 years. We have projects including Angelin and Cassia gas compression project scheduled to begin in 2020. We have upcoming exploration drilling and future phases—this is all BP, one company. In respect of Shell and EOG, they are to embark on aggressive exploration and development drilling programmes this year. BHP Billiton as well has a development programme that would see a gas supply to NGC maintained at 340 million standard cubic feet over the next two years, and the development of Block 3A which is expected to begin production in 2023. Of significance also is the Dragon deal agreement that was signed with Venezuela which will allow us to secure a continuing supply of gas from a significant field to feed our energy-based industry in Point Lisas and elsewhere.

We have also had an international consultant to assist us with development of the gas master plan which will ensure the people of Trinidad and Tobago enjoy the maximum benefits from this sector. So while, when we embarked on our programme of renegotiating agreements with the energy sector, we were told that we would chase them away and we would not get the benefit of their activity, this has not been proven to be true. The approach taken by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, by the Prime Minister himself and other Members of the Government has proven to be very successful in ensuring that the players in the

energy sector continue to invest, continue to develop, while they give us a decent return on the activity in the energy sector.

Downstream, there are projects that are coming on board including the methanol to dimethyl ether complex at Union Industrial Park, La Brea, that not only has created 1,700 jobs during the construction phase but when finished, it will generate a substantial number of jobs, foreign exchange and activity in the southwestern peninsula. There are also two other downstream projects in aluminium production which will generate foreign exchange because what it is doing is producing finished product to be used in the automotive sector and in electrical infrastructure. This, too, is expected to generate at least 1,000 jobs.

As I mentioned the southern area of the country, let us remember that, in my view, a game-changing project is expected to start soon down there and that is the dry-docking facility which we are engaging in partnership with a Chinese company. As we had indicated to you previously, the Chinese have a significant boat operation and they use the Panama Canal and they need repair services, dry-docking services as they negotiate international waters. Trinidad and Tobago, being placed in a hurricane-safe zone, is an ideal location between North America and South America to give us this advantage that we expect to see materialize into a very profitable business and that will not only create jobs and earn us foreign exchange but, in my view, has the potential to really develop and cause the La Brea and Point area to boom again. This would be significantly aided by another project, an infrastructural project that we are continuing which is the highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin—all of which produces jobs.

In respect of manufacturing, as I indicated earlier, to promote the export sector, we have created foreign exchange accessibility to export-oriented

businesses to allow those businesses to continue to operate, generate foreign exchange for the benefit of the country. We are in the process of creating Special Economic Zones to replace the current free zones which we are designing in a way that they are more flexible and should encourage more activity in those zones. We are about to embark on the construction of the Industrial Park at Phoenix Park which will also create jobs, generate foreign exchange, bring foreign investment into the country.

Mr. Vice-President, this administration recognizes the importance of the development of the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago. As I indicated earlier, we are of the strong view that Government is not intended to carry the economy of Trinidad and Tobago but facilitate economic activity for the growth of the economy. So the strength of the economy cannot and ought not to rest solely on the shoulders of the Government, so we need to ensure that the private sector is strong and vibrant so that they can grow, develop and make their contribution to the country's development. With this in mind, we have introduced and are working on the development of several business development incentives to encourage private sector activity, and as I said, one of the initiatives we are using is the public/private partnership.

In tourism, we have a focus in tourism as well. We are seeking to create a best-in-class brand for the Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort because Tobago, like San Fernando, requires an injection to recognize their full potential, and one of the ways we are seeking to do that is to improve the activity and the draw of the Magdalena Grand. We are also opening new air routes to allow in airlines with their airlift that have not previously come to Trinidad. We have seen some success with the introduction of Sunwing Airlines. They have brought an

additional airlift to Tobago and we are hoping to improve on that to bring more tourists and, therefore, more foreign exchange activity to Tobago. We are also in the process of finalizing arrangements to build the new terminal in Tobago to, again, improve the activity, access and open up Tobago to a wider international clientele.

In respect to maritime, we are leveraging our location or seeking to leverage the location of Trinidad and Tobago in a manner that will elevate the standing of this country in the international maritime industry. We have developed a yachting policy that is already paying dividends. We have seen an increase on the arrivals of yachts from 545 arrivals, during the period January to June 2017, to 683 arrivals between January and June 2018—a 25 per cent increase—and this is before we construct the two arenas that are carded to be constructed. One in Invader's Bay and one in Tobago which we are expecting to significantly increase the visitors to Trinidad and Tobago. In particular, we are in the ideal place for people seeking to engage in that kind of activity within the Caribbean to visit during the hurricane season and to house their boats during the hurricane season. So, as I said, we are seeking to take advantage of our physical location to increase that activity which we have neglected so far; so we are seeking to improve that.

As I indicated, we are putting people first; we recognize that Trinidad and Tobago has a wealth of talent and so another focus is on the creative industry. During the period March to June 2018, we launched and ran the Live Music District pilot programme and it attracted significant interest. It gave our performers avenues to showcase their talent and to earn an income and gave them guidance in terms of how they develop their craft. So we are proposing to continue with that initiative because we think it will bear fruit.

With respect to the fashion industry, UTT has a two-year Diploma and a four-year Undergraduate Degree in Fashion Design and a two-year Diploma in Fashion Management. We also introduced and operated a certificate programme in Ultra Bespoke Tailoring in November 2017 through collaboration between Ministry of Trade and Industry, FashionTT, MIC Institute of Technology and the Savile Row Academy. From all reports, that was a successful programme. We extended it beyond where we expected it to go and we are hoping to see that the participants in that programme get involved in production of clothing for exports.

Madam President, in addition to that, one of the things that the Government does to directly generate jobs, in addition to seeking to stimulate the economy, is to incur expenditure on various projects. Some of these projects, the very—I apologize, Mr. Vice-President. Some of the projects on which the Government expends money are some of the very projects which Sen. Mark referred to as vanity projects. These projects also generate jobs and salaries for people who are destitute and cannot get jobs and so on and so forth. So it seems to me that Sen. Mark's contribution was a little contradictory because if we are constructing accommodation for the Prime Minister of the country in Tobago, that requires us to employ people in Tobago. If we are fixing Mille Fleurs which, in my view, is not a vanity project but it is preserving our history for the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago—and I insist that is something we need to do—not only does it do that but it also generates jobs. So that the Government has embarked on a series of direct activity in various areas to directly generate jobs as well as provide social relief as well as to generate the economy.

So we have directly constructed houses for the thousands of people who are looking for assistance from the Government in securing accommodation and in

addition to that, we have embarked on a programme which provides direct payments and incentives to individuals who want to partner with the Government to provide additional houses for our less fortunate among us who cannot individually afford to buy their own house, most of which start at \$1 million. So we have that. We also have the Aided Self-Help Housing Programme. One of the projects which we are targeting to start in the not-too-distant future, as I would have mentioned previously, is the San Fernando Waterfront Improvement Project and Regeneration Programme. This seeks to provide the City of San Fernando with a facelift.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Five minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. A. West:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. It encompasses several other projects which include the establishment of a fishing facility and jetty along Hatters Beach, the construction of a medium-income housing at Lady Hailes Avenue and the development of an administrative complex in Chancery Lane. San Fernando is one of the fence-line communities that would have been impacted by the close-down of Petrotrin and we promised the population, when we took the decision to close it down, that we will provide support to these fence-line communities; this is one of the ways we are seeking to do that.

**3.45 p.m.**

We have or are in the process of constructing hospitals in Arima, Point Fortin, Port of Spain, Sangre Grande. We are/have, or in the process of constructing police stations in Carenage, St. Clair, Matura in Trinidad and Roxborough and Old Grange in Tobago.

In respect of road works, we have the Curepe interchange which is in the process of being constructed. We are finishing the San Fernando to La Brea road

works. We are taking—Sen. Mark all of a sudden is interested in East-West Corridor, but we announced ages ago that the part of Trinidad and Tobago that is least developed is that area in Toco. So we conceived of the highway to Toco and then a port in Toco to encourage not only development of that part of the country but also to create an easier link between Tobago, which would not only encourage increase in visitors to Tobago but also will encourage greater economic activity.

Madam President, these are only a few of the initiatives that the Government has embarked on. We are focused on ensuring that the economy one, remains stable; two, grows and improves; and three, gets on a real and sustainable path to diversification, so that Trinidad and Tobago can more successfully withstand the vagaries of the energy sector. We have a clear policy in place. We have projects that are aligned to those policies and we are implementing them as efficiently as we can, given the continuing economic challenges to get Trinidad and Tobago to a place where it is comfortable, where we can all feel that we are significantly contributing to the economy and we can live comfortably.

So, Madam President, while there has been some losses of jobs, I will reiterate that the rate of unemployment has not exceeded 5 per cent, which is comparable to the most successful countries in the world. It is much better than the unemployment rate that impacted the country during the earlier recessions that we went through, and this was a result of the sound management of this Government, which we will continue along the path of, with the intention of ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago survives and prospers. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh:** Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me to take part in this discourse. I must say with the present state of the economy and

the Government's attempt to balance the budget, we all acknowledge the predicaments that citizens face. Citizens, I guess, we have the job loss. We have business places now trying to see how they can survive in this climate, and even the business owners now have to make harsh decisions, how they can send home some workers whilst new workers coming in trying to get jobs. It is difficult in this present climate.

So, current figures show that the unemployment rate is around 4.4 per cent, the unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago. And when you looked at other countries, Canada for instance has 5.8; United States has 3.8; Australia 4.9; Jamaica, it is a bit high, it is around 12.45, I think. So we look around the world. And I am looking and comparing to some of other countries, Trinidad and Tobago is not so bad. Even in Spain, I think it is a very high figure in Spain and some European countries. So, in in a sense, we are still in a comfortable position. However, looking at the present climate with the oil economy, the natural gas on the decline, we are seeing now that we are faced with a lot of challenges. I have seen and counselled patients who had job losses. I see them in clinic.

Even with the ArcelorMittal case, I remember someone committed suicide and I was asked my opinion about the unemployment rate in countries and suicide that we see. And it is a fact that even in the States when there was recession this happen. So unemployment will affect the mental health, will affect the well-being of the citizens. And even in cases like that the Ministry of Labour actually had some discussions and I was fortunate to be part of that discussion via the Ministry of Health/Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. I came in there and we were trying to see how we could help persons who were unemployed. There were beautiful plans in place where the Ministry of Labour and Small



Enterprise Development said that they would be like the hub of the activities. They would be able to advertise posts. They would look at persons who are losing jobs and even see if somehow they can have different skills training. We can have different skill sets. We can look at these individuals and see if we can fit them in some areas. So it was a beautiful plan.

However, you know when I try to get into some channels, when my patients try to see how they can get access to see which jobs are available—I just lost a job but I am trying to see some avenue—there are still no systems in place that I would look at and say: “Hey, this is an easy system in place”. For instance, you are now trying to get a job but the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development will have certain information.

But you see, when an individual comes to us, or even go to social services and they are going to ask for social welfare, they will say well they have lost their job, there is a situation. We need something to tide them through. I am pleased that the grants that were given were increased and this is something that could go away helping persons.

But in certain institutions that we have in the UK, if you are coming for a job, if you have a job loss and you are coming to get social welfare, they actually put you on a list and try to place you on different jobs before they put you on any sort of dole system or before they put you on any sort of unemployment grants. So I am thinking, in Trinidad, this is something we have to work at. So the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development may have its list, but there is a disconnect with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services who actually give out these grants.

So an individual coming in sometimes, they may want a job but they will now have to go through that list and say: "We are trying to place you in different things", and if you are placed, some of them would be very happy to get that job. But we need a system in place where we can place those persons into that job. So this is something I noted and I am hoping the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development would take note of that. Take note of the fact that we need a better system where we can have a hub of activities because there are a lot of little activities that are taking place.

So persons may be unemployed and there may be a course being offered in Mayaro. There was a course. I think BP had a course for the residents in that area and that course actually afforded residents of that area to get a loan to try and do some sort of a private enterprise. And it is actually, little activities that are going in the country. It was called MIPED. It was a Mayaro Initiative for Private Enterprise Development. It was a BP initiative to help the community. And the Minister of Finance actually stated that there is a need for more corporate sponsorship and private/government intervention, and this was an excellent programme. I think there is a need for more of those programmes.

Besides a need for that, there is also a need, I am saying, for a hub. There is a need to have it up in the face of the person. You have lost a job, but this is where you can apply. This is where you can get a job. This is different activities taking place. Because even the URP had a URP micro symposium through different parts of the country. CEPEP had a micro symposium. And there are different governmental agencies which will have training programmes. YTEPP had excellent training programmes also. But it is so scattered that it is still missing individuals out there. So we need something out there, up in the face that people

could say: "Listen, I could go into these programmes and I can latch on to it."

Because I think we have to understand sometimes the nature of our persons in Trinidad, sometimes you have to carry the programme to them, because some of them will just sit in their depression and do not even come out. Or some of them, they think things must come easy for them. And the newer generation, it is getting worse where younger persons now may think that they need persons to come and give them something, rather than to go out searching. So it is a psychological mindset where we have to say we are missing a certain, there is a gap. We are missing certain persons. We have to go after them to see how we could engage them.

As I am speaking, I want to see how this problem affects the youth, the aged, and also, Sen. Mark mentioned, the foreign nationals. So those are the aspects I just wanted to look at and mention some suggestions that I have. Well the youth, the young, the restless, when you look at figures, when you look at certain statistics, when you look at the Central Bank's statistics and you find some statistics that we had from different institutions, they actually looked at the fact that the youth unemployment and crime is a major issue and we all know in Trinidad, in the Caribbean, crime is a major issue. So anything that could tackle the crime, I think, anything that could put a dent in the crime, we have to go after and youth unemployment is a major issue now, globally.

The ILO Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mr. José Salazar-Xirinachs, in the annual labour overview of Latin America and the Caribbean, in his 2007 report, presented at the headquarters in Lima, he actually quoted: The labour markets of the region continue to be highly—he was saying that the labour markets continue to show that there are a lot of youths that are

being left behind, and he actually tried to tie in the fact that in the Caribbean and Latin American countries, the levels are so high, that he was saying that there is a need to tackle the problems that we are having with the youth and the youth unemployment.

I think he said in Trinidad and Tobago it was 11.35 per cent, and in St. Lucia, 43 per cent, while overall 24 per cent of unemployment rate, so, 11.35. So we see that, on the average, unemployment, one in four, we may say generally. But in the youth, unemployment rate is almost twice that of adults. So therefore, these children, they have hope. They should have a life plan. We are seeing suicide is the second highest cause of death among 15 to 29 year olds.

So imagine you come out a young person, you have done your studies, but you cannot get a job. I think we will have—it is our duty, you know, to give these youths, because they have now scattered dreams of the youth where they cannot plan to get a job. They cannot plan to have a home. They cannot plan to get a family, and this would further frustrate them and lead to the unstable mood that we are seeing in our youth now. So, in more than one way, we have to tackle this problem for the mental health of the youth and for the fact that it can look at our crime statistics.

There was an IMF blog, Madam President, where the view of the International Monetary Fund, IMF, staff and officials, they commented on pressing economic policies and issues and they noted the difficult job market has left an increase in crime in many Caribbean countries. So they tried to link crime and youth unemployment.

In several Caribbean countries, crime has risen sharply since 2004 and murder rates are now among the highest in the world. According to an IMF book

called *Unleashing Growth and Strengthening Resilience in the Caribbean*, they stated that:

“About 40 per cent of the Caribbean population, identifies crime and security-related issues as the biggest problem facing their countries...”

And they quoted a *2012 United Nations Caribbean Human Development Report*, which stated:

“Young people are both the primary victims and perpetrators of crime in the region. Victims of violent crime are mainly between the ages of 18 to 30 and from lower levels of income, while 80 per cent of prosecuted crimes were committed by people aged 17 to 29...”

So here you are, the young persons, unemployed, are victims of crime and also, perpetrators of crime. So, we have to look at this and part of their recommendation, they said:

“Balancing crime suppression programs with prevention, including the youth vocational training that increases job opportunities in the formal sector and keeps youths off the street, targeting interventions in high crime areas, and developing indicators to more accurately monitor the effectiveness of anticrime programs can deliver good results.”

So therefore, our duty is to say how we are going to get the youth, how we are going to target these individuals.

There was a Central Bank report that I remembered in 2016, where the report actually noted, the highest rates of unemployment were recorded among youths, elementary workers and secondary school leavers with zero passes. I want to look at this factor, secondary school leavers with zero passes. Also, they mentioned the 15 and 19 age group recorded an unemployment rate of 13.3 per

cent, while the rate for the 20 to 24 age group was 11.2 per cent. Meanwhile, all other age groups showed unemployment rates ranging between .9 per cent and 6.5 per cent.

So two points I looked at that I would want to develop from this. Why are persons still in our secondary school system coming out with zero passes? And this, I think, is a major challenge. We are putting a lot of money into the educational system but still it seems that we are still failing our youths and those are the youths who will come out there unemployed and maybe the youths who may be dysfunctional in society and youths that may need help. So we have to look at that issue about it. But we have to understand the educational system will not really help all.

Sen. Paul Richards actually had, the Motion he moved by having special teachers, special educators in school, it is a beautiful Motion, in the sense it is a Motion that we are looking to recognize children who may not be able to go through that level and pass and have CXC passes. So we need to have these special educators to say how we can help these children, how we can prevent certain children from having the zero passes we are looking at.

And I think we may have to push for that special educators. We may have to look and push to see how we could recognize these children, how we could help these children. They may have special learning difficulties. They may have a lot of problems, autistic problems, dyslexia. We identify them and we actually will be able to train some of them. We will be able to get passes.

But we have to admit, some persons may not be able to take the educational system as it is. Some persons may want to actually be excellent at a skill. So the child who cannot read his book may be the child who could be the best football

player and could go and represent us. The child who cannot understand a math equation may be the child who could be the best musician out and who could actually be the best welder to be artistic or even build excellent carnival costumes. So we have to individualize our kids, recognize them early enough, give them that education. So education does not have to be just a book education. Education has to be education in the different things you are doing. You are getting certificates in welding. You are getting certificates in music. So this is the level we have to look at in targeting these youths.

What I look at is that we have, since 1988, YTEPP Limited was a training organization which focused on technical vocational education and training, and it was established in 1988 with World Bank funding at the Ministry of Education and that was there to meet the labour and market demands of the industry. The organizational target was unemployed youth, retrenched employees and displaced citizens between 15 to 60 years. So this was in place since 1988. Yet still we are having a segment of persons not engaging in these activities. YTEPP is there. It is a beautiful programme. It is scattered all through the country.

People have to reach out to it and get that education. So we are still missing an element of persons who are not coming forward to go to the YTEPP. And we have to understand why. Why is there are gap? There are programmes but people are not getting it. So some people are not getting the programmes because they may not know. Some people are not getting the programmes because they do not care. Some people are just not getting the programmes because they may find it is just too difficult to access it. But those YTEPP groups are all over the country. So people should not have an excuse. Youth sitting in the corner should not have an excuse again to be idle.

Looking at the second point I would want to look at is the fact that when this report came about they looked at the youths and they looked at the ones with zero passes, and they also looked at children between the ages of 15 to 19. I was a bit appalled because I said: Why are we looking at ages 15 to 19 as being unemployed? A 15 to 19 year-old, to me, should be in school or in some programme. So that jumped at me when I looked at the Central Bank figures at 2006, when they gave that little preamble about zero passes and 15 to 19 age group. And this is a point I am thinking. We should never encourage young children to be working. They have to be seeking an education. Or if they cannot seek an education, seeking a skill. This is what I am looking at now, that we have to look. How are we going to get these children to seek that skill?

So we looked at the fact that, you know, if we are saying, according to our recent legislation, that a child is less than 18, then no person less than 18 should be employed. No person less than 18 should be having to get a job. Anyone less than 18, we should come down to that and say: Something is wrong here. You have to be doing skills training or you have to be doing some sort of schooling.

So therefore, we have to appreciate that if you have youths, and they are left unattended, those youths who are left unattended will be idle and idle hands, as you know, they can get into mischief. They can get involved in gangs. They can get involved in drugs. They can get involved in a whole host of activities that we have to frown on. So, therefore, what I am looking at is those children who are not in school, we have to get some way of monitoring them.

Years ago, I remember there was something called a school inspector. So if you missed classes, the school inspector would go home and make your mother responsible or look for this child and bring this child to school. We have to



reintroduce this system where any child who misses school, you go after them. A school inspector say: "You miss school?" Either your mother is responsible. Because if you are a mother and you have—because I have been seeing mothers who have a lot of children and sometimes they do not know where their children are. Six o'clock in the afternoon a 15-year-old girl, you do not know where she is. If you are a mother, you have the responsibility and the duty to take care of your children. Because if you do not do that, those children, either the boys would get into mischief—

**Sen. Ameen:** And the fathers too.

**Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh:** Yes the absent fathers also. I agree totally. But the thing in a society, we have to look at: How would we make a home, the persons in charge of a home responsible? How could we ensure that a father does his duty and stays within that family? Or even if he is not staying, gives the money to the mother to help with that family? All these are factors we have to tackle.

So let us say you have a child and the child is in the corner liming, there are programmes that this child could go into. This child could go into YTEPP. This child could go into MiLAT. This child, there is the HYPE programme. There are a lot of programmes. But those children are not coming into those programmes. So we have to see how we can engage those children because if you do not engage those children, those children, as the statistics show, may be coming crime statistics or perpetrators of crime.

So I am saying, I think we have to make it a crime to let children be idle. We have to do something because the children of our country, I am saying, let the parents take responsibility and also, you know, because oftentimes we see in the news where a child is caught with a gun and the mother comes down and say that:

"Oh, he was a responsible child." And we frown and say: "Where was she when this child was liming with guns? Where was she when the child was liming with gangs?" What I am saying is that unemployed youth, I think what we have to establish now, if you are an unemployed youth, if you are not doing anything, if you are not engaging in programmes or in a skills training, we should mandate it that they attend a youth camp. Not a boot camp with a bad thing, but a youth camp.

You are there, you are not doing anything, your mother cannot even force you to come to school to take a training, let it be mandated that these children have to go to this camp, a youth camp. Now a boot camp, they were saying, is for children who are delinquent. But what I am saying, idle children, we have to engage them. We have to bring them in because there are programmes here that they are not even getting. So that youth camp, I am thinking, will catch that cadre of individuals who are going to be there and are not going to come into our system that we have had.

Now, we have to have exception. We cannot—if a child is not in school—just make it law to say you have to go to a youth camp. Because remember some mothers have homeschooling. So homeschooling is there. Some parents do not like their children to go to the school so they do homeschooling, but I am saying if you are doing homeschooling allow a social worker to go to visit that home to give approval that, hey, you are doing homeschooling, it is your right, but that child is safe within that environment.

Also again, concessions have to be made for those children who probably are not so intellectually capable of attending school but their father does a trade. So they say: "Well, I want to do gardening with daddy" or "I want to do

woodworking with daddy" a concession has to be made for those children too. So if you do not want to go to the traditional YTEPP, MiLAT, HYPE programmes, let these children at least be able to stay with their parents. They are underage, but again the social worker will say they are in a safe environment and they are learning their trade from their parents.

Now, there is another problem with youth. So besides the youth who we are getting that are not educated, we have a lot. There are other extremes where there are educated young persons out there who are educated but jobless. They are not getting their jobs. There are young people who are qualified, certified, went through GATE, but they are not employed. They are underemployed. And with the increasing economic hardship, we are seeing more of them.

Within the medical fraternity, we have a lot of doctors coming out here and they cannot get jobs. Whose fault is it? Is it that the university is producing too many doctors? Is it that the State has duty-bound to provide employment for these doctors? It has to be a joint effort where we have to say: Do we have enough doctors in certain fields to man those fields? And once we have enough doctors per patient to man that field, government has met its obligation. If the university now wants to churn out plenty doctors, because that is a way that they can help their finances, well they have to get some system in place where they will say: "Well, we are going to get training for these doctors somewhere else."

So we are faced with doctors here, coming out from the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine. More doctors coming from Barbados, from Jamaica and other countries coming in here and all looking for jobs. So I am saying once the government makes that standard of patients per doctor, that quota how many patients are required in each department per doctor, then I am saying the university

has to look at: Where can we get jobs for these doctors? Thank God for with the Brexit you find now, there is an opportunity now, back in the United Kingdom where doctors can go and get jobs there.

So, therefore, looking at this scenario, there is Görg & Strobl in 2003, who had a report and they said: Overqualification to a developing country,

“It has been noted that overqualification is a widespread issue in developing countries also.”

So it is both a problem where you have people are now overqualified and cannot get jobs.

I would like to quote the University of British Columbia, Professor Paul Kershaw. He noted:

“Almost one-quarter of the generation of young adults born between 1981 and 2000 are working temporary or contract jobs, nearly double the rate for the entire job market. Almost one-third are not working in their field of education, 21 per cent are working more than one job, and close to half are looking for a new job.”

So Prof. Paul Kershaw noted this, and it sounds familiar. It sounds like what is happening here. And he said that:

“Part of the explanation is our aging population...”

With our ageing population:

““There’s is a...bit of a bottleneck with baby boomers and still in the labour market, and the [millennial] generation is the one that is really suffering from this.’

Another factor is the current environment in the corporate world,...”

And it is not that young workers want to be in contract jobs but that is what is

available at this point.

**4.15 p.m.**

So globally it is a problem, so I am thinking that our youths will have to look at this fact that is a global phenomenon, and realize, “Hey, I may not get a full job, I may have to get a job that pays less, I may have to get a part-time work”. But at least get a foot in and enable yourself to work. So, again this is an initiative Government has to look at, offering jobs, probably at a reduced rate in the reality, you are not forcing anybody to take it, but you are saying we are giving these types of jobs. And the OJT, On-the-Job-Training does provide, you know, an avenue for certain persons to come on board.

Again, while I looked at this situation with the youth, I now look at a problem where I see another problem occurring, and as I closed on what Professor Paul Kershaw mentioned about the bottleneck. But you see, Professor Kershaw tends to blame the elderly population also for not vacating their jobs. But this is an issue I have to give. And this is my second point. So looking at the youth, looking at the problem with the youth, I want to look now at the ageing population.

We have 12 per cent, around 12 per cent of our population are above 60. And we have to realize that we cannot just, you know, look at these individuals and after they reach the age of 60, say, “You are no longer needed, get out there”. That is a great disservice to people who have served years. And just recently, recommendations to increase the national retirement age to 65 were made by specialists during a meeting at the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs into the National Insurance System in November 2017. So, the NIB Executive Manager of Policy, Planning and Actuarial Services, Feyaad Khan, said:

“...the National Insurance Board...recommended increasing the contribution

rate to 15.6 per cent, raising the retirement age and freezing the minimum pension at \$3,000.”

This point of view, I must say, is a point of view which I personally held since 2010, and I quote an article from the journalist, Alicia Llanos, Thursday, February 25, 2010 in the *Guardian* newspaper, where, “Expert calls for laws to end age discrimination”. And in this article, I, as the secretary of the Trinidad and Tobago Psychiatric Association, speaking at a forum about dementia and mental illness in the elderly. I said:

“...there was a dire need for Minister of Social Development Amery Browne”—at the time—“to create anti-age discrimination legislation especially in the workforce where employees who are 65 and over were expected voluntarily to retire.”

And I looked at an example of the British Employment Equality (Age) Regulations of 2006, and this legislation came into force on October 01, 2006. And the Regulations followed similar structure to other anti-discriminatory legislation and significant issues addressing the legislation, including the provision of a national default retirement age set at 65 to be retained to for at least five years and the right of employees to request work and work beyond the retirement age. So, since 2010 it is the same, I was following that line.

Because you see, now, I understand—[*Interruption*]—yeah. I understand the problems that may arise out of an employee declining to retire. For example, the inability for junior employees to be promoted to a higher level. But even then I suggested a lateral movement of the senior employee, and allowing him to keep his job and allowing for an upward movement of the junior employees. And age discrimination I said then, was often overlooked for more outwardly obvious forms

of discrimination such as gender and racial discrimination, although it carried the same negative personal, social and economic implications.

So even then we had a little battle with the North-West Regional Health Authority when a senior doctor was about to retire. And we actually had to beg, and say listen, this doctor has done years of service in Trinidad. Do not just send him so, give him a part-time job, let him move to the side, part-time psychiatrist, and let the younger ones come up. And he continued working years after, I think he worked until he reached the age of, I think it was 78. So he did excellent service, excellent service there. And the fact is, he was not having little children to drop to school, he was having a work ethic which was different from the younger doctors, he performed far well.

So, looking at that issue I am saying we have to look at the lateral movement for the elderly employees because we have level and that amount of persons who will be unemployed if we just look at that 12 per cent which is growing, because we have an ageing population. We cannot put these people out there just to exist and do nothing.

The third point I would make is about foreign workers. And Sen. Mark did bring up a point about the workers from different countries; Nigeria, China and all these places. And I am saying that for years in the medical service there were doctors from Philippines, Nigeria. So we had a whole set of workers coming in and we had a wonderful time, we were able to integrate, we were able to learn about different cultures, learn about different countries, learn about different health care systems. And it is a good experience to have these persons from different cultures coming in.

However, in Trinidad and Tobago we have to realize that on November 02,

2000, we became the 140<sup>th</sup> country to sign the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the foundations of international refugee law, and we have pledged since then to uphold the terms within this document. And refugees, we have an obligation to provide fair employment, and therefore cannot be discriminated against one individual who has gone through the proper asylum process.

Two problems I see with this. I am seeing individuals coming in from Venezuela, and persons are hiring them at wages that are very low wages that even, you know, the local persons now are at a disadvantage. So, while you have a gardener you may be paying \$300 a day and these chaps come in from Venezuela, somebody might pay them \$200 a day, it is happening—[*Interruption*]—eh?—\$100. You see, so it is a level of taking advantage of these persons.

So two things we have to look at there. We have to look at taking advantage of these individuals in the construction industry and other industries. Plus, we have to also protect our local persons where they now will not be getting jobs. Because you are hiring someone else. So what I am saying is, we need to put in place that standard minimum wage of TT \$15, I think it is an hour, has to be adhered to. We have to have systems in place where the Minimum Wages Act will be able to, you know, transcend both the foreigner coming in, and for our local persons, because it will disadvantage both if it is not put in place. And I am thinking that, so we have to put something in place—

**Madam President:** Sen. Deyalsingh, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh:** Sure. Thank you, Madam President. So we have to put something in place and I am suggesting the UNHCR should be coordinated with the Ministry to document how the Government could look at this to deal with the



Venezuelan refugee crisis. So, you know, in closing I would say that there are a lot of persons out there, there are a lot of programmes out there that people are not coming into. There are a lot of—and I say it could be a lack of desire, a lack of drive, I have seen young fellas who are healthy just liming in the area—when I say, “Come, let me get you into a programme, I will get you in”. “I doh want to do anything”. I said but look, there was this attorney Veera Bhajan, without arms, and she was able to qualify without arms. And here you are, a strong individual and you are not even getting up your butt to go into a programme which is free and they are giving you a stipend. So, our challenge is how to get these guys in and I am saying we have to legislate in place to get the idle youths off the block.

I am saying the lack of inner-drive is something we have to look at. And I am saying the Ministry needs to look at a centralized hub of activities to advertise where you can get these jobs, where you can get this training. Something centralized, it is too disjointed. And also I am saying career counsellors should be there available in the social services area where they could actually—you are coming in for social welfare, they can actually guide you for other jobs.

I would like to close by saying that I had a beautiful experience this morning where one of my patients came and told me that in 2013, under a programme under, I think there was a Minister Mustapha, Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education had a skills service where this girl went. And she did baking, she did cooking, she was given a kit to come home after and start to make her cakes and what not, and all this was free and she is a level of success, but she—actually it was a friend who told her that this programme was available. And she comes to clinic as a patient, sells nuts, sells cakes, and there are success stories out there. We just have to get people to get to it, and to get to them. I thank you,

Clear & Cogent Economic Policy  
 (Government's Failure to Present)  
 Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh (cont'd)

2019.03.26

Madam, for allowing me to take part. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, at this stage we will suspend for tea and we will return at 5.00 p.m. Sen. Obika will resume when we return at 5.00 p.m.

**4.25 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

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

**Sen. Taharqa Obika:** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I take this moment to remind us of the Motion that we are debating today, which is:

*Be it resolved* that this House take note of the escalating levels of job losses in the country since September 2015 and condemn the Government for its failure to present a clear and cogent economic policy to guide Trinidad and Tobago through these challenging economic circumstances.

And I want to congratulate our leader on this side, Sen. Mark, for bringing this very important Motion. But you know, Mr. Vice-President, on a Motion that deals with the realm that is under the control, the responsibility of the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, one would have expected that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development would have responded. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Yes.

**Sen. Ameen:** Yes. Failure again, failure.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** She is not even here, man.

**Sen. T. Obika:** So it seems that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has dropped the ball. And by doing so, she has failed the workers of this nation—

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Yes, she has.

**Sen. T. Obika:**—and the trade union movement would be very wary. What we had to be subjected to, was a presentation by a Minister in the Ministry of Finance, who seemed to have been foisted into the position surreptitiously, [*Desk thumping*] because nothing in the Minister in the Ministry of Finance's submission, respectfully, dealt with the Motion before us. [*Desk thumping*]

So who has the Government dropped the ball on? They have dropped the ball on the Petrotrin workers and the energy sector workers that are on the breadline today as we speak, over 10,000 workers. For the workers severed from TSTT, almost 600, who are hoping them that the labour market would give them some respite after being severed from TSTT; they have dropped the ball on them. They have failed the ArcelorMittal workers, Mr. Vice-President.

There is a gentleman in the community of Marabella, who came to me and because you know, we are walking about in San Fernando West because the people are ready for change. And this gentleman came to me and said, you know, he said he was depressed. So I think I would try to get a contact for Sen. Deyalsingh, to see if he can advise him, because he is a severed Arcelor Mittal worker, he is depressed, there is no position on his pension or anything like that, and most of these persons have to resort to CEPEP if they get one, "to find a bread when de day come". And that is the situation that thousands of workers are facing. Thousands of workers on the breadline and the Government dropping the ball on them.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** They could go to Canada and drive trucks.

**Sen. T. Obika:** For which they are not even qualified, they are asking them to do jobs that they are not qualified, waiting for something to happen in La Brea. When that will happen? We are sure it is after the next election is called and we return to office. So, Mr. Vice-President, it is possibly that the Government probably is in total agreement with Sen. Mark's Motion, that is why they could not present a

strong defence against it. But that said, that only speaks to the state of our nation.

For this Motion today, Sen. Mark referred to it and one must refer to it. At the beginning of this year, the Prime Minister of our country made a statement, he said, "Mind your Business". And in that statement he said some jobs would be lost, some businesses would have to struggle. Now, if that was not a clear indication, one thing I am sure of, 50,000 jobs lost since this Government has come into power is a clear indication that the people are not at the heart of their agenda.

Now, the interesting thing is the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance is a good person, she is from South, you know. Not that persons who are not from South are not good, Tobago people are good too. [*Laughter*] As your good self, Mr. Vice-President. But I am not sure if the hon. Minister really prepared for this presentation. Because the hon. Minister said that people are at the centre, and then proceeded to speak of yachting and that they have increased the yachties by 25 per cent, whilst the people in Trinidad and Tobago probably would—the joblessness has increased so significantly, but we are talking about yachties benefiting. Which people are we really speaking about—

**Sen. Ramdeen:** Nahous at the centre.

**Sen. T. Obika:**—that are at the centre of this development agenda? Now, Mr. Vice-President, in San Fernando West, hit frontally with the closure of Petrotrin, a serious debilitating blow to the economy of the entire south and central Trinidad, what could this Government have found fit to do?—not to bring proper and sustainable jobs to the people. But before the Carnival celebrations, they ran and painted the buildings in Embacadere. So, "dey gih dem some money to go two/three fete for de Carnival season". So they got some job to paint the buildings. After Carnival they are looking for the money. So the fete is done, the music

stops, and people are back on the breadline. That is the way the people are at the centre of this Government's agenda in San Fernando West.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** The MP is missing.

**Sen. T. Obika:** And one think I am sure, the MP is well taken care of. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Ramdeen:** But not in San Fernando West, he is not there.

**Sen. T. Obika:** I think the Greek God is Alexandria, or the Greek—the Roman Emperor is Alexander or Alexandria. So the MP is taken care of whilst the people are on the breadline.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, growing up in the southland, Gulf City Mall, notwithstanding who the owners are. Gulf City Mall has been a place where you look at and you measure, like a litmus test, the health of the economy. The businesses in the Mall, really and truly, are the life blood. Many small entrepreneurs, and by the definition of worker, small entrepreneurs, they are workers themselves, if you are a sole operator, “one man business” as we say. And then you have many small entrepreneurs that employ persons in distribution and sale of clothing and so on, in the Mall.

And when you go and you meet with them, because we met with these persons as well on our walks, and they are saying that things are very slow. Things are very bad, you know, and you could see it in their eyes, you could see it in their eyes that—even one woman confessed to me, she said that she is going to leave this job because if she does not leave now, she is sure her bosses would close the job soon. So she is looking to leave the job to find something to put together to go and sell somewhere on the side of the road. And, of course, we know the state regarding the crime situation in our country. So, really and truly, the situation is

bad but, of course, if we were to take a signal from the Prime Minister, some jobs will be lost and some businesses would have to suffer. The problem is which ones?

Now, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance's response to Sen. Mark's sterling presentation at the beginning of this debate, it is very difficult to find something to respond to. However, I want to mention something. The Minister in the Ministry speaking on behalf of the Government is sounding like a jilted lover with the issue of Sandals.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Yes.

**Sen. T. Obika:** Even the Prime Minister of Barbados, the hon. Mia Mottley, was clear, she was very clear. And if I were to read from my notes just this part:

Given the remonstrations of the Prime Minister of Barbados against Sandals and Sandals' behaviour, there are people in Trinidad and Tobago who could take heart that they are not alone in being critical of Sandals. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** That is a First World Prime Minister. A First World leader.

**Sen. T. Obika:** So they are not alone in being critical of Sandals and the Sandals model of underdevelopment in the tourism sector. Because what happens is, the jobs that would have been brought to Trinidad and Tobago would not have been for the Tobagonians. They would not have been for the people in our country. The big jobs would have been for persons from elsewhere. And what we would have been reduced to in the words of our first Prime Minister, and I am paraphrasing now, we will be reduced to bellhops and bellboys, he used different terms, but I am coining it in the Sandals terminology for the hotel industry.

So when the first Prime Minister of which they claim vintage, said that the

future is in the school bags of the children, he understood that and he understood the connection to education and the job market. When Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar said that the fourth industrial revolution is going to be at the cornerstone of the development agenda and secondary school students got laptops, she understood very clearly that the future of the children is in the technology that is in the laptops in the school bags. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** First World nation.

**Sen. Simonette:** Without broadband.

**Sen. T. Obika:** And I am hearing Sen. Simonette saying, "without broadband".

**Sen. S. Hosein:** "He know wah is broadband? He doh know wah is broadband."

**Sen. T. Obika:** What Sen. Simonette does not understand is that as his children may be able to afford a laptop to do work, many children in Trinidad and Tobago cannot afford a laptop. So, therefore, what jobs are you preparing them for? What jobs are you preparing them for? And I will give you an example of the jobs we are preparing our children for, we are failing our future workers in this country.

If you were to take a walk up to Mount Saint Benedict, not for spiritual reflection, Mr. Vice-President, but to understand the woodworking sector and the training that is available. You would be shocked to know that computerized numerical control is not part of the curriculum, not part. So they are still learning to have a good hand to cut wood. Now, whilst that might be good for a niche part of a sector, it is not relevant for the entire sector. Okay? So we have people being prepared for a job market where those jobs do not even exist today.

Today you need to be tech savvy. You can design the desks in this Parliament in one day, you take on a flash drive, put it on a machine and the machine can cut everything for you in 15 minutes. I have seen it with my own two

eyes, Mr. Vice-President. Those are the jobs we should be preparing our children for. But when you have a Minister of Education—and I want to turn to the Minister of Education. Because this is the Minister of Education, Minister Garcia, addressing youth unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** “He de real wood man.”

**Sen. T. Obika:** And the article is from Wednesday, 09 May, 2018, by Marlene Augustine, and it featured in the Trinidad and Tobago *Newsday* and the headline is, “Garcia: lack of skills in TT youth is reason for unemployment”. And it said:

“One reason for youth unemployment in TT is a growing mismatch between the supply and demand for skills said Education Minister Anthony Garcia.”

All right? Now, Mr. Vice-President, the sad part about this, is that this very hon. Minister of Education came to this hon. House and boasted that they closed the National Energy Skills Centres in Moruga, in Palo Seco, in Point Fortin, three seats that are held by the PNM. They have closed the skills acquisition centres in those areas, and they have wound down the one in Vessigny significantly. They have reduced the capacity, and funding, and skill sourcing for some of the other centres.

So the National Energy Skills Centre is a shell of its former self. Under the People's Partnership Government, when the Government led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar opened the skills centre in Palo Seco, the Member of Parliament for La Brea, under which Palo Seco falls, a very good man, a former principal of Cedros Composite, and his name skips me now. He is the current High Commissioner to Jamaica for Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Senator:** Fitzgerald Jeffrey.

**Sen. T. Obika:** His Excellency Fitzgerald Jeffrey. He said, Mr. Vice-President,



that we want more of this. So he put politics aside and he trumpeted the work of the People's Partnership Government from 2010—2015.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** That is why the PNM sent him away.

**Sen. T. Obika:** That is why they sent him to Jamaica. But, Mr. Vice-President.

**Sen. Mark:** They re-import him.

**Sen. T. Obika:** I want to agree with Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffery. It is not because as Mr. Garcia said, the demand appears to be low, that you close an entire educational institution. No. What you have to do is recognize that maybe your techniques for finding the prospective students are deficient, and you go out and you get. Maybe you are charging them and they cannot afford to pay. Okay?

So the reality is that if you look at the Partnership policies from 2010—2015, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar, all right?—MTEST allowed for GATE funding for the tech/voc areas. That is revolutionary in thinking. So you are not saying that only because you are pursuing mathematics, and physics, and economics, and engineering, and law, and medicine, that you deserve funding. No. We are saying that skills acquisition is where we need to be as a country and therefore we must fund that. But when you have a Government that has turned its back on its people—

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Backward government.

**Sen. T. Obika:** Not the yachties, mind you. The yachties are front and centre in the Government's agenda. But when a government has turned its back on its people, you cannot expect anything else.

Now, there is another point I want to address from the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance. The Minister spoke about 1 per cent tax, reduced from \$20 billion to \$1 billion. But then in the same breath said revenue reduced to \$1

billion. I mean, the Government should come clean. We have already corrected the record. The revenue from the energy sector was not \$1 billion. Whilst it may have been the tax that you may have generated, the revenue declined to \$8-plus billion. So it is not such a significant decline.

What they are trying to do is make you feel that everything from the energy sector went to \$1 billion. So you focus on that and use that to get away with starving the population of development when the reality is what you earned from the sector did not decrease by such a significant amount. All right? And we are bringing this out by the Government answering questions showing how much profit, how much dividends they have garnered from the energy sector. So we are not doing this thing by vaps, Mr. Vice-President, we are showing the population that the Government itself is caught in a web, such a thick web of deceit, that they themselves have not realized how far down the rabbit hole they have gone.

Now, I want to turn to policy-making and history, all right? Because formulation of a policy for job creation really speaks to the core of politics. Because, what is politics? What is politics from the Tapia House movement? Person's names such as Lloyd Best, a great Caribbean man. He would have stated that point of view with a set of ideas made with a view to persuade the public into action, is the work of a politician. So, whilst we are saying that persons are involved in public service, persons who are politicians are only in Government, no, or in Opposition, what it is, is persons in Parliament are in public office. But everyone who is a social actor is in fact a politician because they are seeking to get the people to understand what they are doing.

And this part of my contribution here is to really speak to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to make them understand that we in the United National

Congress are hearing them. We are listening to them. Every single individual that risks being accused by Minister Stuart Young of being an unpatriotic citizen, being unpatriotic, committing treason simply because they are standing up for their rights as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, as a stakeholder in this country where you can have a Government Minister in charge of Communications, in the Office of the Prime Minister, accusing a citizen of being unpatriotic, I think that itself probably fits well to be an act of sedition against our State. So that needs to be checked. I think someone needs to check the Minister of Communications because, really and truly, what he is doing does not bode well for our development, even Lloyd Best said it very clearly.

**5.20 p.m.**

So the question is: What is the point of view to be advanced? Now, we in the United National Congress hold very clearly to some core tenets. People centred: People must be at the centre of the decision making. Now, we are not saying that yachties are not people too but, clearly, Mr. Vice-President, 600-odd yachties cannot compare to 1.35 million citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Simonette:** We are servicing the industry.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** “All yuh servicing the rental industry. That is the rental industry all yuh servicing.”

**Sen. T. Obika:** So, I am hearing Sen. Simonette saying the servicing of the industry, but the concessions that this Government has given to the yachties whilst taxing significantly the efforts of the population—can you imagine, Mr. Vice-President, there are institutions in this country that are actually approved by this Government for GATE funding, and the Minister of Education is simply not paying to the extent where those institutions have stopped allowing students to

access GATE funding? So these are students that, by right, by government policy, are entitled to GATE funding, and because of the delinquency of this Government, they are not getting it. [*Desk thumping*] That affects youth unemployment, because now you are saying—and then you have the Minister of Education saying that the youth are unemployed because there is a mismatch between the skills that are required and the skills that they have. But you, Sir, your Government—

**Hon. Senator:** Is mismatched.

**Sen. T. Obika:** Sorry, through you, Mr. Vice-President, this Government is denying the people of Trinidad and Tobago access to education, and they are causing the mismatch and they are the reason for the increasing youth unemployment. So the other tenet is land-holding democracy. It is not enough for the people to exclaim with a joyful noise that this land is ours. It must rightfully be so, in fact, a home-owning democracy. So it is necessary that our citizens not only have an interest in Trinidad and Tobago, but they must have a stake. They must have a stake in this country. All families must have a stake. That should be a right.

So the people must be empowered, given these tenets, to participate. Now once the people participate, let us look at the history of people participation, Mr. Vice-President. There are many opportunities in our country's history for the people to participate around the issue of jobs. Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler, in 1937, with the Butler riots, was an opportunity for that. In the 1970s, you had Makandal Daaga and the National Joint Action Committee where participation—consultation, participation, mobilization were the watchwords. In the 1980s and '70s you had Lloyd Best, Michael Harris and the Tapia Movement, and I already shared with you some of the thoughts of Lloyd Best and, of course, 2010 to 2015 you had

Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the United National Congress with these three tenets that I have just shared with you and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Vice-President, now that we understand this, what is the position of the United National Congress to address this situation? The position could be easily gleaned from the fact that under the Government from 2010 to 2015, over 50,000 jobs were created. So performance is a good measure. But going forward, we could show you what could happen, where Trinidad and Tobago would benefit. Growth poles are going to be an important feedback mechanism. So across the country—some people may call it a one-district industrialization initiative, some people will call it an initiative that sees the engines of growth along different parts of the country—but what we would call it is a growth pole initiative. So along the East-West Corridor there is going to be a significant growth pole and, historically, where you have many family owned and family oriented businesses, which is at the core of our business structure in this country, we are going to be going back and speaking to those families, directly speaking to those families. Each family can look into themselves, see where there is an entrepreneurial spirit.

And we are not going to be giving away things, we are going to be incentivizing individuals, entrepreneurs to come forward and invest. We are going to signal to them where the jobs of the future are. We are going to allow them to access the incentives in these different sectors and then they can make the decision to invest. You too, Mr. Vice-President, I am sure would be very interested to know, given that you are well credentialed in marine life and the blue economy, that the blue economy will be a very important tenet in our development agenda. So there is a place for you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President, you are back. And so, the point is, growth poles would be key.

Another important aspect would be, with everything in this era—this era is the era of the forth industrial revolution—and whilst persons in 2015 may have found concepts such as the blue, silver and green economy to have been somewhat esoteric, they are real concepts now because the world has caught up. So the problem may have been in 2015, the People's Partnership Government, led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, may have been ahead of its time. So the concepts that were explained may not have translated well, because it may not have captured sufficiently the imagination of the media who would have been able to translate it for the population. But, right now, there are many conferences, the world over, around these concepts and there are many projects that are emerging in each aspect of each characteristic of the economy, and the blue economy is one the largest economic potentials and being a small island developing state, as we are in Trinidad and Tobago, the ocean is all around us, and there are bountiful treasures that we can benefit from and we are going to get into that.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** “And dey lick up de fishermen.”

**Sen. T. Obika:** And I think it was Sen. Deyalsingh who spoke of care and respect for the elderly and making a space for the elderly in the workplace. Madam President, I know it will bring you great pleasure to know that the silver economy, which that speaks to, is an integral part of our agenda. The silver economy mainly, in the main, would speak to industries that treat with goods and services for elderly members of our society, whether it be health care, whether it be leisure and what have you—reorientation, re-training—but also it may include the senior citizens in the workforce. So you may want to have opportunities in the job market that may

not require 170 hours' work per month, 40 hours per week. It may require different work schedules. It may require different types of engagement. It may not require heavy lifting and so on. So we really look specifically, which also is part of gender-based development, because you are considering a person's age which is a feature and characteristic of gender, because gender is not only male/female.

Now, Madam President, I want to turn to another point that was raised. I really had a presentation, but because there were so many points raised by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance that were somewhat misplaced—some of them, you know, did not fit with this particular topic. I just had to answer it. One of the issues was ease of doing business, and the investment climate must be juxtaposed from a local perspective with those internationally. And according to the World Bank's ease of doing business 2018, Trinidad and Tobago's rank stood at 102 which is down from 79 in 2015. And it would interest the population to know, Madam President, that according to this ease of doing business report for 2015, the World Bank group praised Trinidad and Tobago when they listed Trinidad and Tobago among the top 10 economies in terms of regulatory reform toward doing business, regulatory reform. What does regulatory reform do?

Whilst regulatory reform may only immediately allow you to jump a few places on the ease of doing business index, what it does, it sets the stage for the country to move along faster in the ensuing years. So among the 21 economies with the most reforms, making it easier to do business in 2013, 2014—because 2015 measures the prior year—10 stand out of having improved the most in performance and doing business indicators.

So, one highlighted area was the introduction of an online platform for business registration, reducing registration time from 38 days to 14.5. Those

things are significant, because when the IMF, the International Financial Centre, is recommending a market for an investor to enter, they look at the criteria on the ease of doing business Indices, and what you find is, we have declined in many areas.

Accessing credit, which is important to doing business, declined from 36 to 55 under this Government. Dealing with construction permits worsened six places to 119. To start a business, we declined from 21 in getting electricity to 33. Now, how on earth can we decline in getting electricity? I mean, the Government clearly cannot blame that on the economy, not after four years of being in the game.

So, Madam President, I want to turn to a particular sector, and I will end with some statistics on youth unemployment, because I know I have about nine minutes again, but I want to turn to a particular sector and show something. The manufacturing sector: the manufacturing sector has been under pressure by this Government, and I am not talking about the jaunted deal with Venezuela where the manufacturers may not have gotten their payment as yet that was facilitated by the Government. I am speaking of the overall manufacturing sector which has declined significantly when you remove petroleum and chemical products.

If we are to create jobs, the sectors that create the jobs of the future must be looked at, and manufacturing is one of them. It is not acceptable that we allow our manufacturing sector to decline and we hide behind the new classification which allows petroleum and chemical products to be included in manufacturing.

Another point I want to raise, Madam President, has been brought to me by a member of the business community, and what this person stated is—and it is clear to all of us, but perspective is something that one must appreciate—that the Government is riding the balance sheets of the business community. What does



that mean? The Government is not paying VAT proceeds significantly. The VAT refund arrears rose from just over \$4 billion in 2015 to in excess of \$6 billion in March 2018, and the IMF has echoed the sentiments expressed by locals who have been clamouring for VAT refunds where they stated that an acceleration of the payment of VAT refund arrears the Government owes to taxpayers is also important, since such delays may impact liquidity positions of businesses and their tax compliance.

**Madam President:** Sen. Obika, are you reading from something? Are you quoting from something?

**Sen. T. Obika:** Sorry, yes. I apologize. That was actually a direct quote. No, that was a paraphrase sorry, from the IMF Article IV Consultation - Press Release and Staff Report 2018, page 18. I can always present Parliament with that source after.

Now, the issue there is the IMF in the same report—actually, the second quote is from a *Newsday* newspaper article, November 28, 2017 from Sasha Harrinanan, “Chamber demands Govt address \$5.5 b VAT refund arrears”, this second quote. But the verification of what the IMF has warned the TT Chamber had demanded in November 2017 that the Government “take corrective action immediately”, and this will bring relieve regarding this significant VAT fund arrears.

Now, the Government is riding the balance sheets, riding the books of the business sector which, in effect, has a negative impact on business activity. This is not a statement by the United National Congress, the alternative Government, the Government in waiting. This is a statement by the IMF. So unless the Government is at odds with the IMF's position, I wait to hear the position from the

Government in response to this. So they are riding the balance sheets of the businesses. Another way they are riding the balance sheets is by not paying contractors properly. They are suppressing expenditure, and how our system works is, by doing that you can show lower expenditure but, in effect—**Madam President:** Sen. Obika, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. T. Obika:** Thank you very much, Madam President. In effect, what you are doing is you are really under-reporting or under-illustrating the true sides of Government spending. Now, all of this has a negative impact on business.

Another area where business is being affected, and I would just make one small point on it, is forex, the forex shortage. All right? And we have proposed so many solutions to that, but I am not sure the Government is listening. But one simple fix, Madam President—it is not a panacea. It cannot solve the entire problem—is to have government-to-government agreements with the Chinese—the Central Bank of China and the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and you have a currency swap. They did it with Nigeria last year.

The Vice-President or the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of China came to Trinidad last year April. What did the Government engage them with? The Government could have raised this issue, because they offered that to the Nigerians around the same time. Well, if they did not do it then, there is always the opportunity do it going forward, because Trinidad and Tobago is topical, given the geopolitics of the Venezuela and Maduro issue. Can we raise that issue? We can raise that issue.

So, therefore, many of the inputs to our manufacturing processes—many of the inputs to distribution and tourism and so on, which come from China, will no longer require us to use our US and euro currencies. We can trade directly with the

TT dollar. So you have a directly currency swap, through a Government-to-Government agreement. That could reduce significantly the strain and the demand on the foreign exchange.

Now, what are the implications? So, basically, in this contribution, I have sought to show and support Sen. Mark's very important Motion of unemployment and joblessness, the escalating levels in the country since September 2015, and also condemning the Government for its failure. And even in the contribution of the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, it clearly was not clear nor cogent in terms of economic policies to guide Trinidad and Tobago.

We have proposed and presented an approach. We have 12 key initiatives or engines which, basically, are surrounded on growth poles and when you drill down, we recognize that we are creating jobs of the future in the blue economy. The green economy, we are ensuring that our senior citizens and emerging senior citizens are taken into consideration in the silver economy given that we have an ageing population. We are moving ahead, really and truly, with a Trinidad and Tobago that is required for the future. And I want to say no serious country, Madam President, would relax and have 200 unemployed doctors. No serious country.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** And an empty hospital.

**Sen. T. Obika:** So I am sure this country of Trinidad and Tobago is very serious. So the people of Trinidad and Tobago are taking no comfort in the fact that we have over 200 unemployed doctors. The only people that seem to be happy are in the Cabinet of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and I think what they need to do is to apologize for keeping the Couva children's hospital close, employ our doctors and, at least, have 200 less persons unemployed in Trinidad and Tobago.

On a closing note, I want to say that the youth of Trinidad and Tobago are not going to suffer the nine-day syndrome. The unemployed Petrotrin employees are not going to suffer a nine-day syndrome, and this Government has dropped the ball on the over 50,000 people who have lost jobs since they came into office and they will not forget them. When the election come, they will riot with their fingers. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I have listened to the contribution of Sen. Mark, the mover of the Motion, I have listened to his trainee [*Laughter*] Sen. Obika—you are learning, but you are learning from the wrong person—and I am getting a thread of consistency where they seem to be waxing warm politically, but “leh meh mash their breaks one time”. [*Laughter*] You are talking about snap election, normal election, whatever, but I just want to put you on notice that a mobilized PNM, as we are now, well-oiled PNM, as we are now [*Desk thumping*] and a PNM that has the best political infrastructure of the entire English-speaking Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*] When we hit the road, we are virtually an invincible force. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Ameen:** Call election!

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** So, as per usual, you will run second [*Laughter*] but as I say in politics, there are no silver medals [*Crosstalk*] so you will resign yourself to whatever comes your way. But, Madam President, let me recite the Motion.

*Be it resolved* that this House take note of the escalating levels of job losses in the country since September 2015 and condemn the Government for its failure to present a clear and cogent economic policy to guide Trinidad and Tobago through these challenging—time—economic circumstances.

Madam President to:

...condemn the Government for its failure to present a clear and cogent economic policy to guide Trinidad and Tobago...

This borders on sacrilege, you know, because if there is one political organization that has written economic history of Trinidad and Tobago, it is the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] And we did not come on the landscape, as Sen. Mark said, on September the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015. We came on the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 1956, and we have changed Trinidad forever. We took Trinidad from a backward colonial colony into a modern economy, an engine of economic development, and we are the model economy in the English-speaking Caribbean; both in the energy and in the non-energy sector. You go to a Caricom meeting and they will tell you that.

Our manufacturing sector is second to none in the English-speaking Caribbean and our energy sector is a model for the world, in particular, Sen. Obika's favourite place, Africa. And he comes here and he keeps asking questions about Tanzanian, and about Mozambique—what is our initiative in Africa? We had an initiative in Africa, you know. For five years the UNC let it die. Mr. Manning was on the verge of signing deals with Ghana. For five years nobody from the UNC even had the courtesy of contacting the Ghanaian Government.

But just to set the record straight, it is PNM economic policy that has transformed this country through time. [*Desk thumping*] From the early days of William Demas and Frank Rampersad with Dr. Williams, with the five-year development plans, we who formed the IDC. It is the PNM who set up the institutional framework for industrialization and modern financial services. It is we who formed the Unit Trust. It is we who formed NCB and now FCB. **Sen.**

Clear & Cogent Economic Policy  
(Government's Failure to Present)  
Sen. The Hon. F. Khan (cont'd)

2019.03.26

**Gopee-Scoon:** We built the Industrial Court.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** We built the Industrial Court as she said, as the hon. Senator said. We were the first country in the world that came up with a robust gas monetization plan. Today it is being followed all over the world. It is called the Trinidad model.

**Sen. Ameen:** And O'Halloran.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** It is we who built Point Lisas. It is we who revised the petroleum tax laws, because if you did not have the petroleum tax laws, you would not have had revenue, you know. The revenue would have migrated to the foreign oil companies. It is we who introduced PPT, which is petroleum profit tax, at 55 per cent. Prior to that, oil companies were charged corporation tax which was 30 per cent. It is we who implemented the Supplemental Petroleum Tax after the Arab oil embargo in the 1970s, where we said the windfall profit from the rise in oil price is no function of the oil companies—that is serendipity—and the State has a right to access that fund. It is we who recently in this last 2018, Minister Imbert, who introduced the 12.5 per cent royalty on natural gas. That has been the biggest revenue earner for 2018. It is we who decided, under Patrick Manning, to get into the LNG business. And, today, the energy business is the sustainer of the national economy. [*Desk thumping*]

It is under Patrick Manning and Wendell Mottley, who happens to be my advisor now, that floated the TT dollar. Everybody, the naysayers them was saying: “You cyar do that.” It was successful. It is under George Chambers that we modernized the manufacturing sector, so that today we are the most competitive in the English-speaking Caribbean. Nobody could compete with SM Jaleel, nobody could compete with Blue Waters, nobody could complete with the

scores of businesses in Trinidad and Tobago in Caricom. It is we who introduced *Vision 2020* and now *Vision 2030*. But that is economic history.

But I want to speak, through you, Madam President, to Sen. Obika, because you all take facts and twist it to suit your narrative, and that is your right, you are in a debate, but economic performance needs capital. Capital could only come from two sources. I am not an economist, but I know some economics. It is private capital or private equity, private investment or state capital. Private capital needs the attraction of the economy to invest. If an entrepreneur does not feel he has the right atmosphere to invest, he would not invest. If he does not feel he has the social stability, he would not invest. If he feels he does not have the right taxation regime, he would not invest. If he feels he does not have the workforce with the right attitude, and the level of productivity that he desires for his business, he would not invest. So, the role of the State is to create a climate that fosters that type of behaviour.

Ease of doing business, as the Minister of Trade and Industry has been working on diligently during this last three and a half years going on four, these are the things that attract private capital.

**5.50p.m.**

But, Madam President, you just do not manufacture, you know. You manufacture for local consumption or you manufacture for export. To export you need a market, and to get into a market you need trade agreements or you need competition. It is difficult to compete in a global manufacturing environment, let me just tell you that, because anything you could make, China making it cheaper than you. And where there are tariffs and big trading blocs, you are at a disadvantage. Prime Minister Mia Mottley has said that at the last Caricom

meeting I attended. The Caribbean is just too small in terms of the market. It goes to show that when your market is so restricted, you are very much stymied by the size of your market.

When I was in high school we were talking about an actuary called “Malthusian Theory of Population Growth”, and they say population growth by geometric proportions and food grows by arithmetic proportions. Remember? That is old theory. And who were the poorest countries in the world then because of the size of their population? China and India; starvation, malnutrition. Today, they are the two booming economies of the world, and the reason for that is the market size.

So economic models change, and you have to adapt to economic theory and the economic model to suit that. The State capital—God stop sending manna from heaven you know. [*Laughter*] The State has to raise capital. Where does a state get money from? The sovereign state, since in the days of Caesar Augustus, the main source of revenue for any state is taxes. The tax man is the most hated man in history. Joseph and Mary were running away to Bethlehem because of the census and the taxes, you know.

**Sen. Ramdeen:** Jesus went by the tax man.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** So the tax is a part of life. Sparrow immortalized it with, “de doctor say to pay as you earn”, but it is a reality that we have to face. So when you say, Sen. Obika, that the “Government only taxing” and taxing and taxing, it has to tax, within limits. So to say that it must not tax is a foolish argument. How do you raise money otherwise?

The State has equity in profitable enterprises, so the State gets dividends from the profits of the company. As Sen. Obika asked the question, they are on



PPGPL today, and the State is entitled to use that dividend payment for the benefit of the population. Then as a long-term plan, the State can raise capital and raise revenue from judicious borrowing. You borrow now to invest for future returns. That is why most of the investment loans, through the IADB or through the World Bank, are long-term loans. Most of the investment loans are long-term loans, 10, 15 and 20 years. So if the UNC knew so much of economics, why did they take billions of dollars in six-month instruments just before the election?—that we were saddled with when we came into office, after the highest five years of revenue in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, and they still maxed out the overdraft. We have said that over and over, but I will keep saying it over and over and over.

**Sen. Ameen:** “How much debt allyuh leave in 2010?”

**Madam President:** Members please; please allow the Minister to make his contribution. Continue Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** So I just set the economic template right, you see, the situation we are in and how it has to be prudently managed. Now, I plan to speak on two specific areas. Energy obviously, because whether you like it or not, it continues to be the driver of the economy. Secondly, before we adjourn at 6.00, let me spend the next five or seven minutes on a key PNM policy of this administration.

Sen. Obika talked about growth poles, I will deal with that, but the creation of the Ministry of Rural and Local Government, that is a policy shift. The first policy position that was articulated by Dr. Rowley when he was Leader of the Opposition, was in Moruga in Basseterre a Wednesday evening. It was the same day Patrick Manning got the stroke. He passed in to see him in the hospital, he came down to Basseterre late, and in that night he said a new PNM administration

will create the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Because economic activity is self-sustaining, but it needs a growth pole concept and a seed to sow it. Classic example is Couva and Chaguanas.

Couva and Chaguanas were small sugarcane villages, small towns in the '70s, and it is because of something called "Point Lisas", which was a PNM economic policy, that spurred the growth of Couva and Chaguanas. So today Couva and Chaguanas have reached a stage, it matters not to Couva and Chaguanas which administration is in power, you know. They are now self-sustaining. PNM could be in power, you "cyar" stop Chaguanas and Couva, UNC could be in power, they would not stop Chaguanas and Couva. [*Crosstalk*] So it will go on.

But then, when you transform this into a template like that, what is the hope for Toco? What is the hope for the people of Matura? What is the hope for the people of Sans Souci? What is the hope for the people of Moruga? What is the hope for the people of the southwest peninsula? So it is in that framework we conceptualized the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, because economic development can only start in places like this with direct Government intervention, and the way to do it is through the creation of infrastructure.

John Humphrey used to say that since in the NAR days, put infrastructure in and everything else will happen after. That is the reason why the highway to Point Fortin is our number one priority. That is the reason why we are taking Churchill Roosevelt to Sangre Grande and onwards to Manzanilla. That is the reason why we are building the arterial first class road from Valencia to Toco. That is the reason why we are putting the port and the ferry service from Toco to

Scarborough. It makes economic sense; it makes spatial planning sense.

So when you say the PNM has no robust and cogent policy, you are just using words. The PNM has been the architect of economic development in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And we pride ourselves of good economic planning. Sometimes we are accused of over planning. Sometimes we are accused of analysing more than we are supposed to, but this administration under Dr. Keith Rowley is an administration of action. We have taken certain policy positions in terms of rural development and spatial development and balanced spatial development: the southeast coast, the southwest coast, the southwestern peninsula, the northeast Trinidad and Tobago, and what we call the “eastern seaboard of Trinidad”. These are the people who all the social surveys indicate are the poorest in the country. They are the least educated in the country, they have the least facilities. That is the reason why we are building a modern hospital in Sangre Grande. It will service from Toco straight to Guayaguayare, and this is a Government that plans, a Government that cares and a Government that seeks the interest of all of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam President, I have 20 more minutes, next, whenever the hon. Leader of Opposition Business wants to continue this debate—I feel he will never want to continue it again, because he realized he made a mistake.

**Sen. Mark:** I will bring another one for you.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** I will build further on the concept of rural development, and why it is so fundamental to Trinidad and Tobago. I am a rural child. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] When I passed Common Entrance I had no choice. There was only one school in all of eastern Trinidad, it was North Eastern College, Sangre Grande, opened by Dr. Williams in 1976, and my mother said thank God because her son

Clear & Cogent Economic Policy  
 (Government's Failure to Present)  
 Sen. The Hon. F. Khan (cont'd)

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could get a secondary school to go to. We had no family in town. I could not come to CIC or Fatima. So if it was not that, as my mother rightly says, if was not the PNM you would be pulling seine in Mayaro today, and that is a fact. My life was transformed by PNM policy, good. So that is the state of play. I will continue this debate at the next time the hon. Leader of Opposition Business wants to continue, and I will give him more thunder. I will speak about rural development and close off on energy. [*Desk thumping*] “So ah ent finish eh, but I am sitting down and I am getting up.” [*Laughter*]

### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2019, at 1.30p.m., and we will be doing the Evidence (Amdt.) Bill.

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

### Shortage of Foreign Exchange (Impact on Citizens)

**Sen. Saddam Hosein:** Madam President, I am grateful for you granting me leave to raise this matter, which is one of public important: The need for the Government to address the issue of the increasing shortage of foreign exchange, US currency, on the local market and the impact this is having on business and citizens including local Muslims travelling for Hajj.

Trinidad and Tobago has been experiencing a sharp decline in the foreign exchange reserves in the past years. In a country as import driven as Trinidad and Tobago, our ability to purchase goods and services from food to medical supplies

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hinges on our ability to generate and manage foreign exchange. It has affected many citizens and their ability to access foreign exchange for the purposes of travel or business.

The inability to access foreign exchange has crippled several businesses, causing them to shut their doors, and they are unable to purchase stuff for import. It effectively left employees without jobs when these businesses are shut down. The forex shortage has continued to worsen day by day.

The Minister of Finance in his very first budget speech delivered on October 20, 2015 declared, and I quote:

“...rebuilding confidence in the management of the foreign exchange market represents a central thrust as we revitalize our national economy. The current situation is untenable and has contributed to great uncertainty and capital flight.”

The situation the Minister was saying was unacceptable was a foreign reserve holding of US \$10.5 billion, which constituted almost one year of import cover. Today, in their fourth year of governance, the level of net foreign exchange holdings has collapsed to US \$7.5 billion, just about eight months of import cover, the lowest our reserves have been for other a decade.

Would you believe that last Friday in the *Newsday*, Ansa McAL indicated that it is having a serious problem getting foreign exchange, and its ability to pay suppliers, and even increase its export potential is being seriously affected? That is Ansa McAL.

Republic Bank, RBC and Scotia all confirmed that demand for foreign exchange far outstrips the supply, and that the banks were unable to satisfy their customers' needs. And do you know why people are seeking the foreign

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exchange? RBC reported that the business demand for forex is to settle outstanding invoices to foreign suppliers, capital investments, regular travel, education and medical needs. However, we are now faced with another crisis as a result of the lack of foreign exchange. Not has it only affected businesses, but it affects the ability of persons to access forex to comply with their religious obligations.

One of the five fundamental pillars of Islam is the Hajj, which is the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. Hajj becomes compulsory for every Muslim as long as he or she can afford it. Muslims from all over the world during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah travel to perform the Hajj and also celebrate Eid al-Adha, which is the greater of the two Eids in Saudi Arabia. You would appreciate, Madam President, that there would be a significant amount of preparation that has to be made for Muslims to travel for the Hajj.

I have consulted with various groups, and while some groups have been able to access the forex, there are groups with large amounts of intended pilgrims who are affected. I brought this Motion on behalf of some of the persons who have approached me to raise it in this domain. The Muslim community has raised the issue in public that the forex shortage has severely affected their ability to make the necessary arrangement for pilgrims to go to Hajj, and that issue remained unaddressed by the Government.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, 2019, a letter was sent by Hajj Umrah & International Tours Limited to the Minister of Finance outlined the following:

1. That approximately 400 Muslims perform have a desire to perform the Hajj this year.
2. There are five operators in Trinidad and Tobago, Hajj Umrah &

International Tours Limited, Mid-Eastern Travel, Omar's Hajj Group, Al Hijrah Tour and Caribbean Hajj.

3. They have expressed their difficulty in accessing forex for hotel accommodation, travel, ground transport, Hajj fees, Qurbani shares and tours to historic and religious sites in Saudi Arabia.
4. On average it is approximately US \$4,300 to US \$8,000 that each pilgrim will require.

Madam President, this letter was written and sent to the Minister of Finance and there was no response, not even an acknowledgment. These booking arrangements have to be made in advance, as such they have to be made urgently.

While pilgrims are able to access forex, there are some who are not. I will be extremely happy and grateful if the Minister of Finance would meet with these groups and make the necessary arrangements for the foreign exchange to be made available to these groups. They are not asking the Government for a hand out or a grant. They are ready and willing to purchase the foreign exchange so that they can perform their religious obligations.

Madam President, you may not be aware, but some persons wait an entire lifetime. They save their money, putting away a little bit every month for their Hajj. Then when finally they save enough money, they are being denied an opportunity to go to the Hajj because of the mismanagement of the foreign exchange in the country by the Government.

And I am very disappointed that the Minister of Finance finds humour in this matter.

**Hon. Imbert:** I do not find humour.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** These pilgrims must not be robbed of an opportunity to go to the

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Hajj. Some persons may not be able to live for another year to make the journey. I call on the Minister of Finance, on behalf of the Muslim community, to do his job and make the necessary and urgent arrangements for these pilgrims to access the foreign exchange. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you very much.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam President. Firstly, let me reject that piece of fake news just put into the Senate by Sen. Hosein that I found amusement in anything he said. In fact, I was quite disappointed that the young Senator is not familiar with Standing Order 42(11). You are not supposed to read your contribution.

But anyway, I am also very familiar with the concept of Hajj. We are not all uneducated in this Parliament, and I am very well aware that Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, which are: Shahāda, which is a declaration of faith, the recognition that there is only one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger, the first pillar of Islam. Second pillar of Islam is Salat, which is the concept of prayer, where Muslims are required to pray five times a day. Third pillar of Islam is Zakat, which is the giving of alms or charity from accumulated wealth. The fourth pillar of Islam is Saum. Do you know what Saum is? Fasting. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** I am very proud.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** And I have not eaten for the day. There is a period of mandatory fasting or mandatory Saum during the month of Ramadan. Then of course we have Hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam. All Muslims who can afford it are required, if they have the means to do so, and if they can maintain their families while they are away, to make the pilgrimage to the holy city of the House of God, Kaaba in the holy city of Mecca, once in their lifetime. So I am very familiar with the



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requirement of Muslims to go and visit the holy House of God, Kaaba, in the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

The fact of the matter is that this requirement for Muslims has been going on for a very long time—a very, very long time. It is strange that only in 2019 a situation has arisen where a request, or in some cases a demand, has been made on the Minister of Finance to provide US dollars for the Hajj.

Muslims from time immemorial in Trinidad and Tobago have been doing their religious duty and making the Hajj once in their lifetime, without making any demands on a Minister of Finance. May I also say the Ministry of Finance deals with foreign exchange at a macro level. We do not dispense US dollars to individuals or corporate entities. What we do at the Ministry of Finance is that we work with the Central Bank which distributes forex to the commercial banks.

Based on the information that I have, in the first three months of this year, up to the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, the Central Bank has injected US \$350 million into the commercial banking system, which is more than the same amount that was injected for the period January 1<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018. During that period the Central Bank had injected US \$310 million. I am not aware that in 2018 last year when the Central Bank put less US dollars into the commercial banking system, that there was any demand made on the Minister of Finance to provide US dollars to pilgrims going to Mecca.

The fact of the matter is, I have checked this out myself, hotels in Mecca take credit cards. The cost of a flight from Port of Spain via London, Gatwick to JED, which is the international airport in Jeddah, would be approximately US \$2,500. That can also be paid by a credit card. And if elderly pilgrims are not familiar with the credit card system, surely their children and their relatives can

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avail themselves of credit card facilities to pay for the cost of the ticket on behalf of their parents.

My understanding is that the hotels take credit cards, the travel agents take credit cards. So that the expenses that a pilgrim would be required to pay in cash would be for food and tours, transportation and so on while in Mecca. May I also say that in this year 2019, Hajj is between the 9<sup>th</sup> August and the 14<sup>th</sup> of August. We are in March.

So we will work with the commercial banks. We will see what can be done, but as I said the Ministry of Finance operates at the macro level. We will see whether we can encourage the commercial banks to make available the money required in cash for pilgrims to go to Mecca to perform the fifth pillar of Islam, the Hajj. But we in the Ministry of Finance do not dispense US dollars. We are not a commercial bank. So what we will do is see whether we can inject sufficient US dollars and encourage the commercial banks to make available US dollars to pilgrims.

But I want to make the point, it is my understanding that there are new players in the Hajj pilgrimage tour business, and they may be unfamiliar with arrangements that have worked so well for the last 50 to 60 years in Trinidad and Tobago. This problem has not arisen before. I think we would need to see what we can do to work with the groups and work with the commercial banks and work with the Central Bank to make sure that there is US dollars available so that Muslims can complete the fifth pillar of their religion.

I thank you, Madam President.

**Renal Disease Patients in Tobago  
(Adequate Options for Treatment)**

**UNREVISED**

**Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy:** Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to raise this issue as a matter on the adjournment. The issue is the need for the Government to ensure that patients with end stage renal disease in Tobago have available to them adequate options so that they can be provided with timely treatment for their condition.

I propose to highlight real life, real time experiences with the services for persons with end stage renal disease in Tobago. It is my aim to show that there is need for robust leadership at every level: Government, both Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, health care delivery personnel, the community and individuals to adequately resolve the problems that Tobagonians currently face.

Permit me to quote from an article in the *Newsday* of Monday, March 11, 2019:

“There is insufficient space for patients needing dialysis at the Scarborough General Hospital. Secretary for the Division for Health, Wellness and Family Development Agatha Carrington said although there has been an expansion, the only way more space will become available is if patients die. Carrington made the remark at a public health consultation meeting at the Bethel Community Centre recently. She said ‘Hundreds of patients are registered in the clinics, and it is because we have not managed the primary care side of it, that’s why we are here where we have more persons than the number of spaces. We have tried to expand; even when you meet the criteria there is no space, except somebody dies. Not only do we have the (excessive) numbers but we have very ill patients.’”

Permit me to quote another article, *Newsday* March 13, 2019. I quote:

“Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh says everyone who needs dialysis in Tobago is being accommodated.

He was responding to an urgent question in Senate Tuesday from Opposition Senator Wade Mark who asked, in light of reports of a shortage of dialysis machines at the Scarborough General Hospital significantly compromising the healthcare provided to patients at that institution, what was being done to address the matter. Mark was likely referring to statements this week by Secretary for the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development Agatha Carrington that there was insufficient space for patients needing dialysis at the Scarborough General Hospital.

Deyalsingh told the Senate: ‘I take this opportunity to correct the erroneous media reports which reasonably would have led Senator Mark to ask this question.’

He said the Scarborough General Hospital is not the dialysis centre in Tobago but it is the Scarborough Health Centre. He said the centre has 11 dialysis chairs which operate Monday to Saturday between the hours of 6–9pm.

‘And I am told by the chief of staff that there is absolutely no compromising of healthcare in Tobago because everyone who needs dialysis is being accommodated at the Scarborough Health Centre which is the major dialysis centre in Tobago.’”

Madam President, I would like to focus my attention on that statement, “...everyone who needs dialysis is being accommodated...”

I am aware that in November 2018 and again in January 2019 there were patients who were screened by the Renal Ethics Committee and put on the list for dialysis who could not get appropriate treatment until persons who were being dialyzed had died. The Secretary for Health, Wellness and Family Development

was correct in her report to the community. It is therefore inaccurate to say everyone who requires treatment is receiving it. I would humbly suggest that the Minister was misinformed.

I must commend the Tobago Regional Health Authority, the medical and nursing and ancillary staff who are giving yeoman service to provide dialysis for persons living in Tobago. However, those services are not meeting the increasing need.

**6.20 p.m.**

Madam President, I was the Medical Director of the Scarborough Regional Hospital at Fort King George when the dialysis services started in 2003, then with two chairs and eight patients.

In 2011, I was also there when the dialysis centre opened at the Scarborough Health Centre with nine chairs and 32 patients. So in eight years they had increased from two to nine chairs, and the number of patients being dialysed had increased from eight to 32.

I pause here to commend the then leadership of the Tobago House of Assembly in 2009, who showed the vision to construct the dialysis unit at the Scarborough Health Centre.

Madam President, the dialysis unit at the new hospital then in construction had space for two chairs in the outpatient clinic. The then administration listened to the recommendations from the clinicians and put a solution in place. The Scarborough Health Centre was being constructed funded by the IDB, and the Tobago House of Assembly funded the building of the dialysis unit, as a result what is there is available for the increased need for dialysis now.

Currently, up to 54 patients on haemodialysis, that is regular haemodialysis,

10 patients on peritoneal dialysis, and four patients in isolation; that is a total of 68 patients being currently dialysed, a 100 per cent increase in eight years from 32 in 2011 to 68 now. And it is my information that over the past five years there are 16 to 18 new patients requiring renal dialysis.

So, Madam President, the space is full and something would have to be done differently to accommodate new patients. These patients cannot all wait for patients to die to receive care. Could the TRHA fill vacant positions for nurses? There are some nurses who have retired recently as a result of reaching the age of 60. We were just hearing about the systems that Sen. Obika is going to put in place for hiring elderly persons. Currently, those persons are not being hired in the Tobago Regional Health Authority as a result of age; they are not being replaced. But if the number of nurses, if they have an adequate number of nursing staff, they may be able to increase the number of shifts from three to four; or could the TRHA increase the number of dialysis chairs by two? The space can accommodate an additional two chairs and machines and that will allow for, at least, another 12 patients to be accommodated.

Now, it is true that would come at significant cost however, in Trinidad when the public sector cannot dialyse a patient, there is an opportunity for them to access dialysis in the private centre funded by the Ministry of Health. This is not available for the Tobago patients unless they travel to Trinidad and deal with the issues of the air and the sea bridge.

Therefore, the Tobago Regional Health Authority must take a bold move to provide additional spaces so that persons do not have to wait on patients to die before accessing needed care, and they do have options; leadership is about solving problems.

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Another point to note, Madam President, is that a patient comes off dialysis either through death—

**Madam President:** Senator, you have one more minute.

**Sen. Dr. M. Dillon-Remy:** One more minute—through death or receiving renal transplants, and over the last seven years, five persons have received transplants in Tobago of which two have been successful and three have failed.

Madam President, the Tobago Regional Health Authority has the opportunity to do things within the system right now to increase the number of spaces available, and also the Ministry of Health may be able to provide additional services by providing more dialysis spaces. And while that is done, I am also suggesting that we also need population interventions in terms of health promotion, and also individual intentions in taking things. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I thank the hon. Senator for a timely intervention to raise this matter and I respond on behalf of the Government. I think, Madam President, I can agree with the Senator on three or four things, but there are two things that I want to make clear. The first is that we have not reached the point where there is insufficient space, but we may be reaching there and towards the end I will address that matter.

The second point is that in quoting Secretary Carrington, and the reference to “hundreds of patients” registered in the clinics, I think that the Secretary may have been referring to the “hundreds of patients” generally, because the Senator has supplied a figure of 54 patients on dialysis, and I have the same information from the Ministry of Health. So the “hundreds of patients” do not relate to patients

in need of dialysis; most likely refers to patients in need of a variety of treatment.

So, Madam President, in the case of Tobago as the Senator correctly says, there are 11 haemodialysis chairs in the dialysis unit in the Scarborough Health Centre, and one chair at the medical ward located at the Scarborough General Hospital. There are 54 patients on dialysis treatment, each receiving three sessions per week based on a three-tiered shift system that operates during 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. These patients are facilitated in two groups during the week namely group one, Monday, Wednesday, Friday; group two, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and my understanding is that it works in a similar fashion in Trinidad.

Madam President, there is one full-time complement of staff comprising of a specialist medical officer, a registrar, a house officer, two visiting nephrologists from Trinidad who provide dialysis services on a weekly rotational basis which is consistent with what my colleague had said.

Madam President, this is where we have reached to the point that we may have an issue. If we continue to add more patients requiring dialysis, we may have an issue with space because the complement of 11 chairs with the exiting three-tiered shift system and staff can deal with 54 patients.

Based on the current capacity it could be concluded that the dialysis chairs are fully utilized to treat dialysis patients in Tobago in a timely and consistent manner. In order to deal with anything above 54 which my colleague has correctly pointed out, the TRHA has indicated that there are three patients who require haemodialysis treatment and are currently receiving this treatment at the medical ward located at the Scarborough General Hospital; that is the ward with the one chair.

So therefore, Madam President, what the Ministry of Health proposes in



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collaboration with the TRHA is if there is a further increase, the following options can be considered, the adoption of another shift period from either 9.00 p.m. to 12.00 p.m. or 2.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m. which may result in an additional 18 patients benefiting from the service; a proposal has been drafted for consideration already. Or, Madam President, the provision of dialysis services on Sunday which requires a need assessment to be done.

So, Madam President, in conclusion, I agree with most of what my colleague has said except that we are not dealing with hundreds of patients in need of dialysis, we are dealing with 54. That number represents just about how much the current services can accommodate. There is a plan to accommodate an increase of 18 by adding an additional shift, and even beyond that by making services available on Sundays. Madam President, the Ministry of Health together with TRHA continues to monitor the availability of facilities for dialysis patients.

In relation to the issue of the management of patients with end-stage renal disease, the Ministry of Health conducts transplantations at the national transplant unit, and to date there are no cases for review from Tobago. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

### **Greetings**

#### **(Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day)**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, as you are aware on Saturday, March 30, 2019, we will be celebrating Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, so I now invite Members to bring greeting. Sen. Cummings. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Foster Cummings:** Thank you, Madam President. It is indeed a pleasure for me on behalf of the Government Bench to bring greetings to the national community on the occasion of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day.

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Madam President, I came across what is possibly a definition by a member of the faith, because there is indeed, as we know, a lack of understanding by some, and I just thought that I would share it very briefly as I bring this greeting. It is by Rev. Ingrid Ryan-Ruben as she attempts to explain who is the Spiritual Baptists, and it goes like this:

The Spiritual Baptist faith is an afro-centric Christian religion which is steeped in African spirituality, born of a reinterpretation of the colonized African relationship with God so as to fit into the European style of worship. The Baptist emerged as a worshiper who believes in Jesus the Christ and boldly shouts his praises. This praise is many times accompanied by African drums, loud singing and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit which are defined by speaking in tongues, rejoicing and singing songs of praise which have been written and borrowed.

And that is by Rev. Ingrid Ryan-Ruben.

Madam President, the Prohibition Ordinance of 1917 banned worship and practices of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist, and caused its members to go into hiding in order to practise the religion.

In 1951, the order was repealed allowing free worship by members for the Spiritual Baptist faith. In our history it is the only religion that would have been prohibited by law from practising the religion.

In 1996, the Panday Government granted a public holiday which we celebrate on Saturday to the Baptist faith. Features of the Spiritual Baptist faith would be: the thanksgiving service and the bounty at the table; pilgrimage as congregations visit each other in different locations; wayside missions which is the evangelism, the bell; and several other rituals which have moved from generation

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to generation in spite of this ban and this impediment in the way of Spiritual Baptists practising their religion. We have come to a time now when information is now more readily available, and a lot of the misconceptions and misunderstanding about the Spiritual Baptist faith is now being dispelled and light is coming to the faith in a way that it has never been before.

And so as we move towards celebrating what certainly history—we must not forget at all, Madam President, it cannot be allowed to forget that at one point in time this faith was treated as criminals having to hide in the forest to practise religion in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to express on behalf of the Government Bench a very warm and blessed and holy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day to all members of the faith. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

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

**Sen. Anita Haynes:** Thank you, Madam President. Today, I have the honour on behalf of the United National Congress bench in the Senate to join with my senatorial colleagues and indeed, the national community, in commemorating Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation day. And I would like to thank Sen. Cummings for providing the context for the holiday in which we are bringing greetings. And as we celebrate this auspicious occasion, we are all reminded of the important lessons we can learn from this community from the Baptist community: the power of faith, the power of unity, and the power of determination in overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds.

Our beloved Trinidad and Tobago is a nation built on struggles, the strength of spirit and the will of its people. The repeal of the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance in 1951 was a significant and defining moment not only for the

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Sen. Haynes (cont'd)

followers of the faith, but for our country. It signified the end to an unjust edict which deprived the people of the ability to practise their religion freely. And finally, Shouter Baptists were free to make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

The contributions of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community to our country's rich heritage, our diverse culture and to our national development are all deserving of celebration, and it is the recognition of these contributions that on 26 January, 1996, the Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day was declared a public holiday of national significance.

The Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration continued to honour the community and delivered on a promise to provide state-supported education and teaching facilities for the children and young people of the faith. We must applaud the indomitable spirit of the Baptist community to persist and prosper. They have set an example for Trinidad and Tobago as a whole.

Today, as face trying times and challenges in our nation, we can look to the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community for inspiration as they did when they kept hope and faith alive. Let us remember the kind of resilience upon which our citizenship is built, the resilience which defines us as a people.

The United National Congress through me calls upon all citizens to stand together and work together, united in purpose to make a difference in our country. We must take pride in our diversity, take pride that we are a nation that last weekend celebrated Phagwa, and this weekend we stand as a Parliament to bring greetings for Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. I for one I am proud that we are a country that can do this without any strife. We must keep in our hearts and minds at all times the mission to be our best, to do our best and to come together to build our nation, a nation that is united and strong and proud.

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 Sen. Haynes (cont'd)

On behalf of the Opposition Bench in the Senate and the United National Congress, on behalf of myself and my family, I take this opportunity to extend to all practitioners of the Baptist faith and the country as a whole, I wish you a blessed Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. [*Desk thumping*]

**adam President:** Sen. Thompson-Ahye.

**Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye:** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President, this Saturday, March 30, 2019 we celebrate, once again, a very significant occasion in our national calendar. It is Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. But liberation what? From whom? And for what? What crime did they commit?— liberation from the oppression and persecution, the indignity suffered by Shouter Baptists for so many years. From the prohibition order issued against them in 1917, to the lifting of the ban in 1951, members of this religion endured much pain and suffering at the hands of the Government and its agent of repression and suppression then aptly named “the police force”, now “the police service”; and we hope they will always be “the police service”.

These members of the Baptist religion were on a perpetual mourning ground in every sense of the word, and for what?—the practice of their religion. A religion that was uniquely Trinidadian, one that combined elements of African rituals implanted in their bones, sinews and hearts, fired with the spirit of their ancestors, and blended with some aspects of Christianity.

Their persecution is well-documented by Earl Lovelace in his seminal work, *The Wine of Astonishment*. Indeed, one should be astonished to read such a sorry story emanating from a land where “every creed and race should find an equal place”.

In spite of the tale of the Spiritual Shouter Baptists, their tale is one of

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resilience, of courage and pride. We should shout and clap our hands as they toss their head ties, and they sing like Brother Resistance, “Ring the bell for justice”, that they can shout like Martin Luther King, “free at last” to practise their religion; to sit in the Upper House of Parliament and take their rightful place among the brightest and the best like Dr. Hazel De Pesa, my name sake; to populate every sphere of activity, every profession and every occupation, to walk in confidence, to walk tall and assert, “I am proud of my religion, this land is mine”.

On the occasion, on their special day, I dedicate to them The Exodus Song:

“This land is mine, God gave this land to me  
 This brave and ancient land to me  
 And when the morning sun reveals her hills and plain,  
 Then I see a land where children can run free  
 So take my hand and walk this land with me  
 And walk this”—lovely—“land with me  
 Tho’ I am just a”—woman—“when you are by my side  
 With the help of God, I know can be strong  
 To make this land our home  
 If I must fight, I’ll fight to make this land our own  
 Until I die, this land the mine.”

And, Madam President, if I may, I did not know I would have to speak today, but like a good Girl Guide of many years ago, I am well-prepared. And if you allow me to breach protocol, may I ring my bell for the Spiritual Baptists? [*Senator rings bell*] Happy day all Spiritual Baptists. [*Desk thumping*] [*Senator rings bell*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I am very happy to join with the previous

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speakers in bringing greetings on the occasion of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day.

As we celebrate the occasion, let us remember what gave rise to this event. What gave rise to this event was sadly the lack of tolerance, respect for an understanding of the Shouter Baptists. What allowed us as a nation to rise out of this negativity was the perseverance of those Baptists who fought to have the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance repealed and who never stopped practising their faith.

Today, in different parts of the world we see the tragic consequences of intolerance for and a lack of understanding of our fellowmen. In Trinidad and Tobago, we must be ever vigilant and guard against that re-emergence of what seems to be taking root in different parts of the world.

As we celebrate this year, let us focus with a steely resolve on that commitment to one our nation's watchwords, the ideal of "tolerance" so that we will never go that way.

I therefore wish on behalf of the Parliament to the Baptist faith, happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, and I wish that as well to all of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.43 p.m.*