

SENATE*Thursday, October 24, 2019*

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2020) BILL, 2019**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 23, 2019]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Vice-President: Yesterday we had 11 speakers. Who is the next speaker?
The Minister of Trade and Industry. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):
Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and firstly, let us first welcome the 40 students,
about 40 students and teachers who have come from all over Trinidad and Tobago,
[*Desk thumping*] from Sangre Grande to San Fernando, from Tobago to YTC, we
welcome you.

Mr. Vice-President, firstly let me thank the hon. Minister of Finance for his
management of the country's finances over the last four years, and for his budget
preparations, to his staff as well for the hard work that they do, to the Minister in
the Ministry of Finance as well who also contributed to those preparations [*Desk
thumping*] and also to our Minister of Planning and Development who also has a
crucial role in our budget preparation.

Yesterday, Sen. Lester Henry, and of course in the presentation yesterday, Minister
Allyson West, would have dealt with the country's economic situation and all of
the finances. There is no need for me to go there, but just to say that we have

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found ourselves in a really good place, where economic growth has returned, revenue and HSF savings have increased, revenue expenditure is now down substantially and is now sustainable, Government fiscal deficit has been reduced by more than 50 per cent, and inflation is among the lowest in the world. We are number one, Mr. Vice-President, number one with food inflation down and core inflation also reduced.

I just want to comment on—make one comment, or make a few comments on the UNC's ill-conceived transformation plans which they presented. The Opposition proposed the elimination of our robust and efficient managed float exchange rate, and I want to say that that will always—that, we do not agree with. What they are speaking about really is devaluing our currency, and again, Sen. Lester Henry dealt with that. But let me add as Minister of Trade and Industry, and from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, that we are very strongly agreeing with the Government that we are not devaluing the currency in Trinidad and Tobago. There are some that are clamouring for it, those perhaps are persons who are holding large sums of foreign currency, and of course it would benefit them, they would immediately benefit from such a devaluation, but by and large, businesses will not benefit, certainly not small- and medium-sized businesses, certainly not your importers, at all.

As a matter of fact, all those businesses who are owing money to overseas creditors, their bills will impact, in fact, increase overnight, and of course, there is always the possibility of successive devaluations as we had in the 1980s. All of our inputs into manufacturing will be higher, all of our clothes, food, cars, would be higher, and so on. And what you would find is that exporters will be relying on that currency difference to improve, and really and truly what they should be doing

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is they are becoming more efficient and more agile, and introducing technology and so on into their processes, that is where we want the competitiveness to be, not necessarily the easy way out through the devaluation.

And of course we know that Barbados, right around us, they have survived, a lot of the OECS countries, without devaluing their currency, and we are strongly in favour, we stand with the Government with this position. And psychologically as well, devaluation is not a good sign; it is always a sign of economic weakness, so that even your credit ratings may be influenced negatively and when it comes to investments, other countries and businesses and investors would probably look at you as a very weak nation economically, so we are not there. But continuing on the UNC's ill-conceived economic plan, and Sen. Mark yesterday spoke about these five principles on which their plan was based.

Principle Number One: People-centred development, getting people back to work. But we know what you really mean is getting your people back to work, because when you came into Government in 2010, what you did is you fired hundreds of persons in Ministries and state enterprises.

Sen. Obika: Standing Order 46(6) and 46 (4). It is offensive and insulting, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President: Continue Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Continue Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Hundreds of persons in Ministries and state enterprises—

Sen. Ameen: You all fired the whole of Petrotrin.

Mr. Vice-President: One second, Minister. Just let me just set the tone for the

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debate for today's proceeding as we go ahead. Now yesterday I would have ruled in this budget debate against shouting across the floor when a Member is contributing. That ruling continues for today. If you have something to say or raise you can either ask the Member to give way or you raise on a particular Standing Order. Continue Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Yes, so I was on principle one, getting which people back to work? And then of course you took an OJT and installed as head of the SIS. That, again, is getting UNC people back to work. And then think about all those persons, the particular persons who got substantial legal fees, UNC attorneys, to the tune of \$1 billion. That is what you mean by putting people back to work.

Principle number two: Pro-business, allow the private sector to drive growth and development. And you cannot be speaking about private sector projects, because you did none. I can remind you about the LifeSport project, 400 million down the drain; about the massive bid rigging in procurement projects throughout the state enterprise, including the \$1 billion Beetham Waste Water project. Is that what you talk about when you say supporting the private sector? And of course, your friends and family alone who really benefited from the number of contracts that passed through you.

You talked about principle three—

Sen. Obika: Standing Order, again, 46(6), Mr. Vice-President, imputing improper motives.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Nah, the facts.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Obika, you raise a Standing Order, and then I expect silence to fall in this Chamber to allow me to rule on said point of order. Minister,

continue.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. Principle number three: Deepening economic reforms with some human face. Deepening economic reforms, when we know by September 2015 at the end of their term the economy had gone into recession. Expenditure had exploded under them by 30 per cent from 46 billion to 62 billion in 2015. What kind of reform you are talking about? And then, of course, the overdraft of the Central Bank had reached 98 per cent of the legal limit, barely enough funds to run the country for a few days, massive debts left to contractors, VAT refunds left at \$4.5 billion, and arrears to public servants, inflation skyrocketing. You are talking about reforms? You are not able, you “doh” have the capacity to deepen any reforms. [*Desk thumping*]

And principle four, local content, giving people a sense of ownership and independence. Well, we know what happened on Independence night in 2014. Right? The proclamation of section 34. You are talking about ownership? The IPO scandal for the FCB turned out to be a total scandal, and you are talking about independence, and when you had Cambridge Analytica spying on all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We know you UNC, we know you. The country now knows you.

And you talk about principle number five: Sustainability. I cannot go on and on, because I have a contribution to make, promoting environmental stewardship. You cannot be promoting environmental stewardship when you distributed dozens of questionable leases for prime state lands in Chaguaramas. We know you, so therefore with your track record and the plan which you presented, there is no way, and of course with all the wanton wastage and non-performance, there is no way that we could present you to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk*

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thumping] I ask myself what is your legacy? What is your legacy? What did you leave for this country? What could we identify? [*Crosstalk*] What could we identify?

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, please. Again, I am not going to stand to my feet and continue to repeat the ruling. There is absolutely no need to shout across the floor to the Minister while she is making her contribution. If you have not spoken as yet you will have the opportunity to speak in the course of this debate, to which you can then respond to anything the Minister says in her contribution. That is the proper procedure. Continue Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Right. I am not going to spend any more time because we know you left no legacy, not when we can think about things like the Piarco Airport, and again the Beetham Waste Water and LifeSport and so on. You left no legacy, no impression on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is the PNM who gave free education. It is the PNM who built industry. It is the PNM who built all of those houses in Trinidad and Tobago, all of the courts, all of the roads, the infrastructure, hospitals, all of the primary health care, all of those health care institutions right across Trinidad and Tobago. And you know we used to talk about—ah, Point Lisas, we remind them, we used to talk about nursery to tertiary education, but now it is day care, day care to tertiary education provided by the PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

No, and you talked about corruption yesterday. Let me remind you, and Sen. Mark quoted all kinds of indices. Let me remind you about the Global Competitiveness Index. I examined from 2010 to 2015, and I could tell you, this is out of 140 countries, under diversion of public funds, we worsened, this country worsened 43 points. That is 43 countries down. Public trust in politicians, we

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worsened 25 points; irregular payments and bribes, worsened, 61 points. That is below 61 countries. Favouritism in decisions of government officials, 60 points; wastefulness of Government's spending, 37 points. We know you UNC. The country knows you UNC. [*Desk thumping*] Let me speak now—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had spoken in the other place, so I am going to speak more of—

Sen. Obika: Other House.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Sorry, Mr. Deputy—Vice-President. [*Laughter*] I will not make that mistake again. I spoke about more of some things there and I am going to speak less of them and more of others here.

So let me go straight to trade, and let me say that Trinidad and Tobago trade's performance improved significantly over 2016 to 2018. In fact, the country moved from a trade deficit of 2.7 billion in 2016 to a trade surplus of 12.01 billion in 2018. So exports were valued at 59.7 billion and your imports were a lot less at 47.71 billion. And these demonstrate, of course, the importance of trade in the economy, and I had said before that trade is important for driving economic growth. We are a small nation but we are a trading nation, when you look at the fact that the figure of trade to GDP is 132 per cent. We export a lot, energy and non-energy, and we import a lot, just as well. So, it is very important.

So, I looked at our trade figures, but the non-energy figures are what I picked up from the *Review of the Economy*, were static at about 30 billion, and I really have to go deeper. I had to dig deeper into that, because sometimes I am not quite sure of what else is included in there. So, I looked for the positives, I looked for the negatives, I will just tell you some of them. So, I looked at some of the non-energy products which we export, and I looked at non-alcoholic beverages,

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and those in fact had increased by 124 per cent, from 47 billion to \$106 billion.

Hon. Senator: Million.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: \$47 million, sorry, to \$106 million. I looked at waste and scrap iron, from 41 million, back to 80 million, an improvement of 96 per cent. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, yellow fin tuna, from 29 million to 54 million, 85 per cent increase; rum, from 25 million—rum, UNC—to 46 million, an increase of 95 per cent. Of course, cigarettes are increasing as well, from 240 million to 297 million. *[Laughter]* *[Interruption]* Please do not disturb me.

Sen. Ameen: We are not ready for you. Go ahead.

Sen. The Hon. P Gopee-Scoon: Twenty four point—you are threatening me? *[Interruption]* You are threatening me? Two hundred and forty million to 297 million, that is cigarettes; and prepared foods from cereal improved by 14 per cent.

I went to the negatives as well and I looked at where we were with some of the products that went down, like, for instance, printed books, and we could understand why, because of the age of technology, went down by 43 per cent. Cement, when you know that there was an issue with cement, went down by 39 per cent. But, I am happy to say that I met with TCL two days ago, and their exports are now up, so they are balancing 50 per cent of their production for our local use, and 50 per cent of their production for exports, so we expect to see an improvement there as well. So that there is a lot to look forward, there are some gains, but we got to keep pressing on, Mr. Deputy President—Mr. Vice-President, got it right this time.

So, in September of this year, we would have launched the trade policy, which will guide this country towards 2023, *[Interruption]* and I have to thank—

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and it will be tabled. We have not have a session to table it yet. We have to thank UNECLAC who provided the invaluable technical expertise in the drafting of the policy. They were the primary drafters. And I would tell you that this collaboration came out of a visit to Chile by the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley. When our Prime Minister visits, we always get returns. [*Desk thumping*] There are always deliverables, and when he would have met with the UN Executive Secretary, Alicia Bárcena, so that came out of that visit.

So, let me say that because we are a trading nation, it is so very important, it cannot be overstated the importance of being part of this multilateral trading system which is governed by the WTO, the World Trade Organization. And, what they do is that they critically examine trade policies, strategies and measures implemented to ensure that there is transparency and commitment to, and compliance to these multilateral loans. So that last year, in May—sorry, this year in May, Trinidad and Tobago would have had its review. It is held every six or seven years, and we would have successfully completed that review. So, we are very pleased about that.

I want to say as well, another important matter in this whole business of trade is the engagement, the engagement and developing strong relationships with firms, with different countries, regions, and of course the entire multilateral trading system that governs the network of rules and regulations. And I say so because it is not only the work of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, it is also the work of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in terms of that commercial relationship with firms, with countries in particular. It is also the work of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and all of those other Ministers who engage with countries, and I can tell you that we do have significant relationships with the

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Caribbean countries. It is returned under this Government with our hon. Prime Minister. And as I say Prime Minister, let me just wish our hon. Prime Minister, from all of us in this House, a very happy birthday. [*Desk thumping*] It is his birthday today. I think he hit the big 7-0, so we wish him good health, more grandchildren, and of course [*Crosstalk*] no, we wish him good health, all of us inside of here. You should be clapping, he is the Prime Minister of our country. He has led this country very, very well, and we greatly appreciate. We wish him God's blessings. [*Desk thumping*]

But also I was speaking about the trade policy and the importance of it, and what is going to set us on a path to doing is improving the facilitative and enabling environment for trade, encouraging the production and export of non-energy goods and services, in particular, also increasing the production and export of high value added goods as well, of course increasing our share of Caricom trade, which is where we started, and inclusive of trading services, but also increasing our market share in the more traditional and non-traditional markets. So, our focus is on Caricom, and also non-Caricom export expansion as well. So, we looked at the export markets—time runs fast here. And what I want to say is that, our markets typically are concentrated in a few countries. I am talking about Caricom, the US, and Europe. But what this does, it makes you more vulnerable, and it is too narrow, and the whole question of diversification of markets is also very important, and I suppose more important than diversification of products, because you can make all the products you want, if you have nobody to sell them to that is it. So, the policy expands our outlook in terms of markets to the South America, Central America, to the Asian countries. I was surprised the figure of exports is about 10 per cent to the Asian countries. The Caribbean again, and of course the European

economies, and also the USA, particularly to our diaspora communities.

So, in line with that, I can tell you that we are pursuing our engagement, or furthering our engagement with Chile. Following exploratory discussions in December 2018, we are now on our way to negotiations for a partial scope agreement with Chile, and this commenced in August of this year and is likely to be completed in six months. This is going to make Trinidad and Tobago's exports of energy products more competitive in the Chilean market, so that is more. We are focusing on energy products more than anything else in the Chilean market. It is opening up our goods to 18 million persons, and of course it is facilitating as well access to cheaper inputs into our production processes of manufactured goods.

So, Curacao as well, they have approached us for a partial scope agreement. We are looking at it and we will go to Cabinet with it. We do about \$64 million in trade with them, but we feel that we can expand that as well. Even though it is a small country, there are many times more visitors to that country, so that the market is a fairly good one.

Brexit and the UK, I want to say that we have done what we have had to do to ensure a smooth rollover with the CARIFORUM-UK agreement, we have signed all of the MOUs that are necessary, and the legislation is being prepared so that there will be a seamless transfer, so that goods entering the UK will not in fact suffer at all, the businesses will not suffer at all. It will be a seamless transfer, and we will be able to benefit from the tariff preferences.

With regard to the exports to the US and the CBI arrangements, which is the Caribbean Basin Initiative, more than 200 companies benefit from the CBI arrangements and what is called the CBERA and the CBPTA, and there are numbers of—[*Interruption*—there is a lot of murmuring. And there are a number

of goods that enter the US; it is our primary trading market. I am talking about energy products, agriculture products as well, petroleum, a number of items, and all of these items benefit from this unilateral one-way trading agreement. I am pleased to say that last week at the WTO general council meeting it was agreed that the United States request for a waiver extending the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act, has been extended. It has been extended until September 30, 2025. What will happen now is that this will now go to Congress where the CBI arrangements will be assessed with all of the beneficiary countries, and we are looking forward, and we are doing the necessary engagements to ensure that this is preserved.

Cuba, exports improved by 143 per cent, and that is a population of \$11 million. Trinidad and Tobago is their largest Caribbean trading partner, so that 80 per cent of the goods entering Cuba in fact are coming from Trinidad and Tobago. So, we have risen from 11 million to 27 million. Not huge amounts, but definitely you are seeing the exponential—you are seeing the increase of about, I think that is more than 150 per cent, and that is because we have our trade facilitation office on the ground. They are doing their work. I have taken businesses across to—I have taken businesses across to all of the trade fairs and so on, and we are doing well in that market. Additionally, with the introduction of flights from Caribbean Airlines, that is a significant contributor to our increased trade as well, and we will continue to enhance this.

Panama and Costa Rica, all, we are seeing the improvements as well, and also with Colombia, Canada, with our diaspora market, the Dominican Republic, all of those numbers are also going up as well. Even in Guyana there is a trade mission coming up in November, 18 companies are going. We have also signed a

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memorandum of understanding on energy. It is very important that we look at exporting our energy services, and other services into Guyana. Jamaica as well, our top export market, we continue to work on as well. I have spoken about the fact that our products are very limited, and in terms of the range of products, and we therefore have to look at diversifying the products, the range of products, so that the trade policy also speaks to the expansion of these products, and of course it identifies a list of products, a list of high value added products that we can look at to facilitate growth in our exports, electronic assembly, textile and garment manufacturing for the fashion industry, pharmaceuticals in the areas of agriculture and agro-processing, vegetables and fruit, coffee, tea, spices and cocoa, beverages, fish and fish processing as well, animal feed, and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries will speak more to that as well.

So, those are the kinds of rising star products that we have to encourage the manufacturing sector to get involved with. The policy also speaks to the green industries which are really opportunities again for building resilient businesses. And by that I mean, green renewable energy products like solar panel assembly. I am talking about greening also of the traditional sectors in agriculture and tourism and so on, and there are other green activities in services as well. It also attaches itself to global value chains, very, very important, and something that we have to look at, because trade and production have become increasingly organized around global value chains, and so that it is a way of providing a fast track to industrialization for emerging economies. In other words, we get involved with part of the supply chain, so you do not have to actually produce the end product, but part of the product. So, it is very important that we start looking at that, particularly at the cocoa global value chain. There is more to that that we must

look at. And that is the kind of economic transformation that we are talking about and that this country badly needs as well.

The trade policy also addresses the women, youth and differently-abled, and their contribution that they can make to improving this country's productive capacity as well, and really reducing and eradicating some of the issues that are associated with women, youth and differently-abled in business. So that is going to be a focus as well. It also speaks to, with all that we are talking, you "cyar" increase your exports, you "cyar" increase your range of products without the private sector engagement. That will continue.

A vibrant, dynamic and resilient private sector is optimal and it is critical for growth and trade expansion, and I want to say that there is a strong arrangement with the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the private sector, and with the rest of the Government as well with the private sector, and we consult with them on all matters relating to Caricom, all matters relating to policy development, national quality policy, trade policies, manufacturing policies, services policies, and so on.

Diversification: Let me go quickly to the diversification, and there are several areas that somebody said serious areas, that this Government has targeted for diversification. And one of the early commentators to the budget had said, they did not see or hear the word "diversification" mentioned. But, we do not always have to mention the word, because we are doing the work, and it is being done under agriculture and agro-processing, and the Minister will speak to that. Tourism, financial services as well, and today I will just spend a "lil" bit of time on the creatives, on the manufacturing expansion, because that is diversification as well, also on services expansion and also on the maritime industry.

So that in the creative industry, rapidly growing sector, and we are focusing

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on fashion, music, and film, and I could tell you, I took a quote from the World Economic Forum in an article published on October 4th of this year, titled “Agile Governance for Creative Economy”, where in fact they are endorsing the expansion of the creative industry for improvement in economies, and I am talking about income generation, job creation, and export earnings. So, CreativeTT, small in stature, but is becoming a well-known brand, because we are doing a lot of work, and we are focusing on self-employment, entrepreneurship, and of course, working on very strong strategic plans.

10.30 a.m.

The film industry is expanding and has significant potential. And I have to move faster. I can tell you in 2019, there was a spend of \$16 million on film in Trinidad and Tobago. That is spend by foreign film production in Trinidad and Tobago. There were 21 small productions including *The Amazing Race*, which some of you may have seen, an episode of *Love and Hip Hop Atlanta*, the *National Geographic* on Tobago tourism. So we are getting it in drips, yes, but \$16 million is still considerable spend.

There have been a number of film familiarization tours for international filmmakers as well in Trinidad, there have been film workshops, and there have been several film tools that have been advanced through FilmTT as well, including tools such as: the production directory which is a database of professional services and suppliers in Trinidad; a locations database which is a database of locations and festivals in Trinidad; a production guide, which is a publication that highlights the benefit and procedures of filming in Trinidad and Tobago. And the feedback from film crews that have been here are that these tools have been of great value. Of course our film production expenditure rebate programme continues.

The animation: Animation is expected to go worldwide, and there is a major event in Trinidad called the Anima Caribbean Animation and Digital Media Festival, which FilmTT supports. And I could tell you what that has done is to put our local animators in touch with the big ones like Pixar, and DreamWorks, and Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon, and that is a platform for sharing knowledge and introducing technologies. But there have been gains because one local animation production company has been able to produce work for Universal Studios and Disney. And of course he has been contracted by Big Jump Entertainment in Canada, at cost of CAD \$230,000 to produce animation for season three of *Animals* on HBO TV series. Again, I cannot spend much more time but there is an increase in animation activity out there and we want our local people to participate and benefit.

Music: The local music industry is being recognized, and more and more the brand is well known. And of course what we want to get to the point of is full commercialization and exports. So MusicTT has had several capacity building initiatives, 120 participants were trained and certified in music publishing, another 100 in music intellectual property valuation, another 100 again, in song writing, production and mixing, so many, I cannot go on to tell you.

There is also the Artiste Portfolio Development Programme, Spotlight, bringing our second cohort of 10 artistes, two of them have already penetrated the international stage, one artiste has toured Japan, Bali, Singapore, Australia, and Canada, and Portugal. One other is performing in Disney's *The Lion King*. The other eight have secured performances in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Music Export Academy is focused on initiatives geared towards business education and capacity building, so that there is a number of workshops

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and webinars and conferences. In fact, there must have been 1,000 persons participating in all of these workshops and webinars and conferences and so on. They have been doing also very well with the Live Music District in the initial phase, 340 performances across 30 venues. I can tell you in the current LMD, 58 venues, 197 artistes, over 537 performances, and this is going to continue. And with Music Tech Platform, that is an app that has been launched called AMPT, and that is a functional booking site, and of course it allows all of us to get on the Web and search to find out which artistes are performing, what venues, et cetera, in real time. And as I said, there have been a number of workshops, more than 16 workshops, 1,000 persons benefiting.

Fashion, very lucrative industry, and the focus again is on building capacity, manufacturing, financing, retail distribution and export. The Bespoke Tailoring Programme has been a tremendous success. Twenty-six students have graduated, and you know, when I was in the Lower House, a Member of the bench sought to calculate for me the benefit of the programme by working out the cost per student basis, and what I want to say is that that is very narrow minded. And I can understand that you do not really know how to build an industry. You do not have the experience, you never built any industries, but I can tell you have to look further than that.

It costs—I mean, having an expat, and he is an expat because he has worked on Savile Row, that is Prof. Andrew Ramroop, and he has come to Trinidad and sacrificed his time. He has developed this and we see this as a burgeoning industry, and we are now moving towards the Train The Trainers Programme. We have had testimonials from these students, it has—one of them has said:

It has improved my quality and delivery standards and because of this I have

got customers that are travellers who are used to buying abroad seeking quality, now they can get it here in Trinidad and Tobago.

We did a lookbook for them, a digital lookbook and we did some copies to help market their work now. Ten graduates have already moved on to establishing their businesses, and 13 are moving in to the Train The Trainers Programme which will produce at the end of it another one-year programme, an increased number of master tailors who can then train other students in bespoke tailoring. So there is great potential for foreign exchange earnings with this.

The Fashion Value Incentive Programme, working very well, the Global Value Chain, the Non-Global Value Chain, the Business Advisory and Financing Programme, and the Strategic Training Programme. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, I want to thank you. Last Saturday, 50 designers in that lower tier, strategic training, received certificates for the entrepreneurial development programme conducted in collaboration with NEDCO. [*Desk thumping*]

With regard to the Non-Global Value Chain, 11 designers have completed their training, with eight designers increasing their local and foreign sales by 11 to 44 per cent in some cases, and one designer increasing their sales by 135 per cent. And of course, Members, those participants in the Non-Global Value Chain, they are beginning to export to South Korea, to Israel, to Australia, to New Zealand, to Samoa and the Philippines, all of their swimwear, resort wear, ready-to-wear, and couture dresses and so on. So that has been a tremendous success, there have been about nine workshops with a bit more than 500 attendees.

Maritime is another area that we are working on. How much time do I have?

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Mr. Vice-President: Five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Oh no. Maritime is another area that we are working on. I can tell you that there is increased activity in terms of transshipment and transshipment trade. There is a Chinese company that is here, Bosai, \$1.2billion is there in investment. We are working on a national maritime policy. Again, that is going to help improve the maritime opportunities, and I am talking about ship repair and dry docking. I want to say as well, it is going to help as well with yachting. I can tell you that the Trinidad and Tobago Yacht Club by example, is investing—they have given us their commitment—\$100 million to expand. That is private sector investment to expand their current—\$100 million to expand their current facility, which will create 100 additional berths, so when Bill Gates comes to Trinidad and Tobago, he will not be berthed outside, he will be berthed inside.
[*Desk thumping*]

And the manufacturing sector, which continues to employ close to 60,000 persons, again, they are all of the incentives are available and of course we are introducing a Special Economic Zones Policy which has a number of incentives attached to it, which will benefit the manufacturing sector and a number of other sectors. Our Phoenix Park Industrial Estate will have a sod turning pretty soon, by the end of November and it will be commissioned in one year's time. Already, we are engaging with participations from China, and we are looking forward to that. The Moruga Industrial Estate: That is going to be commissioned in one month, before the end of the month, one month. [*Desk thumping*]

The global trading services, regrettably I do not have the time. We have to focus on that, I will tell you when you speak about non-energy contributions to GDP, global trade contributes about 57 to 60 per cent to our economy. But we

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

only export 10 per cent, so the areas of focus must again be on expanding and regulating services as well. Small- and medium-sized enterprises, we have had a great focus on that, with a number of funding facilities, the grand fund facility, impacting small- and medium-sized businesses. We are already seeing the results of that and I am going to publish it, and the research and development facility as well, all of those.

Let me just say something about—I spent a lot of time on business reforms in the Lower House, and I had gone to the population to give the details because there are so many. We are working on the big-ticket items which you did not work on.

Sen. Obika: “How much jobs you created?”

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Big-ticket items—I will tell you just now.

Sen. Obika: None.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Absolutely not. The business reforms, so the aim is—I can tell you, sorry, that the Doing Business Report came out, we are at an unchanged position at 105 which is not good. But I can tell you that we are focusing in the big-ticket items, and they know that. On paying taxes, game changers, the construction permitting process for which a pilot will be rolled out in November of this year, right.

Just let me mention the investment activity. Over the last four years, there have been total investments and those are the ones that we contract, of \$4.7 billion, creating 1,455 jobs, that is under our stewardship. [*Desk thumping*] And in the pipeline we have another 2.8 billion, creating 1,653 jobs. Those are the figures that they do not want to attach themselves to. I can understand how you feel.

So here we are, Mr. Vice-President, I know my time is there, we are about at

this time implementing, we have sound plans implementing and impacting the good people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Deoroop Teemal: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to contribute on this debate:

“An Act to provide for service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2020.”

Mr. Vice-President, in the budget presentation, the Minister of Finance in the area of flood alleviation said that a comprehensive strategy for treating with drainage and flooding throughout the country was being presented. And in his presentation, mentioned a number of desilting projects and highlighted a mark of success that there was no flooding in Greenvale and the Oropune Housing Developments with the recent passage of Tropical Storm Karen, as a signal of the success of the drainage programme—flood alleviation programme. Also within that budget statement, brief mention was made about some measures being taken in the Port of Spain area to alleviate the flooding around the lighthouse area and lower areas of Port of Spain.

Mr. Vice-President, I will like to respectfully submit that what was outlined in that budget presentation are at best short-term measures to cope with flood alleviation, and would really not solve the long-term challenges of flooding that the country faces from year to year. Mr. Vice-President, from the period 2008 to 2015, several studies were undertaken by different administrations. Just to highlight a few in 2008: Consultancy services for flood mitigation and integrated watershed management project for the north Oropouche River basin; in 2009, Ortoire River basin flood mitigation and integrated watershed management project;

2011, Caroni River Basin Study; 2015, the South Oropouche River Basin Study, that for some reason was not fully completed.

And all of this was a cost to taxpayers of probably around \$52 million cumulatively. Within these studies, what we find is that due to the very high capital cost for mitigation and alleviation measures identified, with the exception of desilting and some embankment development and installation of pump and gates in some areas, most of the recommendations within these studies have not been implemented over the many years. And some of the major recommendations for medium-term to long-term solutions for flood alleviation, would include construction of sediment traps, construction of retention dams, and an entire system where automation of sluice gates would be implemented as well as extensive installation of pumping stations in critical catchments throughout the country.

10.45 a.m.

The Minister of Works and Transport in his address yesterday, Mr. Vice-President, did express that there are studies and studies and studies and studies and little action. But I think coming out of all these studies, over the many years, in fact, decades, of these drainage studies, is that these projects are really very, very high capital cost projects, and for some reason past Governments have not found—have not had the determination and the means to invest the billions of dollars that are necessary to address long-term flood alleviation. And the programmes that are necessary continue to be grossly underfunded, as I said for decades.

Sen. Khan: Sen. Teemal, let me make an intervention here please, if you do not mind? As a former Minister of Works these studies, in my humble opinion, they

only focus on civil engineering solution to geomorphological and hydrological conditions. And that is the problem, billions of dollars. We have to look for softer solution that is more geo-oriented than civil engineering oriented. I am sorry if you are a civil engineer.

Sen. D. Teemal: Your comment is taken Minister, but in addition to the civil engineering solutions, a lot of these studies are very holistic in that they look at hydrology, the hydraulics, and particularly in the context of sediment transport, sediment control, sediment generation and all of those things. I think a fair amount of those studies have addressed those matters as well. And I agree with you, they really call for very, very high capital cost, and I think Governments of the past have been reluctant to really shoulder the necessary responsibilities to generate the necessary funding to undertake these projects to address, not just the short-term, but the medium- to long-term solutions to flood alleviation.

Mr. Vice-President, it is therefore no surprise that as a country we have grown accustomed to a certain culture when it comes to flood alleviation and flood mitigation measures. And I would like to refer to it as a culture of desilting and box drain construction. Because this was what we have been seeing over decades, and desilting, yes, because we spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year in desilting, and there are also studies that show our desilting practices need to be looked at very carefully. Because popular desilting practices is just to put the excavating equipment there, scoop up the sediment from the channel, put it onto the embankment and when the next flood comes all the sediment goes back into, and this is what we are spending a lot of money every year unfortunately, into.

Well, box drains seems to have been the solution for all of our problems over the years. It became very popular at a certain point in time that I would not

define, but it seems as though, even the public was saying, what do you want for your community? I want a box drain. Like if the box drain became the salve for all of our flooding situations. And in fact box drains were being installed in areas where there is right of way, and available land space, when the box drain is known to basic engineering students as the most inefficient channel section for dealing with flood water and the most efficient section is of course the trapezoidal section for the drain. But yet still we enter—and it is more economical to construct trapezoidal channels rather than box drains, but yet still we are investing millions of dollars into this box drain construction from year to year.

Yes, I understand the frustration with studies, after studies after studies after studies. As hon. Minister Khan pointed out, maybe the studies are skewed for civil engineering solutions, but at the same time you know the effects of climate change, weather patterns have changed tremendously, and rainfall intensity patterns have changed and what we see, changes in land use, changes in commercial and residential development, and a lot of illegal and unregulated developments. And the combined effect of those changes do warrant that we revisit these drainage studies that have been done in the past.

In addition, we are not complete in this regard nationally and there are certain studies in certain areas of Trinidad that have not been undertaken in the past that needs to be done: The north-west peninsula, central west catchment and urban drainage studies in critical areas, town areas, such as the South Oropouche River Basin and the City of Port of Spain.

Mr. Vice-President, as I said, it is understandable for Governments to shy away from implementing these very high capital flood mitigation measures. Generally, there is a lack of information on the real cost of floods for proper

quantification and the adverse impact of the economy. Thus it is difficult to establish the economic feasibility for justification of capital works related to long-term flood management strategies and it is imperative that we establish this study in order to be able to secure funding on the basis of economic justification to undertake long-term measures to alleviate flooding in our country.

I think our Government has recognized this because in a response in—I understand in Cabinet Minute No. 13 of September 17, 2015, where Cabinet agreed to the formal adoption of the official policy framework of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the priorities of this policy includes the implementation of a comprehensive drainage plan. And our Minister of Works and Transport when he was making his contribution yesterday did inform this House that CAF, through grant funding, is seeking to pull this comprehensive national drainage plan together. And also in *Vision 2030* in which it is clearly identified that an integrated flood management plan is envisaged within *Vision 2030*.

So I think it is heartening to see the recognition of the need to pull all of these things together, particularly in terms of long-term flood alleviation mitigation measures. It is absolutely necessary. And I trust that the Government when all of this comes together that the billions of dollars that would be required to enter into these capital projects does not serve as a deterrent as it has had over the decades and that we as a country can embrace and secure and seek funding on the economic feasibility of these major capital works and we will see it come to pass in the years to come.

Mr. Vice-President, I would just like to share some thoughts on the matter of transportation and we see within the budget mention is made of San Fernando to Port of Spain Highway, the Valencia to Toco Roadway, Churchill Roosevelt

Highway extension to Manzanilla, Curepe Interchange, and we heard from the Minister of Works and Transport yesterday of several more projects. Mr. Vice-President, notwithstanding these projects running into again, billions of dollars, Trinidad and Tobago has a relatively well developed highway and main road system. But however we still have a very high per capita vehicle ownership of approximately 500 vehicles per 1,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it ranks among the highest in the world. And despite all of these highly capital intensive highway and road network construction, it is most likely that traffic congestion would continue to be an issue and a problem, particularly in urban areas of Trinidad and Tobago, and we need to look at policies which encourage high vehicle occupancy and development of a mass transit system.

Mr. Vice-President, the intention to increase the PTSC bus fleet by 300 buses, again it is a very, very noble objective. I think it is a responsibility of any country to ensure a good mass transit system that brings affordable means of transport to the citizens of a country. And it is good that we are looking to increase the bus fleet to PTSC.

Mr. Vice-President, in March of 2016 the consultants from the IDB, the Inter-American Development Bank, conducted a high level strategic analysis of potential mass transit alternatives to implement in the East-West Corridor and in the north-south transit corridors. And the consultants of the IDB concluded that a BRT/PBR, a Bus Rapid Transit and Priority Bus Route system is the best bus based mass transit alternative there is.

In January of 2017 the consultant's recommendations were received by the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago Transport Committee and they recommended immediate implementation of this Bus Rapid

Transit/PBR mass transit system. And in May 2017 the same APETT Transport Committee also submitted to the Ministry of Planning and Development a document which detailed a conceptual design of a mass transit system for the East-West Corridor. The same documents were later submitted to the Ministry of Works and Transport. But in addition to the supplementation of buses to the PTSC, I think it is imperative that we look, in conjunction with that increase in buses, we look at the implementation of this mass transit system so that the increase in buses—we can derive the maximum benefits from this increase in buses.

Mr. Vice-President, also within the transportation sector there is no single institution responsible for the overall planning, develop management and regulation of the public transportation sector. PTSC right now, just over 200 buses per day, 11million passengers per year and over TT \$300 million in subsidies. The private sector forms the bulk of the public transportation system of almost 75 per cent, 13,000 privately owned; four to seven passengers cars; 5,000 nine to 25 passengers maxi-taxis, and they all carry an estimated 43million passengers per year and this is growing. And also an unknown number of PH taxis participating particularly on the rural routes to fill the deficiencies that are there in the public transportation system.

In several documents submitted to Governments over the past years, including a National Internal Transportation Policy 1996, Vision 2020 Infrastructure Committee Draft Final Report, 2004, and a framework for the Implementation of National Transportation Project, 2010, all recommended the establishment of a transit authority. And it is heartening to note that as part of the Vision 2020 the Government has identified the establishment of the transit

authority. But, Mr. Vice-President, I have not seen within the presentations, the PSIP, nor the budget allocations any mention of this establishment of a transit authority. It is a step in the right direction.

We need to bear in mind that the billions of dollars being spent on transportation projects fall within a sustainable transportation development plan. The UN Commission on sustainable development, Mr. Vice-President, identifies six pillars for sustainable transport development and one of the key pillars is integrated land use transportation planning. Some of the signs of poor land use transportation planning are clearly visible every day, that is, the traffic congestion, illegal and unregulated development, and several other signs.

Mr. Vice-President, I note that *Vision 2030* of the Government identifies a national transportation plan and the Minister of Works and Transport did mention that a national transportation plan is to be presented to Cabinet very shortly. But I would just like to add that that transportation plan in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals as enumerated by the United Nations is that we look at it being integrated with land use so that effectively we have an integrated land use transportation planning plan as per the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to come to the question of water security. The projects noted in the budget again brings to mind a similar scenario that has existed over decades particularly with regard to the Water and Sewerage Authority. Mr. Vice-President, I had the opportunity to serve on the Board of WASA, probably almost 18 years ago, and what I see represented in the budget is the same, almost the same, based on the same lines and principles as of 18 and 20 years ago. It is a question of leaks and fixing of leaks, a question of desilting dams, a question of rehabilitation of water treatment plants and it is like the same model that is there

for decades and decades. And notwithstanding the expenditure of billions and billions of dollars over the decades, the country is still in a situation where over 50 per cent of our population receive a supply of water less than three days a week. It is not a success story and as a country I am positive that collectively we can do a lot better than this with regard to our situation with water. We have been faced with this situation, as I said, for quite some time and it is the same ole same old.

Mr. Vice-President, whenever there is a prolonged dry wet season we do not get much rain during a wet season and what follows is an extended dry season to combine with that dry wet season. We are in the situation of having to ration water because the levels in our dams keep dropping, expectedly so. And I ask the question, if we have two years of consecutive patterns of dry wet seasons and extended dry seasons or maybe even three years as a country, what is our position with regard to water? Because we are in trouble with just one extended dry season and one dry wet season. I just do not like to contemplate such a situation coming but because of changing climate patterns in the world, varying rainfall patterns, it is a possibility that is right on our doorstep. It may not be too far away.

And this rationing of water has become a way of life. We have grown accustomed to it and we need to move further than that, and again, it is heartening to see in *Vision 2030* that there is mention of an integrated water resources management plan. Because we have to look at water security and ensuring that despite changing climatic conditions, despite physical conditions and all the constraints we have with regard to water that we can ensure that our population has access to water despite all of these changes. And it is a step in the right direction. I support it, integrated water resources management plan, but again, what I am not seeing in the PSIP, nor within the budget itself—the details are not there as to the

when this is going to be done. And I would strongly recommend that the Government give consideration, bring this to the front burner, let it be done, let it be part of your critical essential planning that has to be done so that water security for the nation, we stand a good chance in the years to come.

Mr. Vice-President, I would just like to get away a bit from the infrastructure issues that I have raised and the infrastructure matters and I would like to just spend a little time reflecting on the VAT refund debt that a proposal was made in the budget to address. It stated that VAT arrears to the business community stands at \$4.5 billion and it is an accumulated debt, okay, and that is also noted. But, Mr. Vice-President, the proposal to deal with this long outstanding debt I think needs to be looked at very carefully. The business community really needs that stimulation to make its contribution to revitalization of the economy. And if we do not have a vibrant business community with access to ready financing, it really affects the ability of the businesses to generate economic activity.

And I wonder how the business community thinks about this, because we see a budget in which probably close to \$5 billion is going to be spent on capital projects and here you have a debt that is not going to be settled in the short-term. And it is like someone owing you money and you see them going outside there and building a lot of things, spending money profusely and telling you, it is okay, it is necessary for me to spend that money, but the money I owe you, you will have to wait until. It does not send a good signal at all for Government as a debtor on the whole for such an approach to be taken, I humbly submit.

Mr. Vice-President, proposed VAT bonds are 1.5 per cent per annum. Mr. Vice-President, the businesses who have been waiting on these VAT returns for years, over five years, they have managed to survive by overdraft facilities,

increase in overdraft facilities and those overdraft facilities when you increase, we all know it is like about 2 per cent above prime. So you are talking about 12 to 15 per cent. In addition some of them would have taken short-term loans with the intention that they would receive the money and settle their loans and those loans would be at least 6 per cent to 8 per cent or probably more. And here we have, in settlement of the debt, we are offering that community 1.5 per cent per annum. So already there is a massive loss to the businesses awaiting these tax returns.

In addition to that the bonds, most likely when you go to the banks with them and financial institutions, those bonds are going to be discounted and effectively the paying off of this debt the dollar value may be just 50 per cent of what is really being owed to the businesses at the end of the day. I am humbly suggesting to the Government that reconsideration be given to the settlement of this debt, that part of the debt be given in cash, whether 25 per cent, 35 per cent, 50, whatever, but some part of this debt should be paid off in cash to those who are being owed. And maybe the remainder of it, part of it, could go into bonds, but not at 1.5 per cent. I think we need to do a lot better than that. The rate needs to reflect the losses that the businesses have accumulated over the years waiting for this to be paid.

Mr. Vice-President, in the remaining time I have I would just like to also look at the health and the health care sector and in particular we see mention being made of the various hospitals: Arima, Point Fortin, Sangre Grande, Port of Spain, Central Block, and it is good to see the plans for the Couva medical and health training, health facility—again, it is a step in the right direction. But the budget has been silent on the National Oncology Centre that we understand is now scrapped.

Mr. Vice-President, the establishment of the oncology centre was promised as far back as October 2002 by former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, when he read the 2002/0003 National Budget. And here we are some 16 years later and two administrations in and out of office, the centre is still incomplete.

Mr. Vice-President, cost of construction initially was estimated at 150million and was put at 800 million in the year 2012. When completed the centre was expected to offer cancer patients and their families several services including MRI scanning, diagnostic and radiation, reshielded treatment, bunkers, et cetera, and really it was to become a state-of-the-art facility giving hope to the over 3,000 cancer patients that we have to deal with in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, I am quoting from *Sunday Guardian* article, dated Sunday 05, 2012, by Rhonda Rambally, in which it is stated that:

“In June 2012, at a breakfast meeting to discuss the NOC, former health minister Dr. Fuad Khan said the total construction cost of the centre was \$663 million, with an additional \$52 million for equipment.”

At that time it was said that:

“Construction was expected to be 18 months and commissioning of major equipment expected to be six months.

He said the start of construction was November 12, 2012, and opening and operation of the centre scheduled for November 2014.”

Mr. Vice-President:

“Chairman of Udecott, Noel Garcia,”—fast forward to 2018—“told the *Sunday Guardian* the centre was one of those projects that seemed to be plagued by issues and that would not allow it to go forward.

Work is expected to restart ‘in full’—within—“next month. The cost is

expected to be around \$573 million, \$227 million less than the figure put forward in 2012.

“Garcia said, ‘It’s been about 15 years now and we have had many administrations but I have committed that one of the tasks that I have is the completion of the centre.’”

He gave November 2018 as the new deadline for completion.

“...We are confident that all things being equal, we should be up and running towards the end of 2018.”

Mr. Vice-President, in early 2019 the present Government signalled its intention to remove the intended equipment from the National Oncology Centre and place it into various institutions. What concerns me is that here we have a vital centre that will provide hope and treatment with patients suffering from one of the dreaded diseases of cancer. And for 16 years as a country we are just cannot

11.15 a.m.

The nation, I think, deserves to know, one, why we cannot deliver a project after 16 years and two, how much moneys that we have spent thus far on this abandoned centre not from the point of view of witch hunting, Mr. Vice-President, but we need to be accountable to our citizens and accountability including the fact that we can clearly identify why we could not get a project correct—

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

Sen. D. Teemal: Thank you. Why we could not get a project correct for the 16 years so that for the future, as a country, we do not repeat those mistakes, we do not repeat those mistakes. Mr.-Vice President, we are a country rich with expertise in the project management and construction industry. We have seen projects and mega projects in this country successfully completed over the years, but what is of

concern is the failure of past administrations to really come to the public and say, “Well this is the situation with this project, look we have made a massive mistake”, draw the line rather than giving hope to the many, many cancer patients over the years, “Well, we are going to fix it and we are going to fix it and we are going to fix it”. And I think that there has to be some form of investigation into why we were not able to give the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago this particular project. Mr. Vice-President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate in this august House and to report on the work of the Prime Minister Tobago Affairs fondly known as Central Administrative Services Tobago.

It is a pleasure for me to be in the Upper House today to share with the national public some of the developments that have occurred in Tobago through the work of central government and the Tobago House of Assembly. Mr. Vice-President, as a child I would have had cause to make some regular trips to the doctor and one thing I learnt early on is that a good doctor would never administer medication without first thoroughly examining the patient. This Government, Mr. Vice-President, led by Dr. the Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley, like any good physician has evaluated the social and economic conditions of our beloved country and administered the relevant course of treatment that would set Trinidad and Tobago firmly on a path of renewed “Stability, Strength and Growth”.

Mr. Vice-President, it is well known that all medications have associated side effects but all medications ultimately brings some measure of relief to the

The Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

patient. Our nation in the hands of a team of physicians with the skills, determination and character to administer the bitter pill required for healing and transformation has seen meaningful growth and transformation. Today we can see and feel the effects of sharing the burden of adjustment but the sacrifices have not been in vain. Our economy is turning around and is projected to grow. We have been able to do more with less. We have seen a paradigm shift and we are well on the way towards the creation of a new society, a new Trinidad and Tobago, where accountability, integrity, transparency in public office is no longer an exception but the rule, and I want to commend the hon. Prime Minister for leading this transformation process, Mr. Vice-President.

The Central Administrative Services Tobago plays a critical role in Tobago's development ensuring that the services of the Office of the Prime Minister are available on island and is responsible for supporting all central government agencies in Tobago. This mandate is executed under three main sections: Administrative services which include the Treasury, the Weights and Measures Inspectorate; general services, finance and accounting, information communication technology, planning, monitoring and evaluation unit, human resources, internal audit and communications unit; the meteorological services which provides a reliable data and weather and other environmental conditions for aviation and the public. The Registrar General's Department which provides a range of services to the public for the registration of births, marriages, death, business, land and other legal recordings.

Mr. Vice-President, although the Tobago House of Assembly is the main driver of development on the island of Tobago, through the respectful collaboration and meaningful partnership with central government, we have seen

The Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

the people and the island of Tobago benefit significantly from the national resources over the last four years. Through the Office of the Prime Minister Central Administrative Services alone, Tobagonians have benefited from improved service delivery, creation of opportunities for youth, social intervention geared towards improving the circumstances of some of the most vulnerable on the island, strengthening of our third sector, the voluntary sector. The Office of Prime Minister Central Administrative Services Tobago has made a notable impact on delivering its budgeted goals. Through the implementation of an asset and stores inventory management system at the head office, we have been able to realize greater efficiency in service delivery and more accountability. The people of Tobago are now—the people of Tobago now have a renewed sense of national pride and appreciation of the importance of what it means for us to be a part of this, what we call, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Through the reintroduction of the Republic Day route march through the streets of Roxborough in 2017, after a two decades-long absence, the people Tobago and the people of Tobago East, now have a better understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a part of this Republic, we call the Republic of the Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2019, an award segment was introduced to honour the contributions of Tobagonians in the field of education, tourism and hospitality, finance, community development and youth development. I want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. Minister of National Security and his Permanent Secretary and the officers of the various divisions within the National Security portfolio for their support. For the first time this year, we were able have officers of various detachments of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force participate in the route march and it was well-

received by all the spectators and the people of Tobago. And again, I say thank you to the Minister of National Security. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, in our efforts to support youth development on the island and complement the work of the Gender and Child Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister, approximately 70 secondary school students from across Tobago benefited from the forum to commemorate International Women's Day. These young students had the opportunity to interact with youth influencers from across various disciplines. They were able to interact with young entrepreneurs from across Trinidad and Tobago, persons involved in business, persons involved in fashion, persons involved in different types of industry and what would have emerged was that, our participants, our young students would have been more empowered and motivated to go out and seek their own different options and opportunities for their own personal development and to link with what we call influencers to become more motivated to follow their dreams.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I want to thank the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs Division, I want to thank the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for partnering with the Office of the Prime Minister Central Administrative Services Tobago for offering students of Tobago the opportunity to sit and meet with influencers and to learn from them. At that session we had a motivational talk from Mrs. Sharon Clarke-Rowley, the wife of the honourable Prime Minister and that was well-received by the over 70 secondary school students who would have participated in that forum in Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, with the exception of the July/August holidays this year, every other year since CAST would have been reintroduced. We would have hosted young girls from St. Jude's Girls' Home in Trinidad. They come to Tobago

The Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

for a few days during the school vacation period and during that time you would host them at the Office of the Prime Minister Central Administrative Services Tobago, have an opportunity to bond with the girls as well as link them with other NGOs and youth groups on the island of Tobago for them to do voluntary projects. And last year what was really significant and meaningful for these young girls from St. Jude's was that the day they came to CAST, the hon. Prime Minister was at his office in Tobago. So they had the opportunity to interact with the Prime Minister, having share his experiences with them, have the opportunity to bond one-on-one with the hon. Prime Minister and to recognize and realize that the Prime Minister is indeed working in the best interest of all children of Trinidad and Tobago including the young girls now vulnerable—vulnerable young girls in institutions such as St. Jude's.

Mr. Vice-President, while the THA is doing its work to empower young people in Tobago and while we at the Office of the Prime Minister Central Administrative Services will do our part to help to support the efforts of the Tobago House of Assembly, we recognize how important it is for us to have all hands on deck for us to transform Tobago and to create opportunities for Tobagonians. So, Mr. Vice-President, our work with youth did not only stay in terms of providing opportunities for motivation and motivational talks. What we would have done through the Office of the Prime Minister Central Administrative Service Tobago is that we would have provided an opportunity for 78 secondary and tertiary level students to benefit from our school vocation employment programme. What we would have done is that we would have established a facility where during the July/August vacation, we would create internship opportunities for young Tobagonians to get On-The-Job Training. We know that it is often

difficult for persons to gain entry into the world of work and most times they ask for experience but if you do not have the opportunities for them gain the experience, it is difficult for them. OJT is doing its part, THA is doing its part.

At CAST, we would have stepped in during the July/August period to create internship opportunities at our various divisions. And what we did, we did not just cater for tertiary level students, university students, we would have worked with young children, young students who are going from fifth form to sixth form, lower six to upper six, give them the opportunity as well to be part of the internship programme so they could help to discover what it is that they would like to do, when they leave school, what areas of service they would want to enter to. And thus far we have been able to service 78 young persons in Tobago and I want to commend the team at CAST in our different departments for ensuring that while the young people come to our organization, that they have a holistic experience and they are able to become well-rounded individuals.

Mr. Vice-President, over 100 students would have also participated and benefited from our various outreach in Tobago. We had our open-day—our open house as well as our career fair and we also had the observance of World Meteorological Day. What we recognized is that a lot of young people in Tobago would often gravitate towards traditional jobs. Through the observance of World Meteorological Day, we have been creating opportunities for our children as young as those in the early childhood centres to get the opportunity to visit our office at Met, our Met Office, see what is done, explore different opportunities for employment there. And what we are also using this is to do is to help to generate interest in STEM so that we can foster a greater interest among young people, especially our young girls in STEM subjects. So we use World Met Day as

an opportunity to create that awareness. And I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the officers at our Met Office in Tobago for their support in helping us to realize that goal.

To support the efforts of the THA to hold the talent of our athletes, over 25 elite athletes benefited from the gym facilities and instructors located at OPM-CAST. This provided great relief to the athlete while the Dwight Yorke Stadium was being renovated. Mr. Vice-President, if you—you are Tobagonian as well, you are often on the island, you would know that for a period of time the Dwight Yorke Stadium was not accessible to the public and we have number of young budding athletes in Tobago who would have needed access to gym facilities to help to maintain themselves during season and sometimes outside of season.

11.30 a.m.

We have a state-of-the-art gym at the office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services Tobago, and we have qualified instructors there. So at least we are able to access the services of the instructors, use the equipment and help to maintain themselves even while the Dwight Yorke Stadium is being renovated. And, you know, I am seeing where a number of young persons would have benefited from it. We are seeing where young Tobagonians have medals in—be it in Special Olympics or other regional games, and I want to commend those young Tobagonians who would have utilized the services and would have seen the fruits by medals.

In terms of our support in developing the third sector, what we call the voluntary sector, the Office of the Prime Minister, through our Cabinet-approved grant funding committee, would have been able to assess and approve over 100 grant applications to individuals and organizations, that is, the voluntary groups

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operating in Tobago. What we recognize is that for Tobago to develop, it does not require just the role of Government and the THA, it requires all of Tobago getting involved. And by helping to fund projects and programmes coming out from the third sector—the voluntary sector—by helping to empower them to do what they have to do, we are helping to build Tobago together. And I would like to commend those organizations that would have accessed the grant funding opportunities available at CAST and would have implemented their projects and their programme, and would have made a significant impact on the lives of Tobagonians.

Mr. Vice-President, additionally, OPM-CAST has been able to continue to support residents who have been referred by the public health system on the island to institutions in Trinidad for medical treatment by way of covering airfare for the patient and a chaperone once the cost is not being covered by the THA or the TRHA. And we have a facility at OPM-CAST where persons in Tobago who have to come to Trinidad to seek medical attention, once they are referred by the Tobago House of Assembly's relevant division, or TRHA, and they are not able to access the funding to cover the cost of the airline ticket to come to Trinidad, there is a facility available at CAST that Tobagonians could benefit from, and Tobagonians have been accessing that. So we have also been assisting in Tobago to help Tobagonians to meet their medical needs. So I want to commend, again, the staff at OPM-CAST in our administration department who would have been ensuring that persons coming to access that funding opportunity get the necessary releases on time to be able to book tickets and get to Trinidad on time to seek medical attention.

In March 2017, a work station was established at the Registrar General

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Division for the public to electronically search the Land Registry for documents registered under Deeds of Bills of Sales Act, and in February 2019, electronic searches for the Land Registry was expanded to include documents registered under the Real Property Act. Mr. Vice-President, in January 2019, the Registrar General's Division commenced receiving payments via LINX machines, thus reducing the burden of having to present exact cash amounts for transactions. As simple as it may appear, this was a great relief to many. I know of my own personal experience of going to do business at the Registrar General's Department and not having the correct amount of cash; having to leave; go back, and you know how it is in Tobago. It is a trek if you do not have transportation, to go downtown, to go back uptown. But now that they are accepting LINX payment, it brings relief not only to senior citizens but to young mothers who may have babes in arms, going to register, and also persons who may have disability not having to traverse up and down Scarborough to get money to go back to do their business, but being able to pay directly by LINX. And that is a benefit to the Tobagonians and I want to commend the Registrar General's Department for that. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, during the period of October 2016 to September 2019, the Office of the Registrar General collected \$3,260,885 in revenue from the extended production services offered to the members of the public. Even though it might be just over \$3 million, it shows that we are, indeed, contributing to the national coffers. So I wanted to note that.

Mr. Vice-President, before speaking to some of the key achievements of the Tobago House of Assembly and the development projects earmarked for Tobago, I would briefly speak to the plans of the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services, for 2020. Over the next fiscal year, the Central

Administrative Services Tobago, plans to strengthen the internal capacity of the department as it relates to the flow of information and security, and to invest in equipment that will improve the monitoring of weather systems to allow for more efficient aviation operations at the ANR Robinson International Airport. These projects include computerization and networking where the proposed project will involve the implementation of hardware and software to manage the recording and the flow of information throughout the various departments and the improvement of security at the main office building. We will seek to improve accountability by outfitting and installation of asset and stores inventory management system at the subdivision offices while improving service delivery by further upgrading our registry file tracking system through the use of radio frequency identification, otherwise called RFID, or alternative technology. This will address one of the shortcomings identified in past reports from the Auditor General's Office where issues of asset management and file tracking were identified for OPM-CAST. Through this particular project we are going to address that need to improve and strengthen our internal controls.

The meteorological services will continue to finalize the acquisition and operationalization of automated weather observing systems. This system provides measurement of all parameters which may be needed for safe operations at the airport including, but not limited to, approaching, landing, and take-off. It provides critical information, especially wind shear, which is prevalent at the ANR Robinson International Airport, and has the ability to relay this information directly to the cockpit of the aircraft. The system also provides automatic runway visual range information to aircraft and will be an added layer of safety for aviation interest.

Mr. Vice-President, the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services Tobago, will continue to do all it is empowered to do for the people of Tobago without contravention of the THA Act. We will continue to be that support agent of the State in Tobago and work with all for the betterment of the people of Tobago and the nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, I will now turn my attention to the Tobago House of Assembly. I want to commend the hon. Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development for what I consider to be a fair allocation to the people of Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*] Tobago's allocation of \$2.229 billion represents 4.30 per cent of the national budget; \$1.979 billion is allocated for recurrent expenditure, \$231.63 million for capital expenditure and \$80 million for the Unemployment Relief Programme.

Mr. Vice-President, based on the creditworthiness of the THA and the Minister of Finance granting approval for the THA to utilize bond financing up to \$300 million, the Tobago House of Assembly will be able to access funds for critical projects on the island. This will go a long way in helping to improve the island's development planned agenda, and on behalf of the people of Tobago, I say thank you to the Minister of Finance, thank you to the Minister of Planning and Development and thank you to our hon. Prime Minister.

But, Mr. Vice-President, that is not all that Tobago can expect. Through the work of various Ministries and Government agencies, Tobago will benefit from an additional \$2 billion in direct investment on the island. In reality, Tobago will directly benefit from over \$4 billion, and that is commendable. Central Government's commitment to the people of Tobago is demonstrated through the acquisition of two new fast ferries for the sea bridge. When delivered, these vessels

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will greatly improve the efficiency of the sea bridge. The commencement of a project to establish a breakwater system at Magdalena Grand, along with the planned construction of the new terminal building, will not only attract more flights to Tobago, but improve Tobago's tourism product and help to attract investment by big brand hotels.

Mr. Vice-President, the launch of two coastguard high-speed interceptors on the island of Tobago signals a new era of border security and brought comfort to fisherfolk on the island. The new Shirvan Road Police Station and the construction of the Roxborough Police Station and Fire Station will improve safety and security on the island. These are but a few of the projects being done through central government agencies in Tobago. And through these projects, and a host of other projects on the island, central government has shown that the people of Tobago are valued, the people of Tobago are loved and the people of Tobago will always bloom under the hands of a PNM central government. These projects, Mr. Vice-President, demonstrate the high regard for the people of Tobago and the close working relationship between the THA and central government, a far cry from what we, the people of Tobago, experienced during the period 2010 to 2015. Mr. Vice-President, during the last fiscal, every division of the Tobago House of Assembly was able to take Tobago further along the road of development.

In terms of agriculture, a revised allocation of \$32.4 was provided to facilitate the development of the agricultural sector. This allocation realized the enhancement of the island's capacity for food security. At the Lure and Courland Estates, 4.88 hectares was cultivated with various crops, such as dasheen, pigeon peas, and sweet potatoes; 3,700 cassava sticks; 1,405 sweet potato slips; approximately 1,941 pineapple plants and 175 banana suckers were made available

to farmers in Tobago. At the Louis d'Or nursery, 5,562 fruit and orchard crops; 8,441 ornamentals and 2,286 crates of seedlings were sold to the public.

In the last fiscal, 27 access roads were completed by 15 contractors, thus providing access to more fertile land for crop cultivation. And the Scarborough abattoir was upgraded at a cost of \$0.6 million and the remodelling of the Scarborough market occurred at a cost of \$10.4 million. Mr. Vice-President, agriculture is important to the people of Tobago. Food security is important to the people of Tobago. For us to ensure that we have access to food, for us to ensure that the sector is able to thrive, we must put the support framework in place, and through the opening of the access roads, through the distribution of seedlings and suckers, through the upgrade of the market and the abattoir, we are putting the framework in place to help to boost the agriculture sector and I want to commend the Tobago House of Assembly for making wise use of the money allocated to them for agriculture in Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of infrastructure development, I would just like to highlight a few things. In terms of street lighting, 34 street lights were installed in eight communities at a cost of \$274,196,050 in Tobago. Road rehabilitation works were done in areas such as Windward Road, Richmond, Windward Road, Argyle, Goldfinch, Sou Sou Lands and Pleasant Prospect Trace. Additionally, the Claude Noel Highway was upgraded and resurfacing work was done for the segment between Orange Hill and Rockley Vale at a cost of \$38million.

Outside of that work done in terms of infrastructure, I would like to highlight the work that was done to help to secure the communities that exist along the seafront, places such as Roxborough, Hanging Down in Betsy's Hope, Argyle, where homes were being threatened by erosion. A lot of work was done to help to

The Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

protect the coastline, and we seeing where now a lot of families and businesses are more comfortable, knowing that their properties are no longer under threat. And I want to thank the Secretary for the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment for the hard work that he is doing to help to secure the coastline in Tobago. I also want to highlight the work of the Studley Park Quarry under its new management and in its new creation and formation. That quarry is producing quality material, to not only for use in Tobago, but for use in Trinidad, and for use throughout the region. [*Desk thumping*] I am seeing where rocks coming out from out of my constituency—because Studley Park is in Tobago East—rocks coming out from my constituency, coming to Trinidad to help to stabilize shorelines in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] So I want to really commend the Studley Park Quarry and the management for the work they are doing.

I also want to highlight the work that is being done to improve health care in Tobago. In Roxborough, the sod was turned for the construction of a new hospital. This would go a long way in helping to ease the minds of people in places such as L'Anse Fourmi and Castara and Parlatuvier and Charlottesvillie, who traditionally would have had to traverse all the way to Scarborough. Once the facility is completed, it will bring great relief to Tobagonians living in the East, particularly women of child-bearing age. I remember when I was campaigning, a number of women would have said that a challenge for them is when it is time to give birth, they have to leave their home and go out to a community closer to the hospital for sometimes a week in advance to prepare, because getting from Hermitage to Signal Hill would take some time and you might have a baby on the road. So I want to really commend the central government and the THA for making the Roxborough Hospital a priority project.

I also want to speak to public transportation in terms of what is being done to improve the PTSC service in Tobago. The management and staff of PTSC would have collaborated with the Tobago House of Assembly and with the elected representatives to ensure that the service delivery is improved. Coming out from various consultations and discussions with PTSC, we have seen where places such as L'Anse Fourmi and Castara would now have a better, more reliable, predictable, bus service for the communities. Additionally, they would have recently reintroduced the harbour master service, which is a late-night service, from Scarborough to those rural communities. That would benefit persons who not only work outside Scarborough, but young persons who go to school in Scarborough and those other communities, that they would get back home safely through the bus service in the community.

I also want to note that in terms of border control and our security on land and sea, when the Minister of National Security came to Tobago to launch the two high speed interceptors, he also took the opportunity to do a walk through Charlottesville, and we would have highlighted certain services that need to be upgraded as well as certain actions that need to be taken to help to improve the delivery of health care in Charlottesville. So a decision was taken by the Minister of National Security to have his agents move out of the facility that is currently housing immigration. That is the Charlottesville health facility. The THA would have provided a building for them, so they will be moving into that facility and the Charlottesville health facility will be used for its purpose, which is the delivery of health care. And that is being done because there is meaningful collaboration, again, between Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly.

In terms of education, we are seeing where the THA is moving towards

improving the whole delivery of education in Tobago and helping to empower our teachers, as well as our students. This year Tobago will have done remarkably well, having some of our students placed in the top 200 and the top 100 nationally, and I want to commend the THA for the work they are doing [*Desk thumping*] by providing those remedial services for students who were not successful, by providing a training facility for teachers so that they could get in-service training in Tobago. We are working towards building the next generation of Tobagonians so that they are more empowered and more equipped to take Tobago forward on this journey of development.

Mr. Vice-President, life in Tobago is not perfect, but life in Tobago is good, and it is good because, as Tobagonians, we remain resilient and committed and focused on the development of our island and our nation. We will continue to face challenges but we will also overcome them, because we are very firm and steadfast in our belief that we, as a people, we can achieve and do all that we set out minds to. So as we embrace the opportunity provided to us through the allocation in this budget, we look to the future with hope. We look to the future with a firm belief that Tobago will continue to bloom, continue to blossom, continue to prosper under this administration. Mr. Vice-President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Haynes. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Anita Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. It is indeed my pleasure to contribute on this, the last debate on a budget from a Mr. Keith Rowley administration. [*Desk thumping*] The country is on the verge of breathing a sigh of relief, Mr. Vice-President. The feeling is palpable that the end of their tenure is near. Trinidad and Tobago is about to wake up from the end of a four-year nightmare.

Hon. Senator: Yes.

Sen. A. Haynes: Now, Mr. Vice-President, it was during a budget response in the House of Representatives this year that the Government saw it fit to rush and call a local government election. [*Desk thumping*] We can only hope [*Crosstalk*]*—yes, we do want you to call the election. You are very right. And so it is our hope that at some point in time today or tomorrow they will rush quickly and call the general election. [Desk thumping]*

Sen. Ameen: Call the general election “one time”. Yes. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. A. Haynes: I know the Minister of Labour—[*Crosstalk*] The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, I see is particularly excited for an election, so excited that she put her resignation in before the population—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: I am still a member of the Government. “All yuh wish that eh.”

Sen. A. Haynes: You put the population—she did what the population—
[*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Ameen: You said so on the national television. You said this is your last term. “Yuh say yuh ready tuh go home.”

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Thunder for “all yuh”.

Mr. Vice-President: So, again, we have gotten to a point where the crosstalk on the floor is above the voice of the Member contributing. When that happens, I cannot hear the person speaking and therefore it becomes very difficult to preside. As such, be mindful of the level of the crosstalk so that it does not elevate above the speaker. Continue, Sen. Haynes.

Sen. A. Haynes: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] Now, Mr. Vice-President, it was not expected that the opening of my contribution generated some excitement from

the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, but as I was saying, the Minister took in front to say that she will not be going back next year, but you could have made the same statement for each and every one. [*Desk thumping*]
Most of them will not be around next year. [*Crosstalk*]

And then, you know, Mr. Vice-President, as I listened to the Government during the course of this debate yesterday and in the House, it has never been more clear to me that we are dealing with a group of people who could not be more out of touch of the reality of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Trade and Industry continues to be the clearest example of somebody who is out of touch with reality—the clearest example. Because on one hand you can talk to a population—and we are certain you are not speaking to anybody outside of the Balisier House brigade, because on the one hand you can come and tell us food prices have decreased; the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and with responsibility for Gender Affairs told us life is good; the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development told us employment is good. So is it that whatever is going on over there, life is nice for them, but the rest of the population; all of the rest of us, we are lying, or not telling the truth?

Hon. Senator: You will lose your deposits.

Sen. A. Haynes: Lose our deposits? Mr. Vice-President, it is the same level of “boldfaceness” that allows the Minister of Trade and Industry to stand here today and say: “PNM did this; PNM did that”, and want to take responsibility for everything, including being in government for the majority of years since our independence, but not take responsibility for the systemic decay that we are facing [*Desk thumping*] in Trinidad and Tobago. It is the same level of “boldfaceness” that will allow you after four years to say, “We will get this done.” When?

You see, year one, you told us we will get some of these things done, and I will give examples of things that they have been promising year after year after year. And year two, the population may say, “Okay, we will give them a little chance. They will get something done.” By year three it was a pappyshow. That was the year of the “Turnaround”. Right? “We will get this done. You will get things by 2019”, et cetera. But by this year, after having done nothing for four years, to stand up here and tell us next year, I mean, you cannot be taking the people of Trinidad and Tobago seriously. You are trying to pappyshow an entire nation, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Sad. Sad.

Sen. A. Haynes: Now, I have a lot of responses that I have to give to the contributions that were delivered here yesterday, but I want to first underscore something that is very important, and it is very important to most of the young people that are listening and tuning into this debate today. And I want to underscore the importance of what the Leader of the Opposition did on Friday, 11 October, 2019. The Minister of Trade and Industry tried to diminish the economic transformation plan, and I do not fault them for that, right? Because if you cannot dream big for yourself—they set a low standard for themselves, a very low bar. [*Desk thumping*] So it is not surprising that you cannot aim higher. There is a remarkable lack of ambition on that side and I will get to that shortly.

However, by presenting an economic transformation plan to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is a signal that the United National Congress is seeking to introduce new politics into Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] politics that is prepared to face an election campaign, to face an electorate with a proper plan to take Trinidad and Tobago forward, a plan that we are willing to have everyone

critique, participate in and discuss.

But, you see, the PNM does not know about that, Mr. Vice-President. They are not familiar with that. I remember in 2014, I believe it was, the Opposition Leader at the time and now Prime Minister, saying, “We will not discuss our plans because somebody might steal it.” Pedestrian. Right, Mr. Vice-President? So what are we voting on if you are not going to tell us what you are going to do when you are getting in government?

Sen. Ameen: They have no plans.

Sen. A. Haynes: Now, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development said it yesterday and repeated it today in crosstalk, about the Leader of the Opposition, and I guess she is very concerned about how often she gets to see the Leader of the Opposition. [*Crosstalk*] But I can tell you where you can find the Leader of the Opposition—

Sen. Ameen: Not on the golf course.

Sen. A. Haynes:—doing the work necessary—

Sen. Ameen: Where is your leader?

Sen. A. Haynes:—to build a government for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] You know, the funny thing is—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, as well as other Members on the other side, I continue from yesterday into today to have to remind you all that when you shout across the floor like that I cannot hear the Member that is contributing, whether they are on my right or whether they are on my left. Please allow the Members to make their contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Haynes: Thank you, again, Mr. Vice-President. The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development is probably seeking to make up for all the times

that she was unable to contribute to significant debates in this Parliament— [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Sen. Ameen: Hiding from the Petrotrin workers all the time.

Sen. A. Haynes:—trying to make up for lost time in crosstalk. But when you come to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and when you face the people of Trinidad and Tobago, when you are talking about the possibility of getting into government, you have to offer the people of Trinidad and Tobago something. This is an administration that came in, Mr. Vice-President, having presented no—and articulated no plans to get Trinidad and Tobago moving forward.

Sen. Ameen: That is right. They still have no plan.

Sen. A. Haynes: But you know what they did, Mr. Vice-President? And as I stood for my debate today, today in the Commonwealth Journal of Lawyers there is an article published on Emailgate and the Emailgate saga and what it meant for parliamentary privilege. And it is interesting that I was standing here to speak today and I am going through what kind of Trinidad and Tobago we hope to create, and that article will be published today, because that is the genesis of the problem that we had, and you are seeing it here again, that you have a political entity such as the PNM that is willing to face the electorate on things that they are, quite frankly, just making up, pieces of paper that you brought to Parliament, made up a scandal, made up an entire scandal and face the electorate on that. And they are doing that again today, introducing things—

Hon. Senator: Abusing parliamentary privilege.

Sen. A. Haynes:—into the debate that are not relevant to the electorate—

Sen. Ameen: “How much contract yuh get in the FCL boy?”

Sen. A. Haynes: “All yuh talking too loud.” So, Mr. Vice-President, when you talk

to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, what we have done, as Sen. Sobers indicated yesterday, under the mandate of our political leader, is before we approach the Parliament to speak on behalf of people, that we must do so on the back of budget consultations; that we must do so on the back of the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we are seeking to represent.

12.00 noon

And what Mrs. Persad-Bissessar did? One, by not only introducing a more mature political discourse by giving our economic transformation plan well in advance of an election campaign, but also by—and this was instructive from Sen. Drayton's contribution yesterday. Because a number of things that Sen. Drayton raised we have addressed in our economic transformation plan [*Desk thumping*] and we were able to do so because of the leadership of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar having invited more persons to the decision-making table and you get a younger generation of people.

So I heard the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development shouting out you all need to get more experience, but we do have experience. The world that we live in today, the world that they created, the Trinidad and Tobago that successive PNM administrations created, is a very difficult world for people who are under 40 years old in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Very difficult world. And then—[*Interruption*] I was educated in the United States of America.

Sen. Ameen: Mr. Vice-President, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, continuously man.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Yes, I am following you.

Sen. Obika: This cross talking—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Obika and Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise

Development, we have been going quite nicely for the last three hours. Every time I have to raise to my feet the clock does not stop, it continues, and it interrupts the speaker. Going forward I will be giving no more warnings, I will just act. Continue, Member.

Sen. A. Haynes: Mr. Vice-President, the goal is interruption, because when you have nothing to contribute to national development what you try to do is destroy. [*Desk thumping*] That is all you could try to do. So it is not shocking, but what we—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ameen.

Sen. Ameen: The Minister.

Mr. Vice-President: No!

Sen. Ameen: I apologize. Control the Minister, “nah”. I apologize.

Mr. Vice-President: Continue, Member.

Sen. A. Haynes: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I am going to deal right now with this OJT Programme, because when we talk about creating jobs is because it is a very serious issue to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Trade and Industry treated it like a joke. The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development continues to show that the substance of the issue escapes her and, so therefore, Mr. Vice-President, what we are talking about when we look at the OJT Programme, you would recall earlier this year, in the mid-year review, the Government came and asked us to give \$39 million into the programme, and Sen. Drayton raised the point, and Sen. Deonarine on a previous occasion raised the point, that throwing money at our problems is not going to solve it, and that is what we have a Government doing here today, but I want to just show that they have a pattern and a record of failed promises.

So in the preparation for this debate—because this is not just looking at the appropriation for fiscal 2020. You have to look at the track record of the Government that is before us, because as they go forward and they tell you something is going to happen next year, you have to see what their track record was like. Do you know, Mr. Vice-President, that in the very first budget delivered by the Minister of Finance, there was a statement by the Minister of Finance talking about a graduate recruitment programme, and I am going to quote from the budget delivered in October 2015. The Minister of Finance stated, and I quote here:

“...in view of the fact that we have so many unemployed or underemployed university graduates in our country today, we are introducing a Graduate Recruitment Programme in 2016, in all 23 Ministries and...Tobago. In the first instance, I propose to provide \$55 million for employment of at least 20...university graduates in each Ministry”—with—“a suitable amount in Tobago”—for—“a total of 500 graduates. The programme will be designed to utilise core competencies of these graduates in their various areas of study.”

This year, in the Standing Finance Committee, the same Minister of Finance who delivered that statement, told us that no one was employed under the Graduate Recruitment Programme.

You see, Mr. Vice-President, they are in the habit of coming and making promises, of coming and telling the population we are going to do this, and then after four years had the unmitigated gall to say nobody was hired, but trust us when we say we are increasing the number of OJTs to 8,000. You did not do anything in four years and in the last year by magic? We cannot accept that. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, they seem to now be emerging from a four-year slumber, realizing today that youth employment and underemployment are serious concerns, but failing to realize when they talk about it that the problem is that our youths are victims of a broken system and they are not offering solutions but rather throwing money at a problem and it would lead to nothing sustainable.

You see, I listened to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development yesterday, and if, Mr. Vice-President, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development had anything of substance to contribute, she would have been able to tell us, so far, with the \$39 million additional allocation this year, and in the four years of the tenure of this particular Minister, what the OJT Programme would have accomplished, or what added value this PNM administration gave to the OJT Programme. You see, the Minister came out and read what the mandate of the programme is, and then told us that the goal is that you would go in and work for the private sector and that at the end of your two-year tenure you will be retained in that job because you would have been sufficiently impressive.

Now, any responsible Minister that would use this time to account to the public, and account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, would have come here with numbers [*Desk thumping*] because people would have been in the OJT Programme since the beginning of the tenure of the Minister. People would have gone into the system, spent two years, the Minister must have some sort of record of how many persons would have been retained; how many persons are currently employed within the system; how many persons have benefited from this programme that we continuously put money towards.

You see the thing is, this is what you—when you have a government that is

willing to always set a very low bar for themselves, you can just say that, look, we hired a number of persons, and then tell us nothing about went beyond because they are not interested in a conversation about nation building. They are not interested in a conversation about national development, they are interested in old politics, old picong and bacchanal, and that is why they will not be elected in the next round [*Desk thumping*] because people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Vice-President, are quite frankly absolutely fed-up of this kind of tripe. Absolutely fed-up. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, when you are talking about employment—and Sen. Drayton raised it yesterday, and I have it here in terms of what our UNC government intends to do. But, when you are talking about youth employment, and you are talking about sustainable employment—now I remember the now Minister of Public Administration telling us that the young people in Trinidad and Tobago do not wish to have sustainable employment because we like to move around, transition, so that it is why it make sense to have this two-year employment stint. But you know, when I listened to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development as she spoke about they increase the allocations, it was very clear that the Minister had no overarching policy for this OJT Programme—no overarching policy.

You see, was there any conversation? Were they ever thinking about a conversation between the Ministry of Education and the OJT Programme? Were they trying to align our developmental goals in any way to the OJT Programme? Is there an actual focus on youth employment, or is it simply a way to mamaguy a number of voters in the next election year? Are you telling the people, the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, that what we will do is give you two years and

then dangle that two years in front of you and say, listen you will get a 10 per cent increase, there will be an increase in the number of you that will take part in the programme”, but then nothing beyond that?

You know, Mr. Vice-President, it is the elements of this PNM administration where, one, they have a problem with prioritization, because I could hear in the crosstalk the Minister of Trade and Industry talking about which money, if we left any money for them to do X, Y, Z. This is the Minister that found the money for the pool. [*Desk thumping*] This is the Government that found money to build Office of the Prime Minister in Tobago. They are building palaces and castles, but they cannot find money to invest in the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] again because they are incapable of sensible governance—incapable.

Mr. Vice-President, this Government has failed to put job creation at the heart of any of their policy decisions, or any of the developmental plans, and to have the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development come in and talk about an increase in employment regionally and make no mention of what employment is in Trinidad and Tobago right now, and then still having the gall to say that is the facts. What does the employment figures regionally have to do with the unemployed people in Trinidad and Tobago right now? [*Desk thumping*] And then to use a 2018 figure in the year that you sent so many people home and tell us that employment is better for who?

When we are in communities, Mr. Vice-President, the number one issue facing people of Trinidad and Tobago today, jobs. They want jobs. They are not asking for handouts, they are not asking for grant. They are asking for the opportunity to earn a decent wage, and that is where they failed. They have failed at creating opportunity [*Desk thumping*] and want to come and tell us about hope.

Mr. Vice-President, Senator—and the Minister of Trade and Industry said it today. She said we talked about job creation and whether we created jobs for our people, and I will let the Minister of Trade and Industry know today the people of Trinidad and Tobago are in fact UNC people. So you are right, we are creating jobs for our people. We are creating jobs for the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and that is something that they are all unfamiliar with.

So when you want to come after being part of an administration that has stifled the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, that has made life so difficult for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and then want to tell us about who we are creating jobs for. You cannot speak the language of job creation because you simply do not know it. [*Desk thumping*] The Prime Minister in the PowerPoint to the nation was okay with saying they only lost 30,000 of the 55,000 jobs that the UNC created. So you have created no jobs, you have lost a certain number of jobs—and the numbers are skewed, eh. The numbers are skewed because between empirical evidence and anecdotal evidence you know that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are struggling right now to find work and to find sustainable employment, and that is as a direct result of their failed economic policies. [*Desk thumping*]

Yesterday when Sen. Drayton was speaking, he gave the stories of Sita and Kevin, and those of us who are within our general age group are very familiar with that story. That is a story we know all too well. You can graduate from university and be extraordinarily worried about how you are going to make your way in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Vice-President. There is no guarantee of this good life that they are promising. I do not know who they are speaking to, but there is no guarantee that you are going to make it in Trinidad and Tobago after having done every single thing that you could possibly do to live on the straight and narrow.

But when we spoke about creating 50,000 jobs by 2025 and then going through to give the detail of how we intend to do that, it is because we understand, as a country, as a political entity, what we must do is motivate and inspire a population to greater heights, something that they are incapable of.

And so, we have spoken about the training and skills in various areas, and shown again in detail how we would align all our policies from our education policies to things like training, and skill training and development, and the thrust towards creating 50,000 jobs by 2025. And again, as I said before, we understand that it is an ambitious goal but it is a very doable goal, but what you need is the right kind of leadership and the kind leadership that would put all the aspects into work and push towards creating jobs for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

You see, they have always asked us, Members of the Government—and I know they mean it pejoratively, but they asked us why you all join the UNC? How you find yourselves there is the usual language they are trying to use and make a joke out of it, but they are right about one thing. When you look at the Opposition Bench in the Senate it is a younger Bench. It is a younger Bench because young people in Trinidad and Tobago right now are making a decision, an informed and educated decision, to join the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] The reasons that we would have done that, Mr. Vice-President, is because we understand that their generation of leaders, the people that are sitting on the Government Bench right now have failed the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They have failed to effectively represent our needs, they have no clue as a matter of fact what our needs are, and they speak a language that quite frankly we cannot understand because they are committed to a politics of the past, committed to an old school approach to political endeavours, which is

why you can hear a tighten your belt in 2015 and see a massive road paving programme in 2019 because the money appeared out of nowhere right before an election year. That is the type of politics that the population will reject outright in 2020.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, what people are calling for is effective representation of their needs, and to do so you must communicate with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot sit in your office, you cannot drive around in your fancy car and then come here and tell me food prices low because you say so. Impossible! I want to also—the Minister of the Trade and Industry repeated a statement designed to fearmonger among the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, that is, that we intend to devalue the dollar. You see, when I told you they are committed to emailgate politics, I was not joking eh. Making things up out of thin air, you know, to come here and tell us businesses will close down because Kamla wants to devalue the dollar, when none of that was said.

You see, Mr. Vice-President, the Leader of the Opposition would have said that as it stands right now Trinidad and Tobago cannot afford to continue on the path that this PNM administration has set us upon; that we cannot continue to live by accumulating more and more debt and by depleting hard earned foreign exchange reserves; and that Government must contain expenditures and must also facilitate national development, and that the Central Bank must strengthen our monetary policy stance. You see, they heard things like that and came up with one line that we intend to devalue the dollar. We want to reject that outright. [*Desk thumping*]

I have to also reject another piece of absolute PNM propaganda outright, and that is on the issue of Petrotrin and the refinery. From day one, we have

maintained a call for transparency and accountability when it comes to the matters of Petrotrin—from day one. Going side by side with that, from day one we have stood and advocated for the fair treatment of the workers and the employees of the Petrotrin refinery. None of that has changed today.

I stood here on several occasions, Mr. Vice-President, in defence of the Petrotrin employees and the Petrotrin workers, and those—you know, Mr. Vice-President, this is the same Government, the same group of people that stood time and time again seeking to vilify those very employees of Petrotrin, and we must not forget, we must not forget, the consistent narrative going from this Government against Petrotrin employees.

I pulled an article because you are hearing from the Government and their agents that the UNC is trying to keep the refinery shut. That could never be anything further from the truth. It is this PNM administration, this Keith Rowley administration that shut down Petrotrin in the first place. [*Desk thumping*] When you talk about the job losses, when you talk about the situation facing Petrotrin employees today that is a direct result of a decision that they took, a decision that they still to this day cannot justify. And you know, you listened and we understand, that there is great political capital in creating and modelling the narrative around Petrotrin, but let us keep some of the facts in this matter very clear.

August 2018, you made a decision to shut down Petrotrin. By September 2018, you said to the workers they were going up and down talking about who was \$45,000 a month, and that the Petrotrin workers bankrupt the country. Those are facts. They are well documented in our national history. When we look back, Mr. Vice-President, at the tenure of this Government, as much as they will try, as much

as they will try now to say that this is not their fault and the plight that these workers are facing right now is not their fault, and now you are offering what appears to be an olive branch, but you still are not offering any concrete job creation. You are not saying how many of them will be reemployed, you know. You are not saying how many persons will get their jobs back. You are again just throwing something out there and hoping it would stick.

So I want to urge, Mr. Vice-President, that as we continue to have a national discourse about a billion dollar asset of our country, that we do so in a very sensible manner because the actions and decisions taken by the Government today affects generations of Trinidadians and Tobagonians—generations—and they may be able—because they have done it in the past and apparently every main committed to that kind of thing, but you may be able to play politics with billions of dollars, billion dollar assets, but the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as I said before, will reject that kind of politics outright in the future.

Mr. Vice-President, as I say before, they have a level of shamelessness that, I mean, it is unprecedented, and I looked at the healthcare promises. Do you know that that Point Fortin Hospital in a previous budget, the Minister of Finance said it would be operational by September 2019? You know that?

Hon. Member: “It coming”.

Sen. A. Haynes: Yeah, it is coming. We know, and he is standard. Coming soon is their standard refrain, that it would operational by September 2019. It is October 2019, and that is what I am talking about when I say shamelessness you know. Because if that were me, Mr. Vice-President, I would not be able to still sit there and say it is coming. It is coming soon when the date has already passed, not once, but twice. This is not the first time. They have set a target, revised the target in a

budget, and then come to tell us “coming soon”.

Mr. Vice-President, the number of promises in this budget, and the previous budgets that were repeated and taken over and over, and—[*Interruption*]

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

Sen. A. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President—that the Government repeated while having failed to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it makes me wonder if it is possible when they are going to canvass the population for their votes, are they really brave enough to go and knock on anybody’s door and shake anybody’s hand? Because, Mr. Vice-President, what we are hearing—when we were on walkabout earlier this week, what I am hearing is—be careful when you are out there you know because people, they are not going to tie their dogs when you come. They are set and waiting for most of you.

You know, I wish the Minister of Public Utilities was here. I listened to him in the Standing Finance Committee. Almost at the same time the Minister was in the Standing Finance Committee, we were in a community in Grande, and in that community they were telling us that they had no water for well over two months and that they have a water problem that is ongoing and recurring. They were trying to figure out how it is that 2010—2015 they had water, and then all of a sudden they cannot get water now.

Sen. Obika: Rain stop falling.

Sen. A. Haynes: Yeah, rain stop falling in the reservoir.

Mr. Vice-President, you know, I repeat most of the times and I try to give the Government, as best as I can, because my goal here, and all our goals on this side, on this Bench, is national development. And so, I say to them most of the times that people are looking on at you; people are listening to what you are

saying; they are looking at your behaviour; they can recognize that you have repeated promises; they do not trust the things you are saying; they are looking at what you are presenting to the population; and they are also looking at us. They are looking at us as well. You see the thing is, the United National Congress has said we are committed to a policy of national development, we are committed to working to get Trinidad and Tobago working again. [*Desk thumping*] So we have no problem with scrutiny. We have no problem with our accountability because the choice is clear.

We have shown our commitment to bringing more persons to the decision-making table. When we speak the language of transformation, we are also showing the actions of transformation. It is very clear from what you are saying from a United National Congress, our new approaches to policy making, decision making, our new approaches to politics, is what will create the Trinidad and Tobago that we want to see. And you know that when—people are looking on at you, and what you say if you do not do the actions that correlate to what you are saying, nobody will believe what you are saying. And so, when we approach the electorate we do so with a coherent plan for national development, we do so with a proven track record of delivery, and we can hold our heads high because we are ambitious, but we have shown that we can do the work to take Trinidad and Tobago far, and I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Communications (Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Allow me to express my sincerest thanks to you for the opportunity to join this debate today on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2020) Bill, 2019. As I do so, Mr. Vice-President, let me say how honoured I am to have been afforded the opportunity to return to the service of the people of Trinidad and

Tobago in this capacity. In my maiden speech in this august Chamber, I feel duty-bound, even compelled to offer gratitude to God, and to my mother who has been traversing with me, and to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for the confidence he has sought in me. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, at one point while listening, I thought that this debate was about the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. You see, what happens, Mr. Vice-President, is that nobody likes to hear about the good of the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] and whenever anyone speaks about it, it riles them up and they kick and scream, but I move on.

As you are aware, and indeed I am sure and my fellow Senators gathered here too, I spent a number of years serving in one of the diplomatic missions abroad, and in the interface with the persons abroad they always say, "You know, you all do not know how good you have it in Trinidad and Tobago", because of the fact that they live there and we are here. They always comment about the fact that we have it so nice, and we think that they are doing well, but they wish they were here. There are some who comment negatively, of course, about the country because sometimes it is what they hear, but then the conversation would turn to how much harder it is for them in the diaspora to eke out a living.

You see, Mr. Vice-President, if you find yourself unemployed abroad make sure and find a soup kitchen somewhere, because there is not a neighbour, or a Tantie, or an "aajee", or "aajaa", that you could visit and you sure you will get a plate of food and even some to carry home.

If you find yourself evicted for whatever reason, there is no uncle or aunt or "nennen" you could visit and you sure would get a place to rest your head.

Actually, you may have to look for a homeless shelter. So outside there, it could be cold and impersonal at times and it is every man for himself, and you would at times end up wondering why did you ever leave sweet Trinidad and Tobago.

12.30 p.m.

So that is why, Mr. Vice-President, when I listened to the Minister of Finance's budget presentation some weeks ago, and I want to commend him for his presentation, [*Desk thumping*] and I listened to that of my colleague's presentation, the Minister of Public Administration and Minister in the Ministry of Finance, I could not help but smile to myself because for me, it was even further evidence of this Government's ensuring that the average citizen of this country could still provide for their basic needs and could still find comfort in knowing that there is a Government in office who will look after persons in every strata of society and could also reflect on how much has been accomplished with so much less.

I move to day-care centres, Mr. Vice-President. It was my own journey as a single woman that caused me to applaud the Minister of Finance when he announced the establishment of day-care centres in communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago so that single parents with children under the age of three will now have an additional option open to them. The National Parenting Policy of Trinidad and Tobago categorized single parents in Trinidad and Tobago as a vulnerable group and that policy-cited research which found that while single parents provided a similar level of child care as coupled parents, they were at a higher level risk of poverty and experienced higher levels of financial challenges and unemployment. Studies also found that children of single parents demonstrate lower levels of academic achievement with consequent limited employment prospects.

So, Mr. Vice-President, put simply, what these studies are saying is that single parents, while doing their best, are in dire need of help and no longer will single parents be denied the opportunity to return to gainful and meaningful employment because they cannot afford the cost of day care. No longer will single parents be denied the opportunity to return to school because they do not trust to leave their children in the care of persons who are untrained or ill-equipped to handle the children. No longer will single mothers be denied the luxury of self-care because the toddlers' ever-present needs always take precedent over hers. This simple yet significant act of providing day-care centres for single parents, Mr. Vice-President, opens up a broad spectrum of opportunities for those who need it most. So when people talk about "what did the Government do", this about the single parents is very, very, very important.

With respect to GAPP, one of the critical pull factors that allowed me to more easily make the decision to return home from abroad was the facility provided here by this Trinidad and Tobago Government to care for the elderly, including my own mother. I am sure all of us in this Chamber would move the highest mountain to ensure that our mothers, indeed our parents, are provided with adequate care in their winter years. Today, this Government offers such care on a 24-hour basis to elderly through the Geriatric Adolescents Partnership Programme or GAPP. [*Desk thumping*] And let us face it, today's world is better at understanding the emotional labour and the countless hours child care takes from families, but there is still much work to be done on what it takes to care for the elderly and its impact on everyone's well-being, financially, and mental health.

The growth of the older population means that there is a greater need of caregivers which is why the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

introduced GAPP. For those unfamiliar with GAPP, it is intensive, short-term, intergenerational training programme that imparts knowledge and skills about elder care to young persons, and trainees are actively engaged in classroom sessions and are supervised in field placement in private homes and institutional settings in the trainees' community. And I just want to say too that you know, this is one of the other programmes, like OJT, that is well thought out. The objectives are to develop a sense of self-worth and self-discipline among young people and to help bridge the gap between young people and the elderly. This allows for more effective interaction, positive outcomes and the development of caring skills and so essentially, GAPP fosters a sense of self-worth, discipline and national consciousness in our young people who can now interface effectively with the older adults.

I would know because I am benefiting from this programme and have seen the effect it has had on my mom. So those who might dismiss GAPP as just another made-up social programme, there are studies which found that intergenerational care contributed and improved the quality of life for the young and old and had lasting positive effects on everyone.

Mr. Vice-President, you know, when I was abroad, my mom was with me and my mom was ill. She was in and out of the hospital and it was very tough for me because, of course, I was not entitled to home care for my mom. So this was a very difficult situation where your mom was bedridden and—she became bedridden actually while we were there and in and out of the hospital. No assistance because of the fact that, you know, everybody is busy, I had to work and could not afford the level of home care because it was so expensive. So as a matter of fact, almost every cent that I made is what I had to pay people to stay home with

my mom because I had to ensure that she was well taken care of because I know that she well took care of me in my formative years. And I want to say and I want to commend the Government of Trinidad and Tobago because I am now a beneficiary of this GAPP programme and I have a testimony where that is concerned. [*Desk thumping*] Because of the fact that now there is someone who takes care of her at least from 8.00 to 4.00, and I am hoping that, you know, soon, we will, you know, have the programme adjusted that we may have another shift on to assist. So I just want to thank the Government of Trinidad and Tobago because this has been really beneficial for me and I know a lot of persons have been benefiting from it and we must speak our success stories. We must speak what is good. All right? Although persons could get upset about it but it is a PNM Government that has instituted this and a lot of persons in this country, thousands, are benefiting from it. [*Desk thumping*]

Similarly, Mr. Vice-President, the establishment of additional shelters for victims of domestic violence. Domestic abuse represents an increase in the options available for women in particular and this is another programme which is geared towards persons who have been abused. Traditionally, women who find themselves in such unfortunate situations often have to endure the added torture of not having a secure and safe space available to them. And while that is one Government building we hope will never be utilized, we cannot afford to bury our collective heads in the proverbial sand and pretend that the need either does not exist or that there are currently sufficient spaces to which a victim of intimate partner violence can easily find safety. The success of any Government and the mark of a maturing, caring society is found in the emphasis that is placed on those who often stand on the periphery of the society; the widows and orphans, and the

poor and the elderly. And these three measures alone; the provision of day-care centres for single parents, care for the elderly and the establishment of safe houses for victims of domestic violence, are tangible evidence of a Government that knows and accepts its responsibility for the creation of a just and caring society.

Mr. Vice-President, I move to the increase in the minimum wage. More than that, the increase in the minimum wage which puts an additional \$400 in pockets of minimum wage earners every month might appear miniscule to some who occupy seats either here or in the other place but that means a whole lot to the nearly 200,000 persons who will benefit, and that extra \$400 could very well mean a single mother not having to work an extra shift and be able to pay for her child who is sitting the SEA exam. That extra \$400 a month, combined eventually with the establishment of the day-care centres for single parents, could make the entire difference between someone settling into a minimum wage job with little hope of advancement, and a young, bright individual breaking the cycle of poverty to which they might have grown accustomed. And that is why it never ceases to amaze me, Mr. Vice-President, when I hear those of us who now find ourselves in positions to assist others, deprecate the efforts of those who seek to do so.

For while we in this Senate and our colleagues in the other place are guaranteed a meal at lunch time or tea time in the dining area upstairs, we are unsure whether the persons who serve us those meals had anything to eat themselves and therefore would rejoice at the extra \$400 in their salary at the end of the month end. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, I want to offer a word of caution to my friends on the opposite Bench who heap scorn on this measure because we must never forget where we came from because all of this, and I repeat, all of this is just temporary.

I move to the OJT Programme.

Sen. Obika: Standing Order 46(4), Mr. Vice-President. We never heap scorn on anything, it is offensive, with respect.

Mr. Vice-President: Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. D. Cox: Mr. Vice-President, there is no mean to be offensive but I recognize that the truth offends. I move to the OJT Programme. How many times have we heard our young graduates in particular—and I heard Sen. Haynes made some comments about the OJT Programme and I just want to say that, how many times have we heard our young graduates in particular and our young people complain about not getting a job because they do not have work experience you know, so I do not want us to diminish the importance of the OJT Programme in any way, because many times, persons cannot get a job because people are looking for someone with experience and that OJT Programme provides very good experience for persons who wish to move on of course.

In 2002, under a PNM Government, that changed. Thanks to the conceptualization and the rollout of the On-The-Job Training Programme, close to 5,000 of our young persons—and I heard the Senator asked for figures. Close to 5,000 of our young citizens are now provided with 24 solid months of paid work experience. But that is not what attracted much chatter and media attention I realize, it was the announcement by the Minister of Finance that the stipends of these trainees will be increased by 10 per cent from December 01, 2019, and he also announced that the programme will now be able to accommodate 8,000 citizens. An increase of that allows just about 3,000 more of our citizens to get much more work experience which is needed. And what this means is that at over a two-year period, 8,000 young persons [*Desk thumping*] who are between the ages

of 16 and 35 will gain practical work experience both in the private and public sector and statistics from the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development—and the Minister spoke earlier on—show that the OJTs are placed without discrimination in jobs throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

More so, the Ministry continues to work with employers to ensure that there are training plans to develop these trainees who are seeking much-needed work experience and a plan is in train to expand the current list of employers to include a wider range of private sector and state enterprises. So I heard that, you know, “there is no plan”, but I think that the Senator just has to do some more homework because it is all there for you, [*Desk thumping*] it is all there. This plan will ensure that trainees are matched as closely as possible to their qualifications and of course, this provides them with the opportunity to gain experiences which are applicable to their career path. For this reason, if no other, this is why the OJT Programme is critical to Trinidad and Tobago and our changing world of work.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I heard some people criticizing the increase for OJTs on the basis that the stipends are already high and therefore, the OJTs would be unable to re-adjust to the private sector where the salaries are much lower. That is what we are hearing. But for the record, Mr. Vice-President, we are going to have figures. The stipends paid to OJTs are as follows: Level 1, CXC, Craft Level Training, \$2750; Level 2, CAPE, A Level, Diploma, \$3,960; Level 3, Associate Degree, \$4,950; Level 4, Undergraduate Degree, \$6,875; Level 5, Postgraduate Degree, \$7,920. At the lowest end, therefore, the 10 per cent increase would amount to a mere \$275, while at the postgraduate level, the increase would amount to \$792.

So I would like any Member of the Opposition to tell this Chamber where in the private sector does someone with postgraduate qualifications currently earn less than \$8,000 per month, and if they can point me out to that, then—[*Crosstalk*] I am being disturbed, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Obika, please. Sen. Obika.

Sen. The Hon. D. Cox: I need injury time, please, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, as you would know, there is no injury time in this Chamber. [*Laughter*] Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. D. Cox: Thank you very much. So I was speaking about the OJT Programme, Mr. Vice-President, that they do not want to hear about because what they were saying was not true, pertaining to the OJT Programme so I understand why the Senator would start to rile again. So, Mr. Vice-President, if they can point me to a direction where they would find someone with a postgraduate degree getting less than \$8,000 per month, then I would like them to tell me if they think that that is a fair wage.

I move to NALIS which is in the Ministry of Communication. Trinidad and Tobago's rate of recidivism is unacceptably high and many view the prison system as a revolving door rather than a place of rehabilitation, where the freedom that comes with restorative justice replaces the self-imposed prisons of retribution and revenge. It is for this reason that the National Library and Information System Authority, which we would call NALIS, has ensured that there are libraries in the Women's Prison, in the Maximum Prison, the Youth Training Centre and the Port of Spain prison.

And during this fiscal year, Mr. Vice-President, it is our intention to widen the scope to include a library in the Remand Yard at Golden Grove, the Eastern

Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility in Santa Rosa and the Tobago prison. And we are also going to ensure that similar facilities are available to those participating in the MiLAT and MYPART Programmes so that they too can benefit from the world of opportunities that come from assessing a properly stocked library. More than ensuring that libraries can be found in each of our penal institutions, NALIS is currently working on a plan which would ensure that sufficiently qualified and recommended inmates of these institutions be trained and employed under the OJT Programme again, I want to repeat that, under the OJT Programme again to provide library services during their period of incarceration.

So, Mr. Vice-President, you and I have heard the horror stories of what happens to families when their loved ones are incarcerated and if they were the previous breadwinners of the family, I want this Chamber to envisage for a minute the possibility of someone who is incarcerated and earning a monthly stipend with which they can still take care of their family. Moreover, envisage again the possibility of that incarcerated person being able to help the family of his or her victim whom they might have robbed of a breadwinner as well. That, Mr. Vice-President, goes to the heart of restorative justice. I wait with bated breath for the launch of this programme. There is already one success story where a previous inmate of the Women's Prison, having served her sentence, is now gainfully employed through the OJT Programme in a library in the east. She is doing phenomenally well and serves as a motivational speaker at NALIS-led outreaches.

Moreover, the current board of NALIS in collaboration with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts has pioneered the collocation of libraries in our newly built community centres. Already, libraries can be found in the Mount Hope/Mount Lambert Community Centre, in the Beetham Gardens

Community Centre and also in Barataria. This represents a sterling example of what it means to do more for less. By collocating library services in the community centres, the Government is able to reach out to a much broader cross section of the society, and NALIS proposes to expand its list of collocated libraries during the financial year to St. Helena and Princes Town just to name a few.

Additionally, we intend to complete the Mayaro Public Library which is 95 per cent completed and has now been redesigned to accommodate commercial space on the ground floor. Our intention, Mr. Vice-President, to establish a model whereby this library will be self-sufficient in that the rental income derived from the commercialization of the ground floor will be used to offset whatever recurrent expenditure required for its operation. In the same vain, the Minister of Finance has allocated 10 million to the Chaguanas Public Library and this library is about 68 per cent complete and it is our intention to see how much we can do with our current resources before the mid-year review. The other bit of good news where our libraries are concerned is that the Toco library is expected to be built during this fiscal year and work will commence on the long-awaited Diego Martin Public Library.

So, Mr. Vice-President, veteran journalist Walter Cronkite once said, and I quote:

“Whatever the cost of our libraries, the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation.”

And I endorse that view and commit the Ministry of Communications to doing its part in the creation of a knowledge-based society where information is the new currency, especially in this time when it is easy for us to build walls that exclude based on race and colour, on gender and political affiliation, on class and

educational status. It is our hope that libraries will empower our people, especially our young people, to tear down those walls.

National Archives which is under the Ministry of Communications, Mr. Vice-President, another significant player in the Ministry. I am happy to report that the National Archives in collaboration with the Tobago Library Services marked the reopening of the Tobago Archives in June of this year in the activity centre of the Scarborough Library. You see, following the earthquake of 1997 which destroyed the old Scarborough library, the safety of the documents was compromised and to date, 60 per cent of the records have been restored by the National Archives and returned to Tobago. Many of these records have also been digitized allowing for access in both Trinidad and Tobago. The Tobago Archives had been inaccessible for 22 years, therefore, its reopening is significant to Tobagonians as research on Tobago can now be facilitated in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

Once more, our sister isle has its own records, including but not limited to records dating back to 1763 including slave records, colonial records related to the establishment of Tobago, churches, villages and plantation estates, Minutes of the Tobago House of Assembly, Tobago court records, Tobago Gazettes, newspaper and digitized records of maps, photographs and numerous other documents of historical importance. But that is not all the National Archives is doing, it is ensuring that the records of Trinidad and Tobago are available online to everyone, all of whom use the archives as a primary source of information but not all of whom reside in Trinidad and Tobago.

In today's digital age, it is a new norm that people go online to access records and such research material. Family records generate a lot of interest.

People want to find out about their roots. The East Indian Indentureship Register, the Chinese Indentureship Records and Registry of Slaves continue to attract a lot of attention. The National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago is the home of original records for most of the Ministries. It should come as no surprise that there are a number of online queries for access to archival material from Trinidad and Tobago. Right now, all the National Archives has is a list of its records but the public expectation is that the actual archives should be available on the website. This is why over the last fiscal, the National Archives has made major strides in this area. In fact, from 2015 to present, close to 110,000 pages have been digitized and the process continues every day to ensure that the records of the National Archives are available online via its website.

I would like to speak a little about some environmental initiatives. Another notable initiative in this year's budget is the announcement by the Minister of Finance that the Government will remove all taxes and duties on LED bulbs or accessories to support this country's transition to LED lighting and of course, reduce our carbon footprint. Many have thumbed their noses at this announcement and question the real value but there are numerous examples which show that the use of LED leads to the utilization of less energy. For instance, the average household saves just about 25 per cent on their electricity bill when they make that switch to LED light bulbs. So therefore, your bulbs actually last longer.

But I just want to—yesterday, Sen. Sobers spoke about it being the People's Partnership's idea concerning the LED bulbs. So, Mr. Vice-President, I searched high and low to see if I could find where the People's Partnership Government introduced LED bulbs. I looked to see where they introduced tax measures concerning LED bulbs. I found nothing, Mr. Vice-President. So I do not know

how all of a sudden, they are now trying to claim it. Just now they will claim that they invented the LED bulb if that is the case. [*Laughter*]

Studies show that LED equals sustainable technology and energy efficiency and one research which looked at the feasibility of replacing the conventional fluorescent lamp with LED lamps at a faculty building in Malaysia found that the use of LED resulted in power reduction savings. And despite this, the prohibitive cost of embracing the LED movement cannot be ignored. Manufacturing costs are coming down and prices are falling, but by and large, LED is still very out of the reach of many households and this is why in many countries, great intentions have not been converted into action and high costs have prevented any real movement towards a large scale implementation of LED. But this Government understands that and is intervening by removing that hurdle and the move to take away all taxes and duties on LED bulbs and similar accessories means that there is one less excuse why we should not take that sustainable step at least via LED. And even if you cannot get on-board now, there is time to do so because this tax break will be in place for a five-year period in the first instance.

But, Mr. Vice-President, we are not simply giving out LED bulbs. In fact, the LED bulb initiative is part of a larger programme designed by this Government to foster energy efficiency and energy conservation and this programme will be backed by a comprehensive educational programme to facilitate behavioural change. The programme will be a collaboration between the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Ministry of Education and will include the retrofitting of 30 primary and 30 secondary schools.

I move on to—because I know my time is going so I want to speak just about a few environmental initiatives, you know. The San Fernando to Point

Fortin highway, the 35-kilometre Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin project will include the Mosquito Creek elevated roadway which is expected to bring an end to flooding in the area. The section of the highway is being protected from sea blast and storm surges by andesite boulders. Its construction adheres to strict environmental standards through the environmental impact assessment process in order to ensure environmental sustainability.

The Valencia to Toco Road upgrade which is presently under construction will bring opportunities for sustainable lifestyles for communities along the route and these communities include Valencia, Sangre Grande, Matura, Salybia, Rampanalgas, Cumana, Sans Souci, Toco, Grande Riviere and Matelot. Similarly, the Churchill Roosevelt Highway Extension to Manzanilla underscores sustainable development for the communities of Cumuto, Manzanilla, Sangre Grande, Mayaro and Guayaguayare. Coastal protection work is also being undertaken in several communities to re-establish these communities as models for sustainable development, and there is a comprehensive strategy to treat with the drainage and flooding throughout the country and we targeted 369 active desilting projects and have surpassed our targets for 2017 and 2018. And we can see the effects of climate change on our small island developing state. Greater precipitation or rainfall is one of the contributors to flooding and it is directly linked to climate change.

Rehabilitation of our Magnificent Seven heritage buildings is important to our history and culture. As a Jamaican journalist and orator said:

“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.”

Stollmeyer's Castle and Whitehall are now resplendent. The Red House and

President's House are near completion and the refurbishing of Mille Fleurs is in progress.

And our Government considers the promotion of renewable energy alternatives very important to energy conservation through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, another effect of climate change.

1.00 p.m.

The establishment of the Toco port and the Moruga fishing port will also be subjected to stringent environmental measures in keeping with our need to ensure sustainable development in Trinidad and Tobago. The elimination of the use of Styrofoam and single-use plastic is a step towards reducing this type of waste that enters our watercourses contributing to flooding.

Based on an article published in the *National Geographic* in December 2018, 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been produced; 6.3 billion metric tons have become plastic waste; 12 per cent has been incinerated; 79 per cent accumulated in landfills; 91 per cent of plastic is not recycled. And the UN's theme for World Environment Day 2018 was "Beat Plastic Pollution" and our Government is working to beat plastic pollution, to provide a safe and healthy environment for present and future generations.

Mr. Vice-President, I just want to speak a little bit about some of the initiatives in the health sector, and I would want to move to the—I heard someone mention as if nothing was done and I just want to say quickly the long awaited Arima Hospital is 90 per cent completed and is expected to be opened before the end of the year. [*Desk thumping*] The sod turning for the central block of the Port of Spain General Hospital is expected to take place soon; it is supposed to be by next month. We have heard the cries of the Borough of Point Fortin and that

hospital will be delivered and opened in the first quarter of 2020. The residents of Diego Martin will get a new health centre when it is opened in 2020. The Sangre Grande Hospital will be completed in 2022. The sod was turned recently, I think it was October 4th, for the Sangre Grande Hospital.

The linear accelerator or LINAC facility at the St. James Medical Complex has been completed and was handed over to the Minister of Health. It is currently in the testing phase, as is mandatory, but should be opened in January 2020, and this service will offer more targeted treatment for some tumors, reducing waiting times and have a positive impact on patient survival, among other benefits.

So, Mr. Vice-President, it is often said that your health is your wealth and these are just some of the achievements in the health sector. This is just some, because I know the Minister of Health would have spoken about it and this demonstrates that this Government continues to invest in the well-being of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. So I will have to skip some of notes, Mr. Vice-President, because I want to stay within the allotted time limit.

So, Mr. Vice-President, the Prime Minister has continuously spoken about the creation of a society—

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

Sen. The Hon. D. Cox: Thank you very much. Mr. Vice-President, the Prime Minister has continuously spoken about the creation of a society based on proper values, on acceptable standards of behaviour, on opportunities for growth and advancement, and most significantly on providing opportunity for persons to break the cycles of poverty, violence, of neglect, of illiteracy and hopelessness. And I am happy to say that the Ministry of Communications, which I now have the honour to lead, is playing a leading role in this regard.

Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of Communications will not only coordinate the activities of these agencies, to which I have alluded, but will also seek to fulfill its own mandate in the coming year. As you and the national population are aware, it is only recently that I was appointed to this position and it is my intention to honour the confidence that was reposed in me by the hon. Prime Minister. Our mandate at the Ministry of Communications, Mr. Vice-President, is to coordinate and implement Government communication strategies, manage the creation, security, storage and dissemination of all information and resources. And in so doing, create a more open, accessible and transparent government.

And it is certainly my prayer that the Ministry of Communications will continue to fulfill its mandate and provide the national community with information on the Government's achievements and programmes. And if information is to be the lifeblood of this society, Mr. Vice-President, we at the Ministry of Communications stand ready to do our part. I thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Members, I think now is a good time to take the lunch break. This House will now stand suspended until five past two.

1.04 p.m.: *Siting suspended.*

2.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy: [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, I am pleased to be invited to join this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2019 to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th of September, 2020.

I remember Sen. Clarence Rambharat, when he piloted his first Bill in the Senate saying, that he had always dreamt about having the opportunity to say the

words, “and I so move”. Like my colleague, I too am humbled to contribute at this level of decision-making in our nation and I consider this a privilege.

Mr. Vice-President, as I am from Tobago and a health professional, I would concentrate my discussion on areas related to the health sector and Tobago. I intend to look at the issues from a developmental standpoint: How are we developing as a people, in Trinidad and Tobago as a result of the moneys we are spending? What else can we do to advance that development? I will also be using cross-cutting themes of sustainability, integration, creativity and servant leadership. I am happy to hear the reports from Minister Ayanna Webster-Roy, as she reported about the services from CAST and the Tobago House of Assembly today.

I turn my attention to the health sector. I congratulate the Minister of Health for leading the initiatives that led to the reduction of maternal mortality, in the process surpassing the sustainable development goals for that area. This is an achievement that we can all be proud of.

I also wish to congratulate the Director of Women's Health and all the staff of the obstetrics units in the Regional Health Authorities. It would have taken a coordinated effort from all of them for this to be achieved, and that process would now need to be institutionalized for continued success.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to put on record one part of the process that got us to where we are today, because I am sure that we can learn from it. Mr. Vice-President, I was there. I participated in that process, and I am certainly happy to see the results of the work that was done. You see, there was a significant problem with maternal and neonatal mortality. We all remember the newspaper headlines, the juicy stories that came out, and while the papers sold, health

professionals were depressed, particularly young doctors and nurses, not wanting to go to work or face the media. Parents were in pain as a result of the impact of those deaths. We all remember those days, do we not? Big headlines: another maternal death, here, there, everywhere.

In 2011, the then Minister of Health, Mrs. Therese Baptiste-Cornelis, appointed a maternal morbidity and mortality review committee. It was chaired by Dr. Lackram Bodoie, then Chairman of the South West Regional Authority, now representative for Fyzabad. This committee was multi-disciplinary, consisting of competent professionals from the University of the West Indies, the regional health authorities, the private sector, the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association. They included midwives, pediatricians, obstetricians and gynaecologists, people who knew their craft and were committed. The committee met for several months and produced a report. That report was accepted by the next Minister of Health, Dr. Fuad Khan, who had replaced Mrs. Baptiste-Cornelis at that time.

Mr. Vice-President, it was this report that the current Minister of Health, Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh, acted on in order to get the excellent results that we are having now. I congratulate the Minister again for his leadership for taking action.

You see, Mr. Vice-President, it took eight years to get to this point and at that time, a leader was responding to a crisis. That leader took competent persons to work on the problem. There are many times committees are formed with people who cannot do the job. In this case, competent persons were chosen. There are many committees that meet and never produce a report. In this case, a report was produced. There are many reports that are produced and never actioned, in this case, even though it was not actioned by the person to whom it was given, because I think it was near the time for change or, I do not remember what the story was,

but in this case, the report was acted upon and here we are, eight years later, celebrating a significant achievement for a problem that was so devastating to all of us.

Mr. Vice-President, how I wish that that would be the way in which we operated on all the time in Trinidad and Tobago, that we do not throw out a report, because it was started by another government, that we do not throw out a competent professional, because he or she is not seen as being from my party. Mr. Vice-President, shutting down perfectly viable projects and reports simply because the government changes, serves no other interest but political.

In the example used, many lives are saved. However, there are many lives and money that would be lost because of a type of politics where our most powerful leaders are based; that shut down a project because it was initiated by another party. Imagine if politicians used their power as servant leaders instead to continue every project where our children, our health, our people and, therefore, our country stands to benefit. This type of politics we could support any day. It will also make more funds available for preparing rather than repairing.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Health again for the initiative taken to reduce obesity, childhood obesity, as one of the pillars in reducing non-communicable diseases. I support the plan to going forward to deal with decreasing the intake of salt and trans fat. I support the initiative to get the population moving.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like the Minister to tackle another problem, that is the epidemic of cardiovascular diseases. World health statistics indicate that cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in Trinidad and Tobago and something needs to be done about it, because it is preventable.

In July 2008, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, via the University of Trinidad of Tobago (UTT), contracted Johns Hopkins International, a reputable international organization, to provide educational and training assistance in cardiovascular services. They worked with professionals at every level in Trinidad and Tobago, at the Ministry of Health, regional health authorities, in primary and secondary care. Professionals were trained as cardiologists. They were trained as echo technicians. They were trained in reading EKGs. They were even tasked with purchasing equipment for our hospitals.

When plans were being made for the services at the Scarborough General Hospital, we too benefitted from that project. We received guidance from the team of Johns Hopkins International as to the type of equipment to be purchased for that hospital. Mr. Vice-President, Johns Hopkins International presented a report entitled “Trinidad and Tobago Health Sciences Cardiovascular Services Initiative Final Programme Report”. It was dated March 01, 2013. To date, after significant sums of money were spent, we have not seen any results of that report. And our cardiovascular programme, as a result, is still in disarray. That is one report that had merit that sought to deal with a significant problem that involved staff at every level that has not seen the light of day.

Mr. Vice-President, we need an integrated national cardiology programme, which includes preventive cardiology services, secondary cardiology services at general hospitals, and specialized tertiary care at specific hospitals. We need that to be established. I should know and every one of us here should know that if we have chest pain in any part of this country, we could be anywhere and we have chest pain, and possible myocardial infarction, there should be a place where we should go, like a district health facility in the places, and get appropriate care there,

so that we can be referred to someone else. It is not happening now, and that needs to change.

I humbly suggest that the Minister of Health appoint a small committee to review the recommendations of previous reports, and thus determine how to move forward and implement a national programme. I am confident that the Minister can do that, so that even if he does not see the results, because it would take time, at least he would have played his part in the process, and the country would benefit.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to the health sector in Tobago, I note that one of the areas for development is the new Roxborough hospital, the sod turning of which took place on Wednesday 17 July, 2019. The Minister, Ayana Webster-Roy, spoke about it here again this morning. I heard the joy in her voice when she spoke in the Lower House as being a Member for Tobago East, as to how she was looking forward to the completion of that hospital. I understand that the people of Tobago East would also be overjoyed when it is completed. But, Mr. Vice-President, permit me to ask some questions: Was a feasibility study done to determine what services would be needed in that area for that hospital? Do we know what services the hospital is going to provide?

Mr. Vice-President, I remember the Health Sector Reform Programme envisaged a 24-hour district health facility operating from Roxborough; a facility that would provide primary care services, specialists secondary care services, outpatients, 24-hour emergency services, with the attendant laboratory and X-ray services. This facility would be staffed by well-trained emergency physicians and they would be able to make appropriate diagnoses, treat with some problems there, and refer complex cases to the Scarborough General Hospital, where they would be

handled by competent specialists.

Minister Webster-Roy, in her contribution in the Lower House, referred to having to travel to Scarborough for a simple problem with her daughter, because the health centre was closed. If that facility were available in Roxborough, she would not have to travel to Scarborough for such a problem. It would have been handled there.

Mr. Vice-President, a 24-hour emergency facility and outpatient service is a far cry from a hospital, inpatient hospital. A hospital is a whole different matter. When we were preparing for the Scarborough General Hospital in Tobago, I was hospital Medical Director at the time. I remember the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Health, engaged specialists out of Canada and they worked with us assiduously for years. I think the programme lasted about three years. At that time, we had to produce clinical services plans. In other words, you have to know what services you are going to provide, because you will only know what to build when you know what you are putting in the building; form follows function. So you had to provide clinical services and it had to be based on the needs of the people.

We also had to provide the clinical support plan; what were your support services that you would need? Would you need radiologists, X-ray technicians, whatever, lab technicians? What support services you will be putting in that institution? We had to have human resources, financial planning, and maintenance plans. All those things had to be done while we were preparing. All those things were done. Those reports were presented, and I can reliably say that though the Government again paid a lot of money for these plans to be put in place—and the plans were thorough—they were shelved. And, the Tobago Regional Hospitals'

Administrations are using some other kind of plan that we are not sure what it is about.

Mr. Vice-President, the Scarborough General Hospital is now seven years old and there are many issues it is facing: breakdown of equipment, air condition units, X-ray machines, CAT scanners. There are so many things going on now, particularly with equipment and buildings. And I would like to think it is because sufficient planning was not done to make sure that we have efficient appropriate maintenance in place for both buildings and equipment.

And I understand that right now, we have insufficient staff for the services. Imagine, in Tobago right now, there are certain services where consultants are on call every day. That used to happen in the old hospital, where we could not do better. Now, in 2019, that is happening in some of the services. It is far from acceptable. It is not a desired situation, Mr. Vice-President.

Now, I do understand that some of the problems that are being faced with staffing is a result of decreased financial allocation. That is what I hear and the TRHA is strapped for funds. They are owing millions of dollars to suppliers. They are owing gratuity to staff, et cetera.

However, I am sure that the problem started when the well-laid-out plans were not followed from the beginning. We are seeing the effects of that now. And I would like to say we love to build buildings in Trinidad and Tobago. A lot of the times we do not put the appropriate effort to not just build buildings, but plan for what happens in the building and plan for what happens after people occupy the building. As a result, many of our buildings now, not just health care facilities, many of our buildings now are run down, because we have not put appropriate money into maintenance. It cannot work in a health care facility, and what we are

seeing now is the effect of poor planning and management.

Mr. Vice-President, I am talking about the experience with the Scarborough General Hospital, precisely because I would hate that we make such a mistake in planning for this Roxborough hospital that is going to be built. I am asking these questions because I am concerned about the sustainability of the proposed new Roxborough hospital, especially at a time of decreased resources. I would certainly like to make sure that what is happening now at Scarborough General, it will not happen at Roxborough, whenever that is finished.

By the way, Mr. Vice-President, I searched but did not find any allocated funding for the new hospital in Roxborough. Madam Minister, I looked for it, but I did not see it in the PSIP for Tobago. I am not sure if I missed it. I note the budgetary allocation for the Tobago Regional Health Authority is \$349,168,800, a 20.5million increase over last fiscal year. It is my hope that the backlogs of payment to suppliers would be met and that the issues of staffing would be addressed, so that we will be back on a better footing than we are right now at the Scarborough General Hospital.

Mr. Vice-President, Minister Webster-Roy also mentioned about the new service for breast examination and Pap smears being undertaken in the pink room in Louis d'Or, again an excellent initiative, since breast and cervical cancers are the commonest cancers in women and also the commonest cancers causing death in women. I congratulate the Secretary for Health, Wellness and Family Development for the initiative. An efficient screening programme would lead to early detection, early intervention and decreased mortality. Added to the Human Papilloma Virus Vaccination programme, the screening programme can result in elimination of cervical cancer in our country just as it is happening in developed

countries.

Mr. Vice-President, again I would ask this question: Why is this programme not being undertaken through the Tobago Regional Health Authority? Why is it being run as a parallel service to the other services being undertaken by the TRHA? There are 19 health centres and outreach centres in Tobago, which puts the population within easy reach of services. These health centres and outreach centres should be doing Pap smears and breast examinations. Health centres are staffed by district health visitors who are trained in this important service. But Mr. Vice-President, again my understanding is that there may be insufficient staff available in the district health services to provide comprehensive service. I am not sure. That is what I hear.

Mr. Vice-President, a similar service was being expertly offered at the Scarborough Health Centre, each year doing over a thousand Pap smears and breast examinations and even some men's health services. That service was closed in May this year, because of a problem with mould at the health centre. Closed, more than a thousand Pap smears and breast examinations, yet money is found to open a brand new clinic running parallel to this one. Mr. Vice-President, I do not understand, so I am asking two questions. Why is the service for Pap smears and breast examination not being undertaken by the TRHA? And what is the sustainability of the service as it stands now at Louis d'Or? Remember we all want this to work. Our women need to have the screenings. Our women need to have the services available to them. And since the funding is there, let us just make sure that the service is appropriately integrated and well resourced, both in terms of human and financial resources.

Mr. Vice-President, the Member for Tobago East also mentioned, in the

Lower House, when she did her contribution, that the Scarborough Regional Hospital, at Fort King George is currently being refurbished to have a men's clinic. And my concerns are the same. Please allow the service to be integrated with the service that is now being offered by the TRHA, both at primary and secondary level, integrated; sustainability.

I now turn to tourism. The first point I would make, in terms of tourism in Tobago is to please ensure that the planning for increased number of tourists to the island should include a concomitant plan for health care for these tourists. Remember the public health care on the island is available for both public and private patients. It is the only health care that is available. So we have to be able to take care of our visitors, if any of them get sick.

Mr. Vice-President, again cardiovascular diseases are so prevalent. The hospital must be able to provide for emergency cardiac services. I am pleased to hear that a visiting cardiologist has resumed services at the hospital after an absence for a couple months.

At the Scarborough General Hospital—remember I said we were—there is a non-invasive laboratory—that is a laboratory that has echocardiogram and stress testing and stuff like that; it is a non-invasive lab—and a cardiac catheterization unit, both necessary for management of persons with heart disease. Mr. Vice-President the catheterization lab has been closed for the past three years. Could the Tobago Regional Health Authority ensure that there is an appropriate plan to reopen this facility and that facility could be used both for the local population and provide for cardiac care for tourists, if needed? It could also bring in some much needed funds for the authority. Right now, there are only two cath labs in the public sector in Trinidad and Tobago, one in Tobago and one in Mount

Hope. All the other labs are privately run.

Mr. Vice-President, Tobagonians are happy with the service being offered by the newly leased *Jean de la Valette* and look forward to the increased capacity on the sea bridge with the arrival of the two new vessels next year. We are also looking forward to a very robust maintenance programme to be put in place. Please, Minister of Works and Transport, let us do it right the first time. Remember the service must be sustainable.

2.30 p.m.

Tobago welcomes the plan to start the building of the new airport terminal in 2020. I expect that appropriate arrangements would be made with the property owners who must be relocated before the works starts. That matter has been adequately ventilated in the public and discussed by the Chief Secretary. I note that 15 million was allocated in the PSIP for land acquisition in 2020. I have the confidence—I am sure the amount will have to be increased. I have the confidence that a satisfactory solution will be found in a timely manner.

Mr. Vice-President, in my discussion with the president of the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association, I was told that regionally the Caribbean Tourism Organization is reporting figures for 2018, showing 29.9 million arrivals of tourists in the Caribbean with a spend of 38.3 billion. And while that is happening in the rest of the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago tourism arrivals are down by 2 per cent up to June 2019 and the average occupancy of rooms in Tobago up to June 2019 is 34 per cent, compared with the regional figure of 67.5 per cent.

In 2018 Tobago received approximately 19,000 international arrivals, slightly up from 2017 due mainly to Sunwing from Canada, which we gained through a regional alliance between Rex Resorts and Sunwing. Mr. Vice-President,

the association is concerned that the gain from Sunwing will be lost through the liquidation of Thomas Cook. Mr. Vice-President, do you know whether the new operator for Magdalena, the Apple Leisure Group, will be bringing non-stops flights to Tobago? The population looks forward to receiving more information on that arrangement, the arrangements that are being made with Apple Leisure Group, because as of now much of it is unknown.

The cruise ship business in Tobago, after a high of 55 arrivals in the 2017—2018 season, and that was because we benefited from the effect of the devastation of the hurricanes in the north of the Caribbean. That business is back down to 32 calls for the upcoming season. It is not good enough. Mr. Vice-President, back in the year 2000, Tobago received 53,667 international arrivals. And when in 2001 that number dropped to 49,441 international arrivals it was said that we had crisis, that resulted in the then Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, setting up a standing committee on tourism in Tobago with a three year rolling plan and by 2005 the international arrivals increased to 87,796. Mr. Vice-President, those numbers make our present arrivals of 19,000 look pathetic. The Tobago Tourism Agency and the Trinidad Tourism Authority are now in place to market the destination and to ensure that the various aspects of the product are developed and sustained to meet the needs of both local and foreign clients.

However, my research on this matter revealed that both are not currently receiving adequate amounts of funding to really compete with the other islands of the Caribbean and I am hoping that this can be addressed. Mr. Vice-President, let us get really serious about the business of tourism well for Tobago and Trinidad also. This industry can provide the country with badly needed foreign exchange while at the same time providing many jobs and the sale of our agricultural and

manufacturing products. This would be a very good step as we are talking so much about diversification. This is an opportunity for such diversification.

Mr. Vice-President, I am told that when the tourist arrivals were up in the 70,000s and the 80,000s, every week the banks from Tobago would be sending foreign exchange to banks in Trinidad. We have a foreign exchange crisis, people are not accessing foreign exchange appropriately, dealing with the tourism product in Tobago can help that.

Mr. Vice-President, all news of tourism in Tobago is not doom and gloom, because the people of Castara have taken it upon themselves to do their own tourism development. Castara, the home of our former President ANR Robinson, has a room stock of about 150 rooms in about 30 properties, so it is very small. However, they are showing entrepreneurship and creativity. In fact they were honoured by Minister Ayanna Webster-Roy on Republic Day for their work in tourism and their contribution to development in Tobago.

I quote from an article dated October 17, 2018, it is entitled “The Castara Strategy” and it is in the www.meppublishers.com.

“Castara: the village that markets itself”

—and I quote—

“Word of Castara’s continuing ability to attract visitors and its 60 per cent repeat business rate, has been getting out. Never mind the transport challenges...”

You all have been to Castara? It is far, right? It is far.

“Never mind the transport challenges, the decline in the Trinidad and Tobago economy, or even the village’s remoteness, clinging to rainforest on the sunset-facing coast of Tobago. Castara is succeeding with a simply

strategy for tourism, and is attracting visitors from all over Europe, the United States and Canada, not to mention Russia, Chile, and Brazil.

Over the past four years, the Castara Tourism Development Association (CTDA) has brought together businesses operating in Castara. It holds the view that all business in Castara is tourism related. So whether you sell fruit or fish, rent cars or rooms, make meals or bread, take tours to rain forest or reef, teach in the school or collect bamboo for Bonfire night, you have a state in the future of Castara.”

The article goes on.

“Bertil ‘AliBaba’ Taylor, owner and operator of AliBaba’s Sea Breeze and Tours and president of the CTDA explains: ‘We make sure that visitors get more than expected, from arrival to departure. Castara is a real village. Safety is a big thing in our village; visitors must feel safe they are invited take part in local traditions, see general way of life. They feel welcome in every part of the village. There are visitors who are coming back for more than 20 years; they book the next year when they are leaving this year. By word of mouth, they bring and send their friends.

We have never been to a trade show. Ali Baba’s Sea Breeze is listed on *myTobago*, Air BnB, Bookings.com and TripAdvisor; and of course, there’s our website and Facebook page. We have a community that sells itself, person to person. The model baffles the authorities; we are getting more arrivals than anywhere else in Tobago. Castara people are very close, keeping the culture and tradition alive. We all benefit from tourism, there’s no need for all-inclusives.”

And I end the quote. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, what made the people of Castara do what they did? Willingly coming together as servant leaders and as community, working together to serve tourists, supply their needs for food, shelter entertainment, together, holistically, not competing. They have an abundance mindset. They know the values of discipline, valuing and serving each other and others, being proactive, and being generous. Tourists are willing to go to Castara because of the culture and the environment, because of the service that they receive. No advertising cost needed, no special equipment needed. What made Castara leaders do this? It is self-leadership. Imagine even if 50 per cent of the communities in Tobago and Trinidad do the same. Our visitors' numbers would shoot up astronomically.

How do we replicate this in Tobago, even Trinidad?—values based leadership. This should not be just a freak of nature, an accidental bit of serendipity. It should be a deliberate strategy to encourage our leaders at every level to behave in a similar manner, to help them understand that when they add value to others and help them advance, they in turn get value back and they advance. Mr. Vice-President, while we are waiting on the big ticketed hotels, we could encourage the replication of that same strategy in other villages like Charlotteville and Buccoo Point. We could also be seeking to gain from the wellness tourism industry. Information from the Global Wellness Institute indicated—

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

Sen. Dr. M. Dillon-Remy:—that in 2017 \$639 billion was spent in the wellness industry and it is projected to go to 919 billion by 2022. That type of industry is going to fit in well with our serene environment. Mr. Vice-President, we need to put a little more on agriculture. We are happy that agriculture—the people of

Tobago were happy for the incentives that were given in the budget, but the farmers need far more to be able to produce enough food for eating locally and for the tourist. And they—I heard the Chief Secretary talk about the cocoa plantation being rehabilitated and using the CEPEP workers to do the same. That sounds like a great initiative.

I would mention two other things. Currently there is a secondary school in Tobago that is closed because of electrical problems. I see that there is \$500,000 on the PSIP for Scarborough Secondary School and a figure of 1 million for building a new secondary school. I hope that plans are in place so that something can start this financial year, because that school has significant problems. I note that the housing sector—the *Public Sector Investment Programme* for housing, the allocation is 29 million, Madam Finance Minister and I ask again whether the people from Tobago are going to be access funding from the housing bond that is going to be raised through HDC.

I will make my final statement this, Mr. Vice-President. I am going to talk about the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill and the reason this is that, this Bill is due to be debated in early 2020, after coming from the Joint Select Committee in an election year. Mr. Vice-President, this is certainly not what the people in Tobago wished for. This type of debate should have taken place in a sober environment, not an environment in an election year where people are jostling for positions. Mr. Vice-President, Tobago has changed hands 31 times and we are still in a battle now for our self-dependence coming out of the grip of what is happening since annex to Trinidad in 1899. It is my prayer that when the Bill is brought back to the House for debate, the end result would be the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill would be passed, granting self-

government to Tobago, a milestone that people in Tobago are waiting on with expectancy. When that is done, Mr. Vice-President, when the campaign for the next election start, both parties can approach the Tobago public with integrity, not dangling the offer of internal self-government, “If you vote for me, I will give you internal Self-government”. Both parties would be able to stand before the people and say, “I respect your right to self-determination.”

Mr. Vice-President, I Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses):

Mr. Vice-President, it is my privilege and honour as the Minister of Foreign and Caricom to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill for the finance year 2019—2020. One again, Mr. Vice-President, the budget delivered by Minister of Finance under the theme “Stability, Strength and Growth” is worthy of high commendation in light of the painstakingly detailed prescriptions which are envisage the further stimulation of our beloved country’s economic growth while providing adequately for the needs of citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

The sensitivity and responsiveness in the myriad of measures detailed in the budget presentation of Ministry of Finance reflect the ongoing of work of a Government in tune with the need of citizens of our country. The lives of many will be positively impacted, notwithstanding the prudence of the options adopted in these straitened times. Mr. Vice-President, permit me to congratulate also the Minister of Planning and Development and my colleague Ministers for their sterling contribution to the budget exercise.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, singular merit is well-deserved by our Prime Minister. I

continue to be inspired by the contribution and performance of our Prime Minister both locally and abroad at bilateral meetings and international fora. The sheer intellect spread of knowledge, experience, savvy and presence of our Prime Minister brings comfort and assurance to us nationals of Trinidad and Tobago as he relentlessly pursues in a visionary way, the concrete interest of our country.

Mr. Vice-President, these interests are indeed varied. They range from treatment of issues related to sea transport between Trinidad and Tobago, border protection, safeguarding markets for our exports, national security hardware and software, and trading, and investments in critical sectors of our economy to bring relief and render service to citizens. The engagement and search by the hon. Prime Minister for solutions to our problems and the sustainability of our welfare are all encompassing and dogged.

Mr. Vice-President, I am really touched by the sacrifices made by our Prime Minister and his commitment to quality representation and the interest all our citizens and the residents. Thankfully, Trinidad and Tobago is once again viewed by the international community as a credible partner to do business with and as a leader in this region. We have regained and even surpassed our standing in the community of nations thanks to the leadership of our Prime Minister. Mr. Vice-President, the country's business is in good and steady hands. [*Desk thumping*] Songs of praise, Mr. Vice-President, "songs of freedom" as they say, freedom from what? Freedom, Mr. Vice-President, from corruption, freedom from impropriety, freedom from immorality, and freedom from make-up stories and duplicity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, after hearing the budget, I remarked to a colleague of mine, "I am happy and I do not know why". The reason resides in the details of

the budget, the varied provisions that will positively impact the lives of thousands. Most importantly, the measures contemplated are geared to ensure the sustainability of the welfare of citizens and indeed, residents of our country.

Mr. Vice-President, the annual budget allocation for the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs for the last fiscal year 2018/2019 was reduced to 260 million from \$260,872,000. Consequently, and as in the past, the Ministry continues to operate at reduced expenditure levels while ensuring that foreign representation remained steadfast and at optimal levels in the face of decreased revenue and recurrent expenditure commitments. With your permission, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to place on the record, my sincere appreciation to the staff of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs for ensuring that despite the extant difficulties, Trinidad and Tobago continues to meet the high profile in the regional, hemispheric and international spheres.

Mr. Vice-President, I will now provide details of the Ministry's stewardship in respect of funds allocated to successfully sustain as well as enhance this country's regional, hemispheric and global footprint through our participation in the global arena and the successful promotion of our country's interest around the world. Our foreign policy is predicated on long-held cherished principles that are accepted and valued by the international community. Respect for rule of law, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, respect for the sovereignty of member states of the international community, adherence to international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, all featured in our engagements with other members of the international community.

Our foreign policy as an extension of our domestic policy is geared to improve the quality of life of citizens of our country. Concrete and measurable

outcomes are sought. Focus is directed on particular needs of our economy and population. Certain countries, organizations have attracted our attention in this regard. Access to natural gas, safeguarding our markets for exports, about national security, foreign investments and the broader welfare of our population have all underpinned our foreign policy. Our foreign policy is now centred less on ethereal notions to one of direct benefits to be derived in favour of our country.

Allow me to turn now to representation and engagement, Mr. Vice-President. During the last four years, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has articulated positions at regional, hemispheric and international fora in support of our domestic development objectives and agenda. Through its interface with members of the international community on behalf of other Ministries and government agencies, the Ministry has advanced this country's position in areas of critical importance for our development, including climate change, trade, de-risking, security and development.

Early in the tenure of this Government, Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry worked to repair damaged relationships within our region. You may recall that there were serious issues related to the entry of Jamaican nationals to our country which threatened to affect the trade between Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. In July of 2016, the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago paid a visit to Jamaica on official business, that is, and under his leadership those issues were resolved and a way forward in dealing with such matters agreed upon.

Regionally, Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry has contributed to the reinvigoration of the Caribbean Community, otherwise known as Caricom, while advancing the interest of Trinidad and Tobago in areas of importance for the development and well-being of our people. In February of the said year, 2016, in

the Twenty-Seventh Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom which was held in Belize, our Prime Minister was the first signatory to the Protocol Amending the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas to incorporate the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement, otherwise known as CONSLE, as an Organ of the Community, and as well the Caricom Implementing Agency for Crime and Security as an institution of the Community.

Further, Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago hosted the Eighteenth Special Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Caricom on the Single Market and Economy. That meeting was held here in Trinidad and Tobago during the period 3rd to the 4th of December of last year. This we all acknowledge as having taken place at a critical juncture in the life of the Community. Among the outcomes at this meeting was the expansion of the categories of skilled persons allowed to move freely within the region for the purpose of seeking employment under the CSME. The result is therefore, Mr. Vice-President, an increase in opportunities for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who wish to avail themselves of access to the relevant rights under the CSME. The Ministry also played a part, a leading role, that is, in hosting yet another meeting here within the fold of Caricom relative to security, national security matters.

In this regard, Mr. Vice-President, within the fold of Caricom as I mentioned, our Prime Minister is the lead in the quasi-Cabinet of Caricom dealing with security matters and the hosting of that meeting on security in Trinidad and Tobago therefore was part and parcel of the reinvigoration of the integration movement as advanced most notably by our Prime Minister. The contributions of our Prime Minister in moving this process forward so that the fruits of the movement can be maximized and the interest of Trinidad and Tobago can be

safeguarded inclusive as well our exports to the Caricom market and having a stronger voice in the international arena needs to be highlighted.

Further afield, Mr. Vice-President, collaboration with the international partners in the furtherance of national and regional interests featured in talks between the Deputy Minister of Finance of Germany and Caricom Foreign Affairs Ministers which was held in Berlin of this year. The dialogue centred on courting German advocacy in international fora to advance Caricom's position relative to corresponding banking relationships and other topical issues requiring our attention given the potential for wreaking havoc on our economy. Issues such as: blacklisting, access to concessionary financing, and the graduation of developing countries into a medium and high income countries thereby denying them access to concessionary financing.

Additionally, Mr. Vice-President, participation in the Latin American-Caribbean Initiative which was launched by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, we participated in that meeting. As the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, I participated in that meeting along with other colleague Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Caricom member states. These dealt with—hope to gather business representatives, representatives of civil society and common challenges such as climate change, rule of law and other such issues of interest to Trinidad and Tobago were treated.

Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago was also represented at yet another meeting this time in Romania and that country was at that time, it would have been, in March of this year. The President of the EU and we availed ourselves of that opportunity to seek advocacy and support in fora where Trinidad and Tobago and indeed developing countries within the Caricom fold do not find status as it

were. So on our behalf, we thought of marshaling the assistance of this nontraditional country, Romania. The igniting of this relationship also presents the prospect of an additional well-placed advocate for issues of importance, of course to our region as I mentioned, given the then status as the immediate past President of the European Union.

Mr. Vice-President, the Government of our country has also being shrewd in developing relationships with longstanding partners such as the Republic of China. Participation in the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation under the theme “Belt and Road Cooperation: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future” which was held in Beijing in the latter part of April of this year provided the opportunity of a focus bilateral meeting with State Councillor Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. During the meeting, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, that is, of course, expressed their appreciation of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the assistance rendered over the years and reaffirmed our support for the one-China policy. The bilateral agenda between Trinidad and Tobago and China included a joint action plan for projects under the initiative, that is, the Belt and Road Initiative also featured in the discussions.

In order to support the advancement of projects in Trinidad and Tobago, meetings were also held with the representatives of a number of companies in China. Further, Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry, that is, of Foreign and Caricom Affairs was instrumental in the expansion and enhancement of foreign policy implementation through heightened engagement with meetings and fora of the regional issues particularly with regard to Trinidad and Tobago’s closest neighbour, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

During the 2017 fiscal year, the Ministry facilitated the official visit of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley to Caracas on the 5th of December, 2016, during which there was a signing of an agreement between both countries for the implementation of the natural gas supply project from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to our country. The visit also yielded several other important outcomes including expanded trade opportunities for manufactured goods from Trinidad and Tobago. In fiscal 2017/2018, the Ministry again facilitated the official visit of the hon. Prime Minister to Caracas on the 25th of August, 2018. The benefits from this visit included the signing of the terms and conditions of agreement in respect of the Dragon Gas Field between the National Gas Company, NGC and PDVSA, that is the national oil company in Venezuela.

Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry facilitated, as well the Prime Minister's participation meetings related to the situation in Venezuela as part of a team of Caricom leaders who met in New York with the UN, the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres on the 28th of January of this year. On the following month, February, the Prime Minister participated in yet another Caricom initiative, this time with Mexico and Uruguay on the 23rd of March. Beyond those two encounters, we also participated in Barbados with representatives of the National Assembly, led by the Opposition in Venezuela. Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago as well as other Caricom countries have long maintained a position of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and indeed, based on our own policies as well beyond Caricom, thereby providing the basis for continued engagement towards a peaceful resolution of the difficulties confronting our neighbour, Venezuela.

We, at the level of country and Ministry have consistently articulated the

principles of non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of state and, of course, the rule of law and respect for the sovereignty of nations, a feature prominently in our discourse in the international arena. Our position against external military intervention as a way of resolving the situation in Venezuela has indeed been vindicated over time. A steady hand at the wheel is what is required, Mr. Vice-President, and we have such hands in the person of our dear Prime Minister in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry has continued to play a central role in ensuring the effective participation in such significant fora as the United Nations and has facilitated the participation in this year's, the Seventy-Fourth Session of the High-Level and General Debates which continue to be held up until— they continue until December, they started on the 22nd of September. The hon. Prime Minister led our delegation to this assembly and the theme of this year's GA, General Assembly meeting was “Galvanising multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion”. Of course, the national statement was delivered by our Prime Minister and he also participated in various meetings and activities focused on the clear and unambiguous articulation of the position of our country, a number of issues under consideration at the UN.

Our Ministry also arranged and participated, of course, in several meetings in the margins of the GA, General Assembly and in this regard, our Prime Minister held meetings with the Prime Minister of Norway, the President of Panama, the President of Ghana, The Secretary-General of the UN, United Nations, in the field of counter-terrorism. The Prime Minister met with the Under-Secretary of the United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism. And use was also made of the opportunity to have a meeting, a grand meeting between the hon. Prime Minister

and the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora in New York. Further, our Prime Minister and indeed the entire delegation participated in a summit, bilateral summit between India and Caricom member countries.

Mr. Vice-President, in my capacity as Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, I delivered a statement at the Annual Ministerial-level Breakfast Meeting relative to the International Criminal Court. We would have done this in the past. I represented this country in last year session as well. As you might recall the foundation and launching of this court, International Criminal Court featured the prominent contribution of our former Prime Minister and President, President Arthur Robinson. That meeting focused in providing an avenue for engaging in constructive dialogue and current challenges facing the court and the focus was to enlarge the participation and universality of the court and its remit in the fight against impunity.

Additionally, Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago also participated in and I delivered the statement at the high-level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. This is in keeping with our country's long-standing commitment for the global non-proliferation regime.

Mr. Vice-President, the engagement with global partners occurs at home as well including the planning and execution of high-level visits to Trinidad and Tobago. The highlight for this year 2019 was the state visit to Trinidad and Tobago His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana which took place in June of this year. The state visit set the platform for further cooperation in a number of areas for the mutual benefit of our peoples.

Under the theme of sectional: "International Agreements and

Commitments”. Allow me, Mr. Vice-President, to detail that our relations regionally and internationally have led to Trinidad and Tobago becoming a party to agreements that will have direct impact on the lives of our citizens. For example, in keeping with the Ministry’s remit for negotiation of agreements between Trinidad and Tobago and other countries in areas of critical importance to our country, we facilitated the signing of the protocol between Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the People’s Republic of China’s provision of military aid gratis to Trinidad and Tobago.

We also processed and prepared a number of international agreements, facilitated the signature of such agreements. In this regard I would just like to mention a number that was done in 2018: the Caricom Arrest Warrant Treaty; Caricom and Government of T&T and Carifesta Host Country Agreement; Caricom Protocol on Contingent Rights, that is within the realm of the CSME exercise; Declarations of Intent to Provisionally Apply the Protocol on Contingent Rights, that is as a temporary measure pending the first fledge implementation of the rights; Cooperation Agreement between the World Intellectual Property Organization and Trinidad and Tobago for the establishment of a National Intellectual Property Training Centre.

In February of this year, Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago signed the revised supplemental agreement concerning the provision of technical assistance by the International Atomic Energy Agency and as well the Caricom Multilateral Air Services Agreement. Later in the year, in fact, just last month or rather September, yes, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs signed the following instruments: The Rome Convention 1961, International Convention for the Protection of Performers, Producers of Phonograms and Broadcasting

Organizations. I also signed the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System. That is a tool used for border control, detailing the flow incoming and outgoing passengers and marking them, contrasting with international databanks to ensure that our national security needs are met.

Further, I also signed the Beijing Treaty on Audiovisual Performances; the Singapore Treaty on the law of Trademarks; and the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled.

The signing of these instruments have and will facilitate the expansion of opportunities for employment and other lawful, gainful activity for citizens of our countries.

Mr. Vice-President, I mentioned a while ago the meeting that the Prime Minister had with diaspora in New York, Trinidad and Tobago diaspora in New York. At the level of the Ministry, we have completed a draft policy for the diaspora engagement. We have had stakeholder meetings across the country and we are about to have it reviewed and further consultation and amendment will take place before the implementation. Of course, this treats with harnessing the skills and competencies of nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, nationals abroad who also will stand to benefit from this in a mutual way from this engagement.

Mr. Vice-President, for the period 2018, October to September of this year, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs facilitated technical cooperation initiatives with our hemispheric and international partners. The Ministry has access and made available to Government Ministries and other government agencies and individuals training from a number of members of the international community from whom over 100 offers of training courses were received. A wide

span of countries are involved in these offers including China, Singapore, India, Japan, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates.

The areas of national activity that have benefited include a number within the realm of: Spanish language training, the International Atomic Energy Agency training exercise relative to the safeguards that are needed. We also were represented at Financial Investigation Branch of the police service that was involved in a technical seminar in The Hague, Holland and it treated with the said, the aforementioned International Criminal Court that I just mentioned. We also had senior diplomats trained by the OAS from our country and also an issue that we have been following consistently over the years, the States Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean on Fulfilling Declarations and Inspections Obligations that is under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr. Vice-President, allow me to go not at a greater speed, because I am coming to an end. The Ministry engages in targeted training exercises to enhance officials' skill set to better prepare them to carry out the representational, administrative and service functions under the Ministry's remit while seeking to ensure that other agencies across the public service were exposed to capacity building undertakings.

Mr. Vice-President the Ministry also offer services to the members of its diplomatic core, foreign missions based here in Port of Spain and as well as directly to members of the public, that is, nationals of Trinidad and Tobago as well as non-nationals. Among the services provided to members of the public are the authentication of documents, processing of applications for certificates under the CSME, Caricom Single Market and Economy. During last year the Ministry process and authenticated and distributed in excess of 3,000 documents using

Apostille that is just an alternative to letters of authentication and that tool as it were is—mechanism is widespread and accepted across countries. Where such is not the case then the letters of authentication will apply.

These documents, the authenticated documents, that is, cover birth certificates, marriage certificates, and university diplomas, among others. Additionally, Mr. Vice-President, under the CSME we issued 458 Skills Certificates and of that number, 317 went to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, 139 of those certificates went to Caricom nationals. We also issued a number of replacement certificates to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago and Caricom nationals as well. Mr. Vice-President, still in the same vein, we process at the level of the Ministry applications for the Right of Establishment of Businesses and for Service Providers and facilitated the processing and issuance of work permits, 37 of which were issued. With respect to applications for managerial, technical and supervisory staff under the right of establishment about 20 permit exemptions were issued.

Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry also continues to meet its obligation as host country to foreign missions and regional and international organization through the provision of administrative services and the attendant facilitation of their presence and their functioning in Trinidad and Tobago. Domestically the services provided by the Ministry which support the function of other State entities cover a wide area whether in library of preparing credentials and instruments of full powers that permit officials to represent Trinidad and Tobago abroad, or instruments of accession and instruments of ratification that facilitate Trinidad and Tobago being party to international conventions. A host of other services are offered by the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

Mr. Vice-President, we also support delegations to events taking place within the jurisdiction of Trinidad and Tobago missions. For example, in Panama and Cuba. We supported delegations from Trinidad and Tobago principally from the Ministry of Trade and Industry as they sought to heighten the profile of Trinidad and Tobago and attract foreign investment and indeed allow for greater export flows to such countries.

Mr. Vice-President, we at the level of the Ministry are aware of the need to pursue actively the reason of the profile of our country in such spheres as trade, culture, participation of nationals in international bodies. And to this end, we have through our efforts have been successful in having our permanent representative of Trinidad and Tobago, that is, to the United Nations elected by acclamation to fill one of the three vacancies on the GRULAC group, the group of Latin American and Caribbean States for the Vice-Presidency of the current session of the United Nation from September 2019 to 2020, the one year period.

The hon. Prime Minister also led a delegation to Washington last month and held a number of meetings with members of the Congress of the United States including the Majority House Leader. And we see this as exercising yet another plank in our thrust to gain influence and have advocacy agents in reaching out in spheres where Trinidad and Tobago does not have a presence. Of course, as I would have mentioned the areas contemplated in such exercise where advocacy is at the forefront would include de-risking, concessionary financing, corresponding banking, vulnerability of Caribbean States and the like.

Shortly, Mr. Vice-President, we at the Ministry, we look forward to being relocated to another physical space and the Government has actually, dare I say, acted prudently in use of resources to ensure that the Ministry is housed in

appropriate headquarters, accommodation from which we can efficiently and safely carry out the responsibilities entrusted to us.

3.15 p.m.

Looking forward, Mr. Vice-President, for the year 2020, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has been allocated \$271,047,930. This will facilitate the advancement of projects under the *Public Sector Investment Programme*, mainly institutional building capacity and the opening of a new embassy in Qatar. The Ministry will continue its initiatives to narrow and close the knowledge gaps as well, in the skill capacity at the level of the Ministry. We are also involved in a strategic plan to continue the work of the Ministry.

Mr. Vice-President, to elaborate on this Government's intention to broaden T&T's footprint internationally, you will recall that in my contribution to last year's debate on the appropriation Bill, I remind the Government's intention to expand representation overseas. In this regard, two members of staff have been on location in Guyana to operationalize the opening of that high commission, the High Commission of Trinidad and Tobago to Guyana. And I already spoke about the one in Qatar, and allow me with your forbearance, Mr. Vice-President, I just want to go over in summary fashion what the Ministry would have accomplished over the recent past.

We would have met the obligations of Trinidad and Tobago as host country to foreign missions and international organizations. Of course, the provision of administrative services and the attendant facilitation of their presence here. We established and promoted the registration system for nationals abroad, which allows nationals to register on the online service and thereby facilitating our outreach in the provision of services to nationals abroad, whether in distress or

otherwise. We would have provided services to members of the public, as I mentioned, the authentication exercises. We would have supported a number of visits by delegations, whether led by the Prime Minister or otherwise from Trinidad and Tobago to other countries, and the span of countries reflects our engagement in the international arena. We are, importantly, we would have contributed to the reinvigoration of Caricom and, of course, the role of our Prime Minister is well known in furthering the interest of our country and the regional integration exercise.

We also established a VOIP, voice over the Internet, a critical service, a PBX service. That service has cut costs dramatically and allows the networking of all our missions with headquarters so that calls can be made at relatively low prices. We also promoted and secured positions in the international arena with different international agency bodies inclusive of the UN. As for our nationals of Trinidad and Tobago—and I would like to mention in this regard—the Committee on the total Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. We have upcoming shortly, a determination to be made in respect of Trinidad and Tobago and we are well positioned having had a national of our country positioned in that body. Mr. Vice President, we continue to articulate foreign policy positions of Trinidad and Tobago at the international arena and we manage the relations with members of the international community.

In concluding, Mr. Vice-President, I reaffirm the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs' commitment to advancing and championing the Government's development objectives through our diplomatic interactions with other sovereign states and with organizations in the global arena. We will discharge our mandate

supported by the pillars of good governance and international law to which this country subscribes and has always been steadfastly committed as we continue to put people first in achieving the objectives of Vision 2020. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for allowing me to partake in this Appropriation Bill, and as I look at this budget, I heard somebody ask, is it a sweetheart budget, yes or no? And I think yes, because I think the major burdens were not put on the population. When I looked at this budget—I know it is an election year so, obviously, you know, the politicians of the day will try to put a budget that may not cause much distress on the population because they depend on that same population to vote them in.

But I have looked at budgets in the past and other budgets, and I just want to compare this budget with the first budget and some other budgets. And I heard Mr. Moses contribution, and I am so thrilled when he said that he was happy with, you know, and he does not know why. And afterwards, he elaborated he was happy because of the budget. And, Mr. Vice-President, I see a lot of patients who are depressed and unhappy, so I am thinking I can probably help them by giving them some copies of the budget. It may make some happy, it may make some, you know, argue.

But the whole idea is, I have seen patients in my clinic, and my patients cover a wide spectrum of persons, because the clinic I have in Barataria is a free clinic that stems from—we see patients from Beetham, Laventille/Movant, Mount Dior, El Socorro, Aranguéz, St. Joseph and Santa Cruz. So it is a wide mixture of the population—different races, different persons—and oftentimes they come to me, and being their doctor they will open up—they will complain and they will tell me

personal things, and just as how Sen. Drayton spoke about Sita—and I think he had some other individual he mentioned—and they were talking about as young persons they were not able to get into the job market, they were not able to find themselves. In in a similar vein, patients come and complain, and part of it really, I have been hearing patients coming and complaining of the hard times.

I have seen business places close to the office in Barataria, close down. There is really the closure of certain businesses there, and I have heard the plight of the persons. And, actually, I had two patients coming in—and this is something I think we all need to address as legislators. We all need to address as even persons on the Executive to see how we can help persons who think they are discriminated against or somehow marginalized. And what was strange, I had an East Indian patient coming into me, “Doc, they took meh food card”. “They are racist, you see what they did?” I had an African lady coming to me, “Doc, they took my food card, because those people in power they only want money, big car, dey only studying about dey selves and dey family and dey business colleagues getting friends”.

So, here you are, two different persons, two different races, and they have their complaints. So everybody may feel disfranchised in some way, and I am saying budgets should be, you know, in such a way, all-inclusive. Budgets should be in such a way that persons can feel they belong and they are part, and they are not left out, and this is, I am thinking, is one of the challenges we are seeing here.

And I heard also, Sen. Teemal’s contribution where he said sometimes he is hearing the “same old, same old”, and it is a point I wanted to make. A lot of these budgets are really like the recurring decimal. You hear the same sort of, you know, promises, broken promises. You hear it. I remember long ago budgets used

to be around Christmas, and then it moved from Christmas and it moved a little earlier on. So it was like, you know, when you are getting a budget around Christmas, you might have expected some goodies or something, but now it came further down and there were expectations, different expectations.

But when I hear the budget debates, I see like a ping-pong attacks—you know, sometimes the Opposition is hitting the ball of corruption over on that side, the other side hitting it back. We heard talks about a wall costing, I think, 800 million around the prison. Again, we keep hearing talks from side to side, that ping-pong going. And, you see, these are the things that when the normal population hears these levels of corruption or alleged claims, the psyche of the nation sometimes gets them, because they just want bread and butter matters. They want a house, they want adequate water and they want security. They want those basic needs, and when they see politicians—you know, it is election year, silly season, but I am saying somehow we have to look at what we are doing to our people by carrying on in certain manners. So, broken promises. Sometimes we talk about transparency in public affairs, we heard it all before.

We heard persons on the other side claiming that, “hey, this is a good budget, because we did not devalue”. “This is a good budget because we did not go to the IMF.” That IMF boogie has been with us for a long time. But, Mr. Vice-President, we have to ask ourselves, who is worse? Is it, you know, the belt and road initiative? Is it the IMF is the dragon or is the Chinese initiative now, the new dragon? We do not know. We are looking at which one will be the lesser of two evils. And I just want to quote the “Rules of the Road: How China’s Belt and Road Initiative Compares to the IMF”, by Patrick Carr. And he compared the IMF and he looked at the Belt and Road Initiative. And, you know, the comparison

was, he said, we have to be careful of both, because even though the IMF may come in and give us certain draconian measures—how to get the country out of this, at least, they are giving us rules and regulations, “Hey, get this act together”. “If you are owing money try and—you know, if too much public servants are there and you need to cut down.” They will give us solutions, draconian measures probably and, probably, you know, we may not like that. But then, he looked at the fact that, you know, the seizure of the ports in Sri Lanka, neo-colonization of certain African and Arabians countries by, you know, the Chinese, those are things that we have to look at, very carefully when we are looking at relationships with going into China. And, I am saying—Mr. Moses said there were initiatives, there were certain collaborations with the Chinese Government, and even when I looked, Mr. Vice-President, at the budget speech of 2016, even then the same present Minister of Finance, he actually looked at this aspect in this budget speech where he said:

“The deceleration of China’s economy is having a major impact on emerging and developing economies, especially raw material producers. Given their extensive trade links with China, many Latin American countries have been hit very hard. Brazil which has benefited the most from trade links with China now finds itself in a severe recession.”

But we still went in and still are going into agreements with China. So, I am saying, it is the lesser of two evils. Probably the economists, the financiers will have to see, you know, which will give us a better option, but we have to be careful we are going down that path because, in any case—be it the IMF or be it the Chinese, whichever dragon we look at—any debt we take it is our children, our grandchildren will have to pay that. So we have to be very, very cautious about

who we are making these deals with.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to say, you know, I looked at, again, this budget speech, and when I looked at the 2015 budget speech—the 2016 budget speech, sorry, I would like to read into this where the presenter said:

“Madam Speaker, the people have spoken. On September 7, 2015 the people of Trinidad and Tobago rejected the politics of deception, betrayal, greed, arrogance, waste and mismanagement. They rejected officially-sanctioned corruption. They rejected squandermania. They rejected discrimination. They rejected immorality. They rejected inequality. They rejected nepotism and cronyism.

They asked for impartiality, transparency, and sincerity in government.”
And—“...equity and prosperity...”

So this was elaborated in the 2016 budget, but we have heard it all before.

You see, I would like to read into the record, the budget speech of 1987, presented by the then Prime Minister, Mr. ANR Robinson, and he stated:

The basic reality confronting Trinidad and Tobago in 1987 is that led by a Government in power for 30 years, we have failed to meet the challenge of independence. We achieved political independence, Mr. Speaker, in 1962, with an economy dependent on one single resource, oil.

Here we are, we are back with that again, and this was the 1987 budget.

Mr. Vice-President, 25 years later, this was then, we are more than ever dependent on the international oil market.

In 25 years we have failed to develop an economy sufficiently diversified and sufficiently resilient to absorb or even cushion the shocks caused by periodic crises in the international oil market.

Now, it went on a bit where he looked at that, you know, mentioned sectors in agriculture, manufacturing and tourism—and all these services need to be beefed up which, again, we are hearing again, rehashed today, which have been rehashed in a lot of budgets.

We actually heard that the cost of the public sector has been inflated beyond our capacity to maintain it. So we are looking at what transpired then. He spoke about the unstable international oil market. He spoke about the fact that, you know, we may have blown it when we had, you know, any sort of oil boom. And, again, he looked at the gravity of the situation and he also spoke. He said here:

We have had, Mr. Speaker, more than our fair share of midnight robbers, prodigal sons, the consequences for us well-nigh and catastrophic.

So he spoke about this.

This budget in 2016 spoke about a Treasury with three days—well, we heard the talk about only three days left in the kitty, in the Treasury, but this budget that Mr. NAR also read—and this was in 1987:

The Treasury is not just empty. There is a \$1.2 billion bill still to be paid from 1986.

So it is the same story then, it is the same story that we heard. So who has let us down here, politicians then or politicians now or politicians throughout the years? And this is what we have to look at. The politicians are the ones who have been given the mandate by the people to manage the economy, to give us the basic needs we have, but what you have is that difference from then to now is the “same old, same old” recurring decimal, I say.

And, therefore, you know, he went on and spoke about the public debt and he said:

In 1981 the public debt, like money, was no problem. Six years later at the start of 1987 this country is suddenly faced with a serious debt problem.

So here we had it then, here we have it now. So you may have one administration blaming the other administration, and we have to say, well, the blame game will continue. But, at the end of the day, it is the population who will suffer. Debt will continue. Our grandchildren will be forced to pay.

And, again, so if we looked at ANR Robinson and his talk then, and we looked at this administration's first budget, I would just like to go back a little bit further down the line, because remember it happened before, and I would just like to read into this, a speech made by Dr. Eric Williams at Woodford Square on September 13, 1955, and he said:

“We, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, are the sick man of the Caribbean. Our principal handicap to recovery is our doctors. Five years ago we called in a new team of doctors to look after us. For five years they have neglected us; they have been too busy growing rich in private practice...”

But he is not talking about real doctors. He is talking about the doctors who were governing the place. I want to make it clear. Right?

“...and in having tea in the House of Commons, sightseeing in Scandinavia...”

I have heard the other side some time ago saying certain people like to travel in planes, in helicopters. So it is the same story we are hearing:

“...and not sleeping a wink in Montevideo. The dishonesty and immorality of public life in Trinidad and Tobago are now a byword. The population is tired of graft and corruption, sick to death of broken promises, fed up to the teeth with the squandering of the taxes for which they have to dig deep into

its pockets. The situation daily gets worse...The disease is rapidly spreading to the Civil Service...The poison is seeping through the entire body politic.”

So it is strange. Dr. Williams’s speech had a familiar ring, 1955, then we saw it in the ANR Robinson speech and now we are seeing, are hearing it then.

But at the time he was actually making those allegations against the Opposition at the time who was Albert Gomes and Victor Brian and those persons at the time. So it is the same blame game, ping-pong, you are hitting corruption. But, what was strange, even when Dr. Williams came in power—intelligent man, an intellect, father of nation—in a short time after his Government was tainted with the brush of corruption—the Lock Joint scandal. So, you know, the Lock Joint scandal was a foreign firm that was contracted to upgrade the sewer system in Port of Spain, and it was alleged that Ministers in his Government took bribes from company extra. So we always had that level of corruption, mismanagement. It was there, and if it is still here, we have to see a way that we can make things work without that level of corruption.

We have to put things in place, because every dollar spent on corruption or million dollars spent on corruption, somebody is not getting their health care. Sen. Dillon-Remy spoke about the lack of basic supplies in the health care in Tobago. I am frightened to get ill in Tobago now. So, you see, yet still we are hearing grandiose plans, but basic things we are not getting. Sometimes the average wait where you go Mount Hope complex, sometimes in the emergency room, it is horrendous and people say they wait 10 hours, 19 hours before they get a place. So there are deficiencies. It is mentioned, so we have to work as a people, how to get it. If there is a corrupt dollar going there and it can go into health, I say we go after corruption.

I commend the Attorney General for bringing in legislation—procurement legislation and other legislation he has brought in to look at—and follow the money—and look at things. If it really kicks in hopefully, and I am saying “hopefully”, because next five years down the line somebody may be here reading the same speech that we passed legislation, but it continues. So we have to actually ensure that we have legislation. We have to ensure that the corruption is somehow put in a bracket that we could manage it, probably not stop it. I am not being idealistic to say we can stop it. And, again, I think this is a duty that we all will look at.

And, Mr. Vice-President, I just want to quote the trade policy document, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2018. They came out with a document and under the business environment section, they pointed out that, you know, some of our problems—and this is bureaucrats, it is not politicians—there is poor work ethics in the national labour force, poor work ethics. So, therefore, this has always been a challenge. We have seen it mentioned—I mentioned it here. It was spoken about the public servants, you are getting in the national force and if you have poor work ethics, you find our watchwords, productivity, tolerance, you know, the productivity is not there.

I commend the Government for giving increases to CEPEP, for giving increases to, you know, the CEPEP and the URP workers, but what I am saying is, should we have tied in that to a level of persons who work? So you find if you have five CEPEP gangs and you give them a certain amount of a road to maintain, those who are doing an excellent job—those who are staying on the job, those who are actually producing, the productivity—we tie in that with—I am thinking we should have somehow tied in the work that those people do and in terms of

competency—they are working, they are performing—those are the individuals who may be able to get some sort of rise, because then you are now changing a work ethic that, “hey, five gangs in an area, but if this area they are working good and showing me they are staying on the job and finishing that level of road”, you find that they are going to get that bonus. So, probably, I mean, they have given it already, but we may have to look at bonus earnings tied into productivity to see if we can look at that.

We look at corruption, crime and theft. That is another fact mentioned in this, and I am saying, let us look at corruption because, you see, I am looking at these five recommendations or five problems that this business environment report looked at. So corruption, have we had corruption? Well, I mentioned the Lock Joint aspect before, but then we look at successive Governments. So we have the ping-pong, one side will blame the other side and the other side will blame the other side. So allegations of corruption have always haunted us.

Remember there was the old PNM, the new PNM. We had the O’Halloran, the Lock Joint scandals, the gas station racquet, Gene Miles incident, DC9 scandal, Sampie Wallace, Caroni racing scandals and, again, that was the old PNM. The new PNM, we had allegations of debt forgiveness for a \$3 million mall, you know, allegations, different allegations. You had a temple built and nobody knew about the planning of this temple. I just want to digress a bit. So the Temple was built and it was destroyed, a Temple for a priestess.

And when I saw the new administration come in power and I realized—

Hon. Senator: The church.

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh:—the church. It was a big—what should I say? A big political talk before the election that, “Hey, this church is being built for a priestess

and what not". And, okay, I saw that. But then I saw the dismantling of a building. I saw the army parked up there—and this building was built, looking beautiful and systematically people were allowed to go and take things out of that building. And I pleaded to somebody at the time in the new administration—give us that building for the domestic violence people, give us that building for rehab—but it was left and it is nothing now. So, you see, the value of money, it may have been built by one administration, but we could have swung that around. We could have gotten some approval. We could have converted that to house people for rehabilitation. So one administration may not like what another administration does, so, let it go. Let all those things just go down the drain.

So, again, we looked at new PNM now. We looked at Calder Hart incident and also people alleged that he was wielding more power than Cabinet Ministers. And even our recipient of a national award, Mr. Chalkdust said, in his calypso, My Heart, he actually sung a calypso about that incident. So we have it in the public psyche that certain things were not there—sung by our own Chalkdust at the time about corruption. But, as I am saying, we have it on both sides.

I am not going into any recent corrupt charges, alleged corruption between the present administration and neither the PP Government, because they do it enough here for us to realize what is going on, and they do it enough outside and we are going to hear it in the election platform. So I am not going there, but I just wanted to show the history from the days of Eric Williams right down the line to a few leaders, we had those levels, and I am thinking we need to really get our act together to curb that corruption. We need to get that act together to see if somehow we can get a little more decency where the ping-pong effect would not occur where they keep hitting a ball one next to each other where, you know, that

continuity, battering each other. It should not occur.

So it hurts me when, internationally, people look at Trinidad and Tobago and say, “Boy, your country is so corrupt”. I was so happy when Mr. Moses said peace was made with Jamaica with our hon. Prime Minister when a situation was developing. Jamaica is like my second home. I met my wife in Jamaica. I love it. I have memories in Jamaica. So anything with Jamaica, my heart is there. So, I am happy when he said that happened. But, again, remember at a time when our father of the nation had a disagreement with Jamaica, 10 right?—one from 10 leaves zero. That was then, but we have an opportunity now. We made back—one and one is 11, let us get the Caribbean community back together as strength. And this is where, I am thinking, if we really want to get the Caribbean community back together in an economic front, we can do it. We have the ability to do it now. Right? So I am thinking this is something we could look at. So I feel hurt when people say about crime and drugs, human trafficking and all those allegations were made, and I try to defend my country, because this is my home.

So, again, Mr. Vice-President, I just want to go through again, the list that I was going down. We looked at poor work ethics, corruption, crime and theft, inefficient Government bureaucracy which, you know, that has filtered not just in the Government institutions. We see judicial lag, we see delays and we are hoping to get it by legislation and probably work ethic. Foreign exchange shortage and not quick payment to the external business traders, was also one of their problems. Shortage of skilled and unskilled personnel.

So we have the answers here, how we can do it. We have the answers here that, you know, we have to create a country where there is less corruption, there is less talk of “is my party, your party; is my race, your race”, and if we could do

that, we would have great nation-building, but we have to put systems in place because some persons may still be warped in a sense of race, party and corruption and this is why I am thinking this is a challenge to go forward.

Mr. Vice-President, I do not think this budget can get anywhere—the recommendations that, you know, our finance Minister gave. I do not think it could go anywhere unless we tackle crime, because crime is a major issue.

3.45 p.m.

You see, tourists would not come if there are adverse crime reports. I would not open my business in the night if I can get shot. I used to buy “doubles” by Sauce in Curepe eleven o'clock in the night, I would not go into there now. So once crime is tackled, the business will “ketch” back, and I think I have tried my best to support measures that the Attorney General brought. And it may seem draconian to some of the attorneys, whatnot, but I think Trinidad has reached a time with crime that I do not mind supporting draconian legislation for a while, and if it is anything, with sunset clause, we pull it back. So crime, I think, is something we have to tackle before we can move anywhere in any budget. But I have looked at successive governments, and I could go into all the different budgets where in Mr. Manning's Government we had the OPVs, we wanted to lockdown the borders; I think the criticism that one of our past National Security Minister, Mr. Martin Joseph, got about the blimp was poor.

The blimp was up there, we had the air, we had the sea and we had things in place, and I am thinking if that was continued we would have been in a better place, but probably politics again. And this is why we have to create systems in place that if a certain administration gets a policy, it is good, because Sen. Teemal mentioned that there were policies in terms for flooding, there were policies in

terms for transport, and if we could get to tie in one administration with another administration for the good of the people, this is something we should look at. Because there are certain things that we cannot play politics with, security, the flood relief he talked about, you know, there were plans in place, but why did it not continue? So I studied this and I am thinking, if we had the civil society, we had Opposition, Government, we had Independents, like Mr. Teemal who knows about the infrastructure of the road and flooding, and what not, all in a team together to put a plan for 15 years in the future. So we try to tie in, if the budget is good, because remember the world economy could shape anyhow, things can go wrong, but if you could tie in one administration to another administration for the people's benefit, I think we would have achieved something.

He spoke about the Oncology Centre, this is what I was going to speak on today also, why was it scrapped? But, it was started by Mr. Manning, Mr. Manning's Government. The last administration said they were going to do it but it is scrapped now, probably it is factors we do not know, probably it is more cost effective to take the equipment and put it in St. James, but we need answers to know why it was scrapped. So we need those answers because, you see, even if you scrapped that Oncology Centre and you could put that equipment in St. James or another centre and tell the people you are getting service, we made a mistake, economic times have changed, we have no problem, but we need answers. We do not want to, vaille que vaille, start something and finish it. I remember in one of Mr. Manning's budgets the mega farms were mentioned, and I thought, at the time, it was a good idea, but afterwards, you know, I heard the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries recently stated that it is really not a good idea, but at the time I was thinking it was a good idea, and then when I looked at some research, the

mega farms will in fact stifle and kill local farming industry. So if we have a viable local farming industry, and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has been giving land to persons who—and I commend him on that—are landowners, who are willing to do farming, and this is something in the budget I commend.

So I see the mega farms changed from being a good idea to being a bad idea and now supported by the Opposition, ping pong again. So on one side when Mr. Manning first suggested it we heard from the Opposition then, it will “lick up” the small farmers. We did hear that. We heard one set of politics about that, it is not a good idea, you are bringing in Cubans, but, again, the other side now is saying, you know, it is not a good idea, ping pong, but what is really the good idea? We need the technocrats to sit down with us and tell us, “Listen, this will work, tie it in for the next five years”, because other than that most of these budget promises would just be taking the nation for a ride, because you are telling us you are doing one thing and then it is being changed.

So I digressed and I want to come back to National Security, I think the failure of successive governments to stop guns, drugs and persons coming in, this is something; we really need to lockdown the borders. We need some action, and again to say, I think, you know, as I said, National Security is a major player in this and I support moneys given to National Security if we could put a dent in crime, because I mentioned it already, it will open the gates back for tourists to come for us not being robbed.

We have to get safe places for our citizens, and I have always mentioned the fact that I may be stressed out but I want to go Carenage, I want to go Maracas, I want to go Caura River, but I might be robbed. Safe places mean, Mr.

Vice-President, “I going there, I see ah joint army and police patrol”, so they are there, they are stationed there so people can carry their relatives Botanical Gardens and we know there is a presence there; it is not hard. The soldiers may be in their barracks, let them come out. Let them be stationed at certain areas there so we would know that is their patrol, we are giving safe places, people can carry their family and get that relief. We can do that. And I spoke to some of the lifeguards and, again, they were mentioning some of their plight, because the lifeguards are now under National Security, and they mentioned that, you know, in the recent flooding they would have been appreciative if they could also be called out because they might be able to save somebody drowning in certain areas.

They mentioned the fact that they are daily-paid workers and they saw the need to somehow, you know, stabilize this, and I commend the Government for the daily-paid workers, at least you have given some pension to them. This was a plight that the lifeguards had, I am thinking some moneys need to be spent on the two ambulances that the lifeguards have and training for them because they are not trained into emergency management training, so if somebody really collapsed and needed that care to get resuscitated on the way to the hospital, we need to put moneys into training them. I am looking again at the police officers, and, again—I am just pulling in some things that the man on the street may have been telling me. So lifeguards had that complaint, police officers said there is discrimination between the First Division and Second Division in terms of retirement benefits. So if you are a First Division officer and you retire, your benefits would come faster, if you are a Second Division officer you are basically begging and you actually have to go and try and be behind them, and it may take as much as three, four years sometimes to get that. So we have to look, if you want happy police officers, give

those officers the benefits that is due to them. So this is something we need to look in to.

Again, when we are looking at the fight on crime, I am thinking that—as I said, we supported the Minister of National Security and the video evidence, and I am saying now the cameras that we have may not last a long time, so we are now challenged with that. And I supported the Bail Act in its so-called draconian, you know, with some draconian measures, as an attorney who held me up and say, “How could you support that, you know, they could just hold you and make up two charges and you are in jail?”, but I said I supported it, because I said that, “If a police officer is coming to plant a gun on me, they are going with video evidence”, so we should have that video evidence before you go to charge a man. And if you go to the magistrate and you do not have that camera, that you are going into a house and you “find” that, the magistrate should say, “No way you are going to get that”. So I am saying, a camera system is important to equip it, to prevent abuse of rights from the police officers or to prevent the public from being, every weekend, causing—I use the Indian term “janjat”, confusion. Every week you are seeing on Facebook, “Police come but they shoot this one, brutality”, police cameras will solve that.

Now, if there is a challenge for money, all these police officers have phones now, it may be cheaper for the Government to consider getting a good phone with good video surveillance, at least that phone you could keep contact with the police officers so, you know, when you want to call them out. You also have that phone where you have video evidence also, and the—

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

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. You have video

evidence, and also with the phone you could have GPS tracking, so you do not have to put GPS tracking in the cars. So, again, those are things I wanted to say, it may save taxpayers' money. Marine Branch, good idea; why it is a good idea, because I am thinking that, okay, we may not be giving the Coast Guard the materials to work with, the diesel or the boats, or proper running vessels, but I always like if "who will guard the guards". So if there is a Marine Branch, I am feeling a little more comfortable that they could be looking at the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard could look at them. So this is a recommendation.

For the prison officers, a lot of them will get death threats, I am saying with the Caricom revitalization we can get prison officers from here to work in another Caricom island and let some there come here. We can also make sure that the prison officers are masked so the prisoners would not know who is to go after which family, and whatnot. And the other solution I have with the prison officers who are getting—you know, some of them, it is their own persons are being threatened, you know, their relatives and sometimes they give in and give prisoners what they want. So what I am saying with the prison officers, we need to somehow get something better there, probably we need again to get the intervention of the army there to be joint with them. And I commend efforts I am seeing for the marine division. Mr. Vice-President, I would like to look at the fact that, yes, we have pathologists now at forensic but we need to build a better centre. We need to look at the DNA evidence to get that together.

As I move now to agriculture, I welcome the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and Mr. Avinash Singh being somebody in agriculture, he knows everything about agriculture so I am thinking—even before the last election Mr. Clarence Rambharat was named as Minister of Agriculture by the Prime Minister

before the election, so he had faith in him, and I am thinking if you two together can come together and give us something, I am happy. We need to ban Gramoxone because it kills a lot of persons, and any person who take Gramoxone and goes to hospital it costs us \$10,000 in three days for that person. So we have to look at banning certain substances; years now that has been. We need to encourage planting. We need to encourage persons to have more greenery, you know, according to our, you know, the development, I am saying, we need more greenery. I think it is 30 per cent of our land space have to be green. When we are getting planning, we need to continue that.

I am looking at the fact that certain countries they also have what you call a property tax benefit where if you have certain trees, certain acreage you could apply so your property tax would be less. Property tax, Mr. Vice-President, when we spoke about flooding, I mentioned, if property tax is going to come back and I am in a flood-prone area, please give me a less property tax because it means that my area is a flood-prone area, I should not be paying property tax as somebody else. And touching about flooding again, I had made a plea to the Minister of Finance that if you are in a flood-prone area and you want to bring in flood protection devices, please allow these people to bring it in VAT free; allow them to bring in those stuff so they can at least prevent damage that will trickle to the insurance company.

Agriculture, I mentioned, I have faith, good things are there. I hope that we could continue. We had past failures with TTABA, you know, the TTABA was there and it failed. We had allegations about ADB, certain Ministers got that ADB loan, but the Green Market we have now is doing a fantastic job. So I am thinking that, you know, I must also put in a plug here, there is an article in the *Express*, Dr.

Sherene Kalloo said, on the 18th of the fourth, 2016:

We should consider marijuana as a goldmine.

And that was her head point. So, again, I looked at her and we had some talks, I said, “Buh we cyah even plant cassava to feed our nation”, but she was saying look Jamaica, Scandinavia, different countries have benefited from the marijuana, and probably the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries should look at this.

Again housing, we have been doing good things in housing, and I am seeing that, you know,—housing, you know, I cannot blame Government for housing because the UK has a housing shortage, so worldwide there is a problem with housing shortage. All I want is equitable, you know, you make sure nobody could cry race or political affiliation, “This is why I got my house”. So make it a more transparent manner and I think the persons in society would be happier for that.

So housing, I think we looked at it, there are houses distributed in Real Spring Gardens, people made allegations that it is only the majority of a certain race got it; the same allegations we had here years ago by a certain Member of Parliament saying that same thing. He said he did not know if it was race or political nepotism. So I am saying, put things in place, put it transparent, and I am thinking the population would now be able to go on as a nation forward.

Mr. Vice-President: Thank you.

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen Cummings. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Foster Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for this opportunity to contribute to what is clearly one of the best budgets we have had in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I see my friends on the other side have ran away because they know—

Sen. Ameen: “We doh have time with you, boy.”

Sen. F. Cummings: They ran away. Mr. Vice-President, breaking news, the UNC withdraws the case seeking to block the Petrotrin refinery sale, [*Desk thumping*] a councillor candidate from the UNC, his name is Clint Davis, yesterday withdrew his candidacy as candidate for the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] He said the injunction was “the straw that broke the camel’s back”. [*Desk thumping*] He said that they were doing nothing for him, that he joined them three months ago and having noticed that they were doing nothing to help the people he decided to withdraw his candidacy. But he said what “broke the camel’s back” is when the UNC decided to file an injunction to prevent the OWTU from getting involved in the Petrotrin refinery. They have withdrawn the matter, Mr. Vice-President. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] A counsellor candidate has the UNC on its heels, Mr. Vice-President, on its heels.

Sen. Ameen: “How much all yuh pay him?”

Sen. F. Cummings: Mr. Vice-President, the UNC is on the run and they will have to keep on running.

Before I get into my contribution let me take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance and his team, they have done an excellent job [*Desk thumping*] in bring stability, strength and growth to Trinidad and Tobago. I also want to congratulate the Minister of Planning and Development and her team for the work that they would have done on this budget. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, it is not—well, I think it is a dream of all of us that we can live to three score and 10 as promised in the Bible, and I want to take the opportunity to also wish our Prime Minister a very happy birthday, and may God continue to grant him health and strength. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to tell my friends on

the other side, “yuh doh” have to be PNM to say happy birthday to the Prime Minister, you know, he is Prime Minister to all of Trinidad and Tobago, including the UNC Members. Okay?

I want to say, Mr. Vice-President, that—[*Crosstalk*] I see my friend, Sen. Haynes—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: So as much as the start of the contribution may have “lively up” the proceedings in the Senate, I think enough is enough now and the Member should be allowed to continue his contribution with some silence. Continue, Sen. Cummings.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I am very familiar with the UNC, Mr. Vice-President. I know their political DNA quite well. They are from Couva, this is my hometown. They used to be based at a place called Reinzi Complex but they were evicted, so I know them quite well. I can trace them back to, not going far as ULF, but I could trace them back to the Club 88. Sen. Ameen was not around that time. The Club 88, which morphed into the UNC, they eventually got rid and their founder and replaced him in hunger for power and they were certainly one of the worst governments that ever—[*Desk thumping*]
—one of the worst governments ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. They plundered the Treasury, they did not get a change to get under the flooring; they did not get a chance to get inside the walls, and now they are telling Trinidad and Tobago that it is a new UNC. What new UNC? It is the same bunch of people, and if Trinidad and Tobago gives them a chance again, they will do the same thing and probably worse; never again, never again. [*Crosstalk*]

The PNM—and, you know, Sen. Haynes said earlier on—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, again, so there is a debate going on whilst the

Member is contributing, I have been saying that since 10.00 a.m. this morning for several Members on my left and now on my right. I do not want to hear any more commentary while the Member is contributing. Continue, Sen. Cummings.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you kindly, Mr. Vice-President. As I said, I understand their DNA all too well, the truth gets them all riled up and their hunger for power has them a bit blinded, but the truth they will have to hear. Sen. Haynes in her contribution, my good friend Sen. Haynes, I am not seeing her across there now, said that the local election, there was some rush; there is no rush, the elections are due, and the Prime Minister has repeatedly said that elections would be called when they are due. He has given that commitment and he is a man that sticks to his word, and so the general election that you are calling for you just have to wait until it is due, “buh do not not rush to eat because your licks is booked anyhow”. You know, do not be too hurry, you know, hold on, there is about a year again to go, and when it is due, as the Prime Minister said it will be held, and when it is held the UNC will, of course, lose the election.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to just tell my friends on the other side—I am sorry my friend, Sen. Mark, is not here—I wanted to give my friend, Sen. Haynes, some advice, you are new to the UNC be sure they give you a safe seat, you know, because my friend, Sen. Mark, has been around there a long time and the closest he has come is to Pointe-a-Pierre, licks after licks after licks, you know. And Sen. Ameen who was put up against the giant, Jack Warner, got some licks in Chaguanas West as well. So I am looking at the whole bench. Sen. Obika be careful they “doh”—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: So, Sen. Ameen, we had lunch and I would have hoped there would have been a certain level of lethargy after we had a full stomach. It seems

as though that we were good for about an hour or two and now it is getting a little bit out of hand. If Members cannot sit in silence and listen to Sen. Cummings as he is making his contribution, I invite you to exit the Chamber and come back after he is speaking. This is the only invitation I am giving, the next time I stand to my feet it is going to be a request. Continue, Sen. Cummings.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Sen. Obika, do not fall for that offer of Point Fortin because the PNM is unmoveable. And my good friend who I like to listen to sometimes, Sen. Sobers, San Fernando East will not do well for you at all, at all. Even in 1986 the PNM held on to San Fernando East, do not fall for that.

Mr. Vice-President, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM has continually, over the last four years, put Trinidad and Tobago on a path of development, on a path of growth and has worked to stabilize this country and this country's economy under the astute leadership of our Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley. I know that my friends get uncomfortable on the other side but the fact remains, you did an absolutely poor job when you were given the opportunity in 2010 to 2015, and sadly we could have been doing so much more as a country if you had not wrecked this economy. [*Desk thumping*] You would expect whenever I contribute that I will not remind you and remind Trinidad and Tobago of the absolutely poor job you did as a government. The corruption, the greed, I mean one Senator spoke about corruption early on but those examples are really pale in comparison to what the UNC did to Trinidad and Tobago during 2010 and 2015. The country will not forget it and certainly the PNM will not allow you to get our hands back on the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, as I said early on, I am quite familiar with the political DNA of the UNC, the PNM is a Government that governs for all of Trinidad and Tobago. When we put plans forward, as we did with the 2020 vision and now the 2030 vision, it is not designed to look at parts of the country and neglect others, it is designed to take the holistic development of Trinidad and Tobago into consideration, and the UNC knows nothing about that. They have consistently, for instance—let me just speak two minutes about Tobago. Tobago is a place that is very dear to my heart. I was not born there but I really love Tobago. Today the UNC cannot contest an election in Tobago but yet put forward itself as a national party. If you want to be considered as a national party put some candidates up at the next THA election, put some candidates up for the two general seats in Tobago, Tobago East and Tobago West. There are returning officers put by the EBC in those constituencies as well, you are a national party, let me see your candidate in Tobago; you have none, but you love Tobago and you are questioning about Tobago. But the PNM has demonstrated over time, and I can go back, I will just go to the 70s. In the 1970s when Tate & Lyle who was the sugar producer in Trinidad and Tobago, an English company, when there were movements in the sugar industry influenced by lack of preferential treatment on the European market and sugar was no longer gold and Tate & Lyle would have decided to pull out, initially the Government bought 51 per cent of that company and Tate & Lyle continued to run the company.

In 1975 when Tate & Lyle decided they were going to move out completely, the Government could have decided in 1975 to close down Caroni (1975) Limited; the PNM could have decided that. And what did the PNM Government in 1975 do—we have heard a lot of history today—they bought out the remaining 49 per

cent of Tate & Lyle and continue to run the sugar industry to keep jobs in central Trinidad, the place that I am from but a place that traditionally the PNM has not gotten the kind of political support from. And that company continued to run at a loss and required support from the Treasury on a consistent basis, almost like milk for a baby. And in 2003 when we reached to a point of almost \$2 billion in accumulated losses and the Government had to do something and the decision was taken to get out of sugar, the Caroni workers have gone down in history in Trinidad and Tobago as having received one of the most attractive separation packages in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] There is no question about that, cash payment, and this included temporary and casual workers, a lot of residential land, full service lot, and a two-acre parcel of agricultural land; that is PNM policy. So the PNM is not concerned about where you come from. When the PNM decided to take the economy towards industrialization where was the most premier industrial location in the country placed?—Point Lisas, in an Opposition-held constituency. It is still Opposition today. But what did the placement of that Point Lisas Industrial Estate do? In addition to what it did for the economy, it created jobs for persons in the central belt, opportunities for entrepreneurs, young contractors, budding contractors could all benefit from PNM policy in central Trinidad. And that is what some of my younger friends on the Opposition Bench are unaware of. At the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited, a very large company full of a lot of equipment, tractors, harvesters, trucks, backhoes, excavators, those things were given for zero cents to farmers in the sugar industry. You heard of no auction. They were given that so that they could continue to cultivate and service the land. That is PNM policy.

4.15 p.m.

So that when I listened to some of the gloom and doom coming from my good friend, Sen. Mark, I am reminded of a story back in my primary days at the Tortuga RC School—that is where I went to school—Chicken Licken and Hen Len, the sky has fallen on the head of Chicken Licken. You know about Chicken Licken, Sen. Sobers? Chicken Licken, Hen Len, every day is some gloom and doom. Never one day a good story; 40 minutes of doom and gloom added by another 20 minutes, plus 20 minutes of Motions on the adjournment all about doom and gloom. No good news for Trinidad and Tobago according to the Opposition, but yet you are anxious to get into government.

The fact remains that as you till the soil while you are in Opposition, and the time comes and you get into government, I am always looking to see what opportunity is given to some of these persons on the Opposition Bench to help change some of the things that they say must be changed. In Opposition you are working, in government there is no opportunity provided for you. Watch out Sen. Saddam, the same thing might happen to you. Follow the track record of your leader on the Opposition Bench. I think, Mr. Vice-President, that the UNC must realize by now that they are not cut out for government, and they are not even doing so well in Opposition. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, the PNM is on a course to take Trinidad and Tobago in the direction that will benefit all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Let me just share with you some of the projects that have been successfully completed, and you would just have to accept the fact, because it is the fact. And this is one state organization charged with some of the development under the PNM in recent times: Arima Hospital, Point Fortin Hospital, St. Joseph Police Station, Besson Street Police Station, completion of the Maracas/St. Joseph Police Station, Shirvan

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Road Police Station in Tobago completed, Roxborough Police Station, Government Campus Plaza, Carenage fishing facility, Carenage homework centre, Ministry of Education tower, Stollmeyer's Castle, Whitehall refurbishment, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, that you all left abandoned for years.

Sen. S. Hosein: \$1 billion.

Sen. F. Cummings: Laventille swimming pool, Diego Martin Sporting Complex, Moruga agro-processing plant, Mount Hope/Mount Lambert Community Centre, Chickland Community Centre, Ackbar Trace Community Centre, Blanchisseuse Community Centre, La Pastora Community Centre, Pleasantville Community Centre, Las Lomas Community Centre, San Fernando North Community Centre, Roxborough Administrative Complex, the Prime Minister's official residence in Tobago, Hope Primary School, Whim Primary School, Patience Hill Primary School, Signal Hill Primary School. PNM at work in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ameen, thanks. You can take a walk and come back in about 10 minutes.

Sen. Ameen: Mr. Vice-President, my apologies.

Mr. Vice-President: Thank you, no. Great, I am glad that you apologized. Please still take a walk and come back in 10 minutes.

Hon. Senator: Come back tomorrow.

Sen. Ameen: I will deal with him tomorrow.

Mr. Vice-President: No, you will deal with no one as long as I am here. Take a walk and 10 minutes. Continue Sen. Cummings.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. You know, I

understand the political DNA of the UNC very well. The truth gets under their nails and they get very antsy, but the PNM will continue its development programme. And when 2020 comes, understand one thing, the people of this country will vote for the PNM to continue these development programmes. Take that, put it in your pipe and smoke it.

Mr. Vice-President, social services in Trinidad and Tobago: The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has continued to ensure that there is a safety net in place for those most vulnerable in our society, something that our friends know nothing about, because when they had the opportunity, persons who could have afforded it were at the front of the line taking opportunities from those who were really in need. You saw some persons pulling up in very fancy motor cars, going into the supermarket and presenting a food card to the cashier. Therefore the wastage had to be put to rest under the PNM, and in so doing, even so, public assistance, over 25,000 deserving individuals benefiting from that programme under the PNM at this time.

Senior citizens grant, or pension as we may call it, 103,000 citizens. We also have, to the tune of about \$5 million, clothing grant, domestic help, education grant, funeral grant, household items grant, medical equipment, pharmaceutical grant, school supplies grant. That is the PNM at work, [*Desk thumping*] whether the UNC likes it or not. Disability grant, over 24,000 persons benefiting. Disaster relief, food cards, 29,000 households benefiting, minor repairs, sanitary plumbing, electrical house wiring, all of these programmes continue to reach those most in need under the People's National Movement Government led by Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley. That is Government at work.

Then we move to the Government Aided Self-Help Housing Programme.

Mr. Vice-President, you travel through certain rural districts in this country, you see poverty in a way that would touch your heart. The Government has come up with a programme that has been so impressive, that has reached those so vulnerable in those communities, that the programme was given an award sometime earlier this year. Through the Land Settlement Agency, we have been able to construct, along with some sweat equity from the villagers, a two-bedroom dwelling house for the cost of \$120,000. [*Desk thumping*] If you go into some communities in Moruga, in Sangre Grande, in certain parts of eastern Trinidad, you will see this programme at work, and you will see the meaningful effect of it and how it changes the lives of those persons who, without this programme, would not have been able to afford a decent home. As your country develops you have to take everyone along with you, not just create super millionaires. You have to be able to take everyone along, and this programme has been able to reach those, as I said, who are most vulnerable.

Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts—but of course, you see, for some persons, Port of Spain is not a place because you do not have a base that you can relate to. The fact remains is those buildings that you left abandoned when you were in government, we had to come into government to make sure and restore them because Port of Spain is the capital city. So recently the most successful Carifesta was hosted in the city of Port of Spain. I saw some of you there. [*Desk thumping*] I did see some of you. I saw my friend, the Senator who was making a whole lot of noise a little while ago, having a good time at the Carifesta. Well then come out and say that over 24 participating countries in the region came to Trinidad and Tobago and we were able to showcase this country. Our artistes, over 1,000 of them, were able to perform. We had over

500volunteers from throughout Trinidad and Tobago coming forward. Everybody said it was the best Carifesta, and you talking about cake all the time. [*Desk thumping*]

So if the volunteers get a piece of cake, they did not even get a stipend. So cake becomes your campaign? Well you come on, on the campaign trail with cake and we will deal with you. [*Desk thumping*]

Construction and refurbishment works continue on 37 community centres. Success causes you to behave like “cow itch” in your clothes, but the PNM will continue to perform to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

A national policy on sustainable community development was adopted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Vice-President, as you go into communities—when I was a little guy growing up, the village council was one of—the local arm of government support in the village, and we have been working to strengthen these communities, to give them the facilities. The Minister of Communications spoke earlier on about library services being offered at community centres. I know that there is a programme under the Ministry of Public Administration for computers to be placed at these locations. So in the various districts you are taking those facilities out to those remote communities, and the people are benefiting. Through the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, over \$10 million spent in training at the community level benefiting over 50,000 citizens, with training in practical skills to best micro entrepreneurship. That is the PNM Government at work.

Mr. Vice-President, you know earlier on I spoke about the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, and you might think, you know, well okay that is just one. You might think that is just one. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Turning sod.

Sen. F. Cummings: The Point Lisas Industrial Estate was around before you were born Senator. The one I am about to talk to you now, you could talk about turning sod, the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate. Another industrial estate neighbouring the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, another PNM policy to bring development to central Trinidad, to encourage foreign investment in our country. According to the Minister of Finance when construction starts, tenants have been identified, including firms operating in Central and South America in the areas of air-conditioning, automotive, heavy machinery, building material, power transmission and furniture. Somebody spoke about diversification? This is the PNM policy at work in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to spend a little time on some of the—Sen. Deyalsingh spoke about housing. The PNM continues, and has the record, as the only government to take housing seriously in Trinidad and Tobago, because it is a need. If we go back to our primary school days, we would have been taught about the basic needs: food, clothing, shelter. There are several citizens wanting to own a home and being unable to do so. The PNM has a track record of providing low-cost housing to deserving citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

What happened by my friends who get very antsy when the PNM is speaking? Under their stewardship, when they met the cost per square foot at \$600, the homes that they built while they were in government during 2010 and 2015—they met it under \$600, they took it up to \$1,200 per square foot—\$1,200 per square foot. So that a home constructed under the UNC Government cost 850 to \$ 1.3 million per house, taking it completely out of the reach of those who were supposed to benefit from State housing. So that, totally out of the reach.

[Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Obika.

Sen. F. Cummings: Let me be clear, Mr. Vice-President, when the PNM demitted office in 2010, the cost of an HDC home ranged between \$350,000 to \$500,000. The UNC Government took it to \$850,000 to \$1.3 million per house. “Work de maths.” And therefore all of that fat—all of that fat—to enrich certain persons and to put pressure on the poor man to qualify for a home, to pay an inflated mortgage for the 20 or 30 years, while certain persons got rich on the backs of poor people in this country.

The PNM has slashed that, and taken the cost back to where it should be. It is now at \$600 per square foot, and with a new initiative introduced in the budget. You see they would not like this, you know, because this does not allow room for the corruption, when you cut the fat out. So this new programme, geared at small and medium contractors to produce a house at the cost of \$500,000, a three-bedroom house, the same house that they were trying to build for \$1 million. Contracts to be awarded to small contractors in batches of five and 10 houses. What this will do is put our small contractors to work. It will energize the economy, the downstream. The hardwares will have work. The masons would have work. All our skilled men would be put to work—men and women. At the end of the day, a house will be produced that the average citizen would be able to afford a mortgage on such a unit.

That is when you are concerned about providing a benefit from start to finish, which is to say, you put your people to work, you create employment, you put your business people into active entrepreneurial activity, and at the end of the day, you provide an affordable house for those who are deserving. The UNC

policy is: you inflate the cost, you get some people rich very quickly, and then you take away the ability of those who are most deserving to afford a low-income home. The PNM will get us back on track with the housing programme in this country.

Then you have the construction in the health sector. Mr. Vice-President, the Point Fortin Hospital, the Sangre Grande Hospital, the Port of Spain central block—*[Interruption]* The Point Fortin Hospital, the Sangre Grande Hospital, the Port of Spain central block, the Arima Hospital, and we had to rescue a project that they tried to open beforehand, where it was incomplete. They called it all sorts of things, incomplete. They opened it before the contractors handed it over; it was a construction site. As a matter of fact, faith intervened on the day and “blow away de tent” at the opening, because even the wind, the elements of nature got involved because they knew the hospital was not completed and ready for the public. *[Desk thumping]* The PNM has gotten that back on track, and we in central Trinidad will now benefit from the Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility. *[Desk thumping]* That is PNM at work.

We propose to construct the Roxborough Hospital. Mr. Vice-President—
Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. Obika: Thank God!

Sen. F. Cummings:—the St. James Medical Complex, the Diego Martin Health Centre. Mr. Vice-President, my colleague Senator across the floor, who is trying to displace the current sitting Member for St. Augustine, is making some noise across there. But the same thing that happened in Chaguanas West might repeat itself in St. Augustine. I want to point that out to her. The same thing might happen again, be careful.

As I wind up, I want to say that Trinidad and Tobago is privileged to have a government led by Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley. [*Desk thumping*] We are privileged to have a Minister of Finance with the experience to have steered Trinidad and Tobago out of the morass that it was left in by the UNC, and even a sitting Member of the UNC was heard saying some time ago that the PNM is the only qualified party to take Trinidad and Tobago forward. [*Desk thumping and Laughter*] Sometimes the truth just seeps out of you when you least expect it. [*Crosstalk*] Out of the abundance of the heart the tongue speaketh.

I want to say that we are on the right track. “Stability, Strength and Growth”, that is what this PNM Government will deliver to Trinidad and Tobago. As we continue in this term, as we move towards 2020, as we steer Trinidad and Tobago towards developed status by 2030, with the support of the people and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are certain that they will not retard the growth of this country by returning the UNC to power, I say to Trinidad and Tobago, thank you for your support. I say to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, press on, and Mr. Vice-President, I thank you very much.

Hon. Senator: Goodbye!

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, let me just—

Sen. Mark: Sorry, sorry Sir.

Mr. Vice-President: Let me just say, welcome to the Senate.

Sen. Mark: Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Vice-President: That being said, there have been some rulings that have gone before.

Sen. Mark: I have been following you very closely.

Mr. Vice-President: Very good, so I do not need to repeat, great.

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for recognizing me and allowing me the opportunity to contribute to the Bill, an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September 2020.

What a difference five years make. I remember just under five years ago I was making my maiden budget contribution, and petrified. This is now my fifth budget contribution and I thank the God above and Her Excellency, and His Excellency before her, for the opportunity to continue to serve my country. It is indeed an honour and quite an interesting experience and journey

Let me start by saying that my contribution is actually titled “utopia versus dystopia”. Utopia is the perfect world. Dystopia is another matter on the other side of the continuum. Trinidad and Tobago seems to be right in the middle of it, which means we are poised to either rise or fall.

So let me just make some comments on some contributions made before, as we were usually taught to during budget debates. There are some commendable—many actually—commendable aspects of the national budget as presented by the Finance Minister in the other place. These are the ones that I kind of hold on to because of my social science background. I think the homes or the areas for survivors of domestic violence—I hate the word “victims”, so survivors of domestic violence—is extremely commendable. We have an issue in Trinidad and Tobago, and this provision recognizes that and takes a step forward in providing those, what I would call “safe houses” and “places of refuge” for those persons. I think that is extremely commendable.

I think child care provision for single mothers—I think it should be parents quite frankly and not just mothers. While single mothers are in the majority there

are some single fathers who should benefit from this, [*Desk thumping*] and I think that is actually very commendable, but that is semantics, and well yes.

Let me talk about the Minister of Communications' comments about the archival issues, and the fact that archival assets are assets all over the world, which can generate huge revenues. If you think of the Smithsonian and the kinds of US dollars that one has to pay to access those archives, and Trinidad has a rich history, culture and legacy, and all those documents are reposed in those archives. So I think that is a move in the right direction.

Light bulbs—"uh", it is okay. I would have preferred a little more forward direction in an overall renewable energy policy and a green thrust policy, as opposed to the specificity of LED light bulbs, which is not a bad thing. "Doh get me wrong", it is a good move, but an overall general policy toward moving Trinidad and Tobago off fossil fuels, because we have a base in natural gas that drives our electricity supply. But we are in a position way in advantage of Barbados that has made significant strides in providing a hybrid system where solar energy, which has been announced in three past budgets quite frankly, has been able to be used as a hybrid with their main electricity grid to save that—I think one of my colleagues mentioned it—natural gas asset to be used for more productive endeavours.

So I think placing some focus on the legislation that governs electricity distribution to make it easier for home owners and some small commercial entities to bring those hybrid systems into place, and adding a hybrid and moving us closer and closer off that fossil fuel dependence, would have been to me a more holistic approach.

The OJT increases I approve of, but then what? Because the OJTs are at a

particular disadvantage in a country that would spend billions of dollars educating its population, rightfully so, administration after administration, at a tertiary level and a skills training level. So while you would get some experience as an OJT, there are post-grad students and undergrad students who are graduating from five or so major universities in Trinidad and Tobago who cannot get jobs.

I think it is the Minister of Communications, through you, Mr. Vice-President, mentioned that she would want to know any post-graduate person who is working for \$8,000. Well, there are several who are working for \$8,000 and less, because there are several that are unemployed. And we have an undisclosed underemployment situation in Trinidad and Tobago, given the amount of resources we have placed in educating the population at the tertiary level, and we still have not been able to, quite frankly, adequately align that level of spend with the direction in policy of any administration moving forward, in terms of the types of industries and sectors we want to develop.

I think there is a huge gap in terms of ICT training, because in the next 10 to 15 years, actually now, but moving forward, everything is going to be underscored by ICT. Every single aspect of our lives is going to be run by ICT. It is already basically there, and we need to start aligning ourselves with technology generation, innovation, investment in R and D, and getting ourselves as a country positioned to take our place in the world, revenue wise and in terms of where we are, to facilitate our continued growth and development.

Which takes me to the other issue which I mentioned just now of research and development, and our miniscule investment in that. It is part of the reason why we have not been able to effectively diversify as we would have liked to, and yes we will be part of the petrochemical sector that is covering our economy for a long,

long time to come. But if you listen to Dr. Dax Driver, the President of the Energy Chamber in a recent interview post the day after the budget, the Tuesday, at the Chamber of Commerce, he said, if you look at the global trends—and he is uniquely positioned to make these kinds of pronouncements—the trend is already away from the world in terms of oil consumption and demand. We are still fighting to fix our oil sector, in terms of production, in terms of the amount of oil we refine.

Even gas, which is the mainstay of our energy sector, most of the countries that have a base in that are pouring a lot of the resources and revenues coming from that into R&D, into renewable energies, because they understand, one, the climate factor about that, so they understand it is a *fait accompli*.

4.45 p.m.

So while we seek to bolster our oil and gas production and outputs, they are actually where they are supposed to be and moving in terms of investment in innovation, away from that and that is an issue.

On the other issue of diversification our colleague, Sen. Henry, in his contribution yesterday kinda shocked me because he said, this country has been trying to diversify since 1960/1970 and “diversification is a difficult thing”. Well, we know that. If it was easy, any country could do it, but that is not the point. The point is, we have to continue trying and we have to get it right, there is no if, but or maybe. Whether it is hard, difficult, challenging, we have to get it right, and we have not been as successful as we should have been given the kind of money and revenue this country has generated for the last 70/80 years. It is actually an embarrassing situation where we find ourselves today, given what has passed through this country in terms of revenue that could have been poured into research

and development and getting us on a more—a stronger foundation in terms of the kind of diversification we want and sustainably so, we have not done well at all.

And there are some bright points. The Minister of Trade and Industry would be very happy that I see some glimmers of hope, the creative industry is finally getting the kind of attention it deserves, but there is still a lot more work to be done because that is an infinite resource. If you look at what Hollywood has done, the US has done with Hollywood, a billion-dollar industry, New York, Atlanta music industries, but we have so many resources that we are not really putting an industry in place for. We are doing nice little things here, nice little things there, but it is not being positioned as it should, in my humble opinion, to take its place as this type of revenue earner in terms of infrastructure support systems and everything in a straight value chain line. [*Desk thumping*] So while we are doing some great new things, I think there is a lot more to be done to turn it into an industry.

The music business is still a hustle, let us not kid ourselves. It has no industry there. There are some very talented, and we have infinitely talented artistes who are making strides on their own that we as a country are latching onto, and there is nothing wrong with that.

Let me give the example of Rihanna, Barbados, and if you do some reading you would realize what Barbados has been able to with one superstar coming out of their country. Rihanna was discovered by Jay Z, taken to New York at 16 years old and turned into a global superstar—music. Since then, Rihanna has turned her fortune into Fenty global cosmetics, a billion-dollar brand, Savage X Lingerie, and several other creative industries in the fashion world. It is not by guess, what you may not know is that every step of the way the Barbados Government has been behind Rihanna understanding how the world has changed.

While we are looking to make 30-second commercials to put on CNN and BBC, the Barbados Government in several different incarnations, has stayed behind Rihanna as their global brand ambassador. So you see Rihanna, you see Barbados. Every year Rihanna goes back to Barbados and she is followed by throngs of international media because she is a global superstar, who are all on their phones, film her at Crop Over and say, “Come and party with Rihanna”. It has significantly bumped their tourism arrivals to Crop Over because every little North American and European wants to “lime” with Rihanna, and they “aint” have to pay a cent for that because it is the new way the millennials advertise, and it is free, it is on the Internet.

The Barbados Government has also, even in different incarnations and leaderships gotten Barbados business to invest in Rihanna’s companies, so remittances come back to Barbados, this is all attached to one superstar. Are we thinking that way? And their natural leverages, do we not have superstars? We have 15,000 more superstars than Barbados. We have Nicky Minaj, but we still worrying about Nicki Minaj takes off too much clothes because we are not looking at the bigger picture, you understand? [*Crosstalk*] Whether she does or does not, is irrelevant, it is the brand and the brand association and the power of her celebrity that they are leveraging. In terms of tourist arrivals, business investment, and it is not only tourists coming to Barbados, she is also bringing business investment to Barbados.

The hon. Prime Minister of Barbados recently went to Rihanna’s charity ball in New York. That is the kind of support the Government of Barbados gives to Rihanna because they understand what she is doing for the country. That is innovation to me; that is thinking differently about your assets as a country. We are

still thinking analogue, they have gone digital, we need to get our heads in a different space because the world is a different space now. So that is my little quip about where we can be.

I also want to respond a bit, because I will get into it little a deeper, to the Minister of Communications and it will take me right into my next—oh, I almost forgot an import part of my diversification and commend the Ministry of Trade and Industry—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Sen. P. Richards:—for—you see I have on this blazer? “It hot, eh, but it nice.” This blazer and this trouser was made by a local designer called D.A.W.W Creations, trained by Prof. Ramroop, Bespoke—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Really?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: What!

Sen. P. Richards:—and it is, to me, I have bought suits in London, in New York, in Philadelphia, and this is one of the best suits, [*Desk thumping*] blazers, I have ever worn in my life.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: History in the making.

Sen. P. Richards: So, I say that to say that that is the kind of investment that I would applaud because it may seem small, but it is an investment in developing a cadre of talent that can help diversify the economy. The next step is proving the infrastructure for them to take their product from making five suits a week to 500 suits a month, and that is absent, so that to me is what—let me give you all a good look at it. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] This is local, this is made in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: A fine cut.

Sen. P. Richards: You understand? This is almost perfection, this is what we can export, but we have to get to the point of building it to critical mass, and providing the infrastructure to do that because in their present confines, they have the talent, they have been trained by the State, we have made the investment in him, and he is one of, I think, 26. And in addition to them, there are several other talented designers, garment manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago. We have get to the point where—yes, take the picture. [*Laughter*] We have to get to the point where we do not have to import the fabric, so we need fabric mills, because that is foreign exchange going out, so it is totally local.

Take another picture; [*Laughter*] and I have to show it here because I am proud of it. I am proud that it is made here, it is not an Armani or Tom Ford, but it is Trinidad and Tobago and that is important because we have talent here that we can leverage into diversifying the economy, and that is also important, but we have to put the infrastructure to get them from being able to make five, 10 suits a week, to 500. And we have to open the markets for them, and we have to ensure that the markets have penetrated because we know of the non-tariff and the economies of scale that they are up against. So we, the State, has to do that, they are just supposed to design and make the garments, we put the mass productions systems in place and sell the product. That is why I made a point of spending so much time on this because there are spaces and elements that we can leverage now. So congratulations to the Ministry on that [*Desk thumping*] and continued success, just put the other things in place to make it work. All right. So much for the praise. [*Laughter*]

Also, I want to comment on the Minister of Communications' divulging the issue of libraries in the prisons, and it will help me to segue to the issues that I have

outlined that I want to focus on, I know I will not get through half of them. Libraries in prisons is a great idea but this fallacy of a proper restorative justice system in Trinidad and Tobago, if you do not admit you have a problem, you cannot solve it. We do not have a proper restorative justice system in Trinidad and Tobago, because you cannot house somebody in a six by eight cell with 12 other hardened criminals with no ventilation, with a pail for defecation for 18 hours a day and think that they are going to read any book in any library, it is not intuitive. They are going to be angry; they have no time for reading; they are in survival mode.

So while the library in principle, Minister, is great, there is nothing wrong with it, it is impossible for them to take advantage of that under their present circumstances.

Hon. Senator: That is not so.

Sen. P. Richards: It is, and I counter that is so, because if it were so, this fallacy of a restorative justice system that is working, would not be pouring out 70 per cent recidivism rates. We would not be having men and women on 10 years waiting for trial and on remand for 10 years waiting for a trial, it is a fallacy. Our idea of restorative justice is Wayne Chance after they come out, how much ever he could take. And that is not to say Wayne Chance is not doing a good job, you know, but that cannot be the State's response to restorative justice. We are failing in that regard, and if we do not admit that—

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, let me just ask. The idea of restorative justice, is that an enquiry that is now being conducted in one of the joint select committees?—especially the one on social and human services?

Sen. P. Richards: Yes.

Mr. Vice-President: Just guidance. Just keep mindful that it is still an enquiry at that stage, and there is a Standing Order refraining from going too much into it, if it is being dealt with at the JSC level.

Sen. P. Richards: Thank you for the guidance, Mr. Vice-President. Yes. So, I will pause there on that, but I went into that to go into my first major substantial topic which is my thesis of the business model of criminality in Trinidad and Tobago and why crime persists. And crime persists in Trinidad and Tobago at the level that it is because somebody is benefiting, and it is not only the criminal element. Crime is big business in Trinidad and Tobago because there are companies that are making as much as \$200 million annually for the provision of services that support national security, and I am not saying that they are doing anything wrong, you know. I am saying maybe it is remaining the way it is because if crime went down we would not be giving those companies millions of dollars, so somebody is benefiting. Maybe I am a conspiracy theorist, but I do not see a country this small having such a challenge dealing with crime as it is and it is not getting better, it is getting worse, in spite of the Ministry of National Security benefiting from over the last 20 or so years, either the first or the second largest allocations in national budgets. If somebody sees every year that we are putting \$9/10billion into national security, well, that is a big business model there for me, let us help keep it the way it is.

There are some people whose obvious interest it is to hold people in remand for as long as 15 years because there is money to be made from it in several different ways, in food, in transport services at the tune of, I do believe the last check was about \$90 million a year, to run up and down the highway to take inmates from Golden Grove and Port of Spain and maximum security, to prisons and back, when

we could spend that money on education and infrastructure. It is staying the same because somebody is benefiting from it to the tune of 150 to \$200 million a year. We are privatizing the support services for national security in the country, so much so, I understand, there is a single company that has the transport contract, the Judiciary contract, Petrotrin contract, the electronic monitoring contract; one company. So, why would we want crime to go down, because a company is benefiting, and other companies, simple maths. Maybe I am a conspiracy theorist, but I see it as that.

Another thing that struck me in preparing for this, and I am not saying it is a wrong thing, the Government has championed quite an astute legislative agenda over the last four years, a number of laws passed, amendments passed. When I did a check, thanks to the astute research of the Parliament staff, and I looked at the number of Bills passed and amended, there is about 65 to 70 per cent of them that has to do with crime, law enforcement and national security, the other 25 or so per cent, taxes, money, that sort of stuff relatedly. I “aint” see one Bill or amendment dealing with education, not one.

What does it say philosophically about us as country, when education and training is what is going to position us and our human resource capital for the future? Is it that our education system is not in need of some sort of legislative framework underscoring that, it is not in need of review? I was able pull up a draft education Act.

And let me just go back to the issue of allocations. 2013, a total allocation 4.3 billion, 7 per cent of the national budget, this is national security. 2014, 3.96 per cent; 2015, 8 per cent; 2016, 11 per cent; 2017, 10 per cent; 2018, 10 per cent; 2019, 10 per cent of the national budget. So, again to me, that is a business model.

If businessmen seeing this or sectors in society seeing this sector of the economy being driven by this huge allocation, huge spend, it means that it has money to be made in that sector, it means someone can benefit from retaining the status quo. And I am not saying a country—I am not naïve—does not have to spend significantly in maintaining law and order, that is not what I am saying. I am saying, it does not seem to be improving for the increased spend, the relationship is not positive or linear so we need to take a look at it.

The issue of—and I want to quote the hon. Attorney General in a contribution on the 4th of the sixth, the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2019, and he told us:

“There are close to 3,000 persons in remand, 1,000 of them alone on matters...for murder which is non-bailable.”

And we are spending an average of 20 to:

“...25,000 per month per head, times 14 years and 15 years and 16 years, taking us into the realm of...”—hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers’ dollars to take care of inmates and remandees.

So, you have to ask yourself, is it that it is beneficial for us to keep that level of spend on remandees and inmates? We are actually spending more in Trinidad and Tobago on inmates, more on inmates than we spend on the education and intervention for special needs children. [*Desk thumping*] We are spending more on inmates than we are spending on the education and intervention and support services for special needs children. Think about that for a minute. Something has to be wrong with that, has to be wrong with that; that cannot be right. And the hon. Attorney General is saying, “Bring down the cost of incarceration”. In a Trinidad *Guardian* an article dated Friday, September 20th, he says and I quote:

“It is inconceivable that the State can be paying \$20,000 to \$25,000 per month to keep a prisoner in Remand Yard. The costs as given by Attorney General Faris Al-Rawi, reach up to \$50 million per month for 2,230 prisoners and billions of dollars stretching over the years.”

I will go back even further. There is a quotation in the same article that quotes, and I quote:

“Equally unfair and fulfilling of little purpose is having prisoners on remand for between seven to 10 years without their cases”—even— “being heard. Even more frightening is that 42 per cent of the prisoners on remand are on murder charges.

The above situations are also a dire comment on the entire criminal justice system, the Judiciary being at the centre of it all.”

So said—“Succeeding chief justices...Michael De Labastide, Sat Sharma...”—the late—“...and now CJ Ivor Archie...”—who—“spent collective hours in”—their—“speeches at the opening of law terms talking about backlogs which seemingly cannot be cleared.”

So one has to ask ourselves, is it that we are incapable of country of solving these problems? Is too complex and beyond our collective intellects to put systems in place to introduce night courts, to double up on something to actually try to make some headway? I do not know, I do not think it is beyond us.

Former national security Minister Edmund Dillon said in 2016 we were paying 46 million of 60million for justice on time. So it has gone up now to 80 million, so you see how the cost is going up. And, again, I ask the question, and I do not want anybody to think I am demonizing “justice on time”. They are doing nothing wrong, they are a legitimate business entity. I am saying that, as a country

I do not think that we are making progress in reversing that trend, because that is the first thing they will say, that I have issues with them, and I really do not.

And I want to quote another article through you, Mr. Vice-President, the *Trinidad Express* March 01, 2011.

“\$400m a year to maintain prisoners.

The State pays \$312 per day to maintain an inmate in the prison...”

—So says then—this is 2011—

“...National Security Minister Brigadier John Sandy...

In response to a question on the Order Paper...”—in the—“...Senate sitting, Sandy said according to records at the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, up to December 31, 2010, there were 3,493 prisoners in the nation’s jails.

This means that close to \$400 million”—to be exact—“(\$397,782,840) is spent annually to keep prisoners behind bars.”

That is an interesting revelation to me because it underscores what I am saying in terms of it does not seem to be getting better, and the more resources become scarce in Trinidad and Tobago, the more critical it becomes when we continue spending that kind of money to maintain inmates who are on remand for 10 to 15 years; that needs to be dealt with, and that is why I am spending so much time on it.

And I want to move to another aspect of my contribution. You know, it is very difficult in Trinidad and Tobago through you, Mr. Vice-President, to ascertain how Trinidad and Tobago is doing globally because everything is so politically tinged depending on who you are listening to, even so-called professionals or experts, they have their own spin on stuff.

So I looked through, of course, two well-respected global indices, the

Fragile States Index 2019, and the Global Competitiveness Index. And to be fair and objective we are doing well in some areas, very well in some areas, and not well at all in some areas. So let me look at the first one called the Fragile States Index which is a report released by the Fund for Peace in the magazine *Foreign Policy*. It has been released annually since 2005, and there are several areas that are in terms of examined: cohesion, economic areas, political, social.

And Finland scores the highest at 16.9 per cent, and the categories are: very sustainable, sustainable, more sustainable, underperforming, warning, and countries that are sited as alert because they are trouble spots. Trinidad and Tobago—Zimbabwe scores the lowest at 99.5 on this Fragile States Index, and Trinidad and Tobago is at 53.0 in two categories. One, long term most improved from 2009 to 2019, so we are on the upward trend, and at 53.0 we are up 13 points, seven points, so that is a pretty a good thing. We are a stable country, we are not an alert list and we are on a more stable footing, so that is good.

Some of the questions, to me, that we need to ask ourselves if we are to remain objective about analysing how we are doing as a country, in the economic indicators are: what are the interest rates, actual or project; how is the inflation rate, actual or projected; what is GDP, actual or projected; consumer confidence, how people view the economy, how citizens view the economy; how they feel about their futures; how do experts view the economy, and is there a correlation between those two; the laws and access to capital flow for internal entrepreneurship; and, of course, economic focus and does one primary product make up the economy putting it vulnerable to global shocks.

In terms of the political indicators: does the government have the confidence of the people; have demonstrations occurred, have riots and uprising occurred; is

there evidence of corruption on the part of government officials; are nationals and locals or officials considered corrupt; do all parties enjoy political rights; is the government representative of the population; have there been recent peaceful transitions of power; what is the longer term history of power transitions; are elections perceived to be free and fair; are there reports of politically-motivated violent attacks or assassinations or assassination attempts; are there reports of armed insurgents and attacks; have there been terrorist attacks and how likely are they.

In terms of what are called the social and cross-cutting indicators: is there equal access to public services; what are the general conditions of public services to citizens; is there adequate access to medicine; are there an adequate number of medical facilities for all people; are there adequate numbers of medical professionals for the population.

In terms of education: what is the level of school enrolment; is it different by gender; do the poor have access to housing; are housing costs in line with the economy. There are several other indicators. So anyone could go online, it is the global Fund for Peace and it gives you a really great sense of how a country is doing, and I think it is pretty objective, you know, and it gives you a good balance against the Global Competitiveness Index, which I will move to now.

In terms of that we are 79th out of 141 countries, and there are some areas we are doing well. In terms of ease of doing business, we are 105th, not good at all. Starting a business, 76th; construction permits, 125th; electricity, 41, pretty good; registering a business, 158, not good; getting credit, 60 and minority investors in business, 57, so that is not particularly bad. Where I want to cite that we have done really badly and we are actually last, 141st is—and I want to get the exact. Right. In

terms of IR and product market, labour market, we are 141st in cooperation in labour-employer relations, dead last, not a good sign, we need to fix that.

We are also 122nd in reliability of police services; 102nd in institutions; 130th in security for obvious reasons; efficiency of legal framework in settling disputes, 121; efficiency of sea port services, 116; transport infrastructure, 118, and we know we have transportation-grid issues; trade openness, 122; flexibility of the economy, 130, and so and so. Anyone can go onto the site and see where we are and what you think about this. Mr. Vice-President, how much time do I have left?

Mr. Vice-President: You finish at 5.17.

Sen. P. Richards: 5.17 so I have a very short time. Let me go to my pet peeve education, it had to come. Right? Now, Trinidad and Tobago has five broad areas of education, pre, three to four years; primary, five to 11 years; secondary, 12 to 18 years; and tertiary, 18 and over, generally. According to UNESCO, 21 per cent of our population is 14 years and under, and we have some issues in terms of transitioning from primary to secondary schools, because the primary student body is generally 128,000 or so, and secondary 86, so there are 42,000 or so that generally do not translate, it goes between from year to year up and down, but that, to me, is not good at all.

I have deep concerns and maybe I am missing something, but Head 26 in the budget, Sub-Head 26: Special Education Resources Programme gets \$900,000 in 2019, and it has increased by 500,000 in 2020. And Student Support Services, Head 26, Sub-Head 15 gets in 2020, an improvement of \$1 million to \$3 million.

So if we divide, according to the Ministry of Education, Student Support Services, 3,735 people who have special needs or who have been identified as having special needs which is different to the number of student- aged people

learners who have special needs, we come up to about—if that disbursement in the budget is right, if I am not missing anything—\$803.22 per student with special needs annually for intervention; and maybe I am missing something. And I know students with special needs will benefit from the general education allocation, but I am talking about specifically related to intervention or diagnosis, intervention and support services in addition to their general allocation.

And, you know, I have mentioned that on many occasions that many of the speakers on the Government side spoke about the equity approach to this budget, and the budget dealing with the vulnerable groups. Well, there is no more vulnerable group than this, there is no more vulnerable group than children with special needs in Trinidad and Tobago, and we are simply not doing them justice and their families, because our education Act states, an appropriate education for all students. We do not have the requisite number of professionals, diagnosticians and support services in the classroom.

And I have heard a lot in the budget about the special schools that will be build, against the backdrop of a system that purports to be in terms of policy, an inclusive system. An inclusive system means that every child is educated in the general education classroom setting as far as possible, provided with support in that environment unless it is absolutely necessary and that, to me, means that you have to invest a lot more in special-ed teachers, diagnosticians and support material and infrastructure to support these different learners, and we are not doing that, we are failing them miserably.

5.15 p.m.

In fact, it was quite interesting at a recent JSC, and the report has been already lodged, so I do not think I am breaking any Standing Orders. The Chief

Education Officer, Harrilal Seecharan said, many people are diagnosed late and so by the time of SEA exams the Ministry receives a host of requests. Well, that is unheard of in a modern education system. Because, if you have to reach SEA and pass through Standard 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, for you to have to apply for a special-needs provision, the whole system is failing, because that student should have been diagnosed in Standard 1 or 2 and remedial service provided. But this is the Chief Education Officer saying, some pupils have waited five to nine years to be assessed, and whose fault is that? The system is failing these students.

And according to Ayana Hutchinson-Wallace—I think that is her name—the private assessment typically costs \$10,000 per child to be screened for developmental issues at the pre-school and primary school level. NPTA Chairman, Raffiena Ali-Boodoosingh said her group has long lobbied for children to be screened much earlier than Standard three and four, but the Chief Education Officer is saying that they will start screening students before SEA. In 2019? This is the kind of system that we think is productive and global. Nah man! We are joking! The Down-Syndrome Association said in 2017, the Equal Opportunities Commission had received 145 complaints about schools not catering for special needs students, and that is a drop in the bucket because the last SEA and the one before this one here, we have seen media reports of parents complaining that they were told, we brought the request for support at SEA too late. That confounds me, because that school should have known that child had a special need long ago, and been providing support services to the point where the exam room situation had that built in, and it is registered.

It is as ridiculous as some parents of children with special needs, are asked to come back every year to prove that their child has Down-syndrome, in Trinidad

and Tobago. So while our education system has a lot to be proud of, and I am saying it publicly, we have a long way to go, particularly with intervention where special needs children are concerned. We have a lot of work to do.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, your speaking time is up.

Sen. P. Richards: So I have no five-minute warning? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Vice-President: I gave you the warning when I said you would end at 5.17.

Sen. P. Richards: Oh, I am sorry. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, now is a good time to take the tea break, so this House would stand suspended until 10 to six, which is 5.50.

Sen. Haynes: 10 to six?

Mr. Vice-President: Yes.

5.18 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.58 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Obika.

Sen. Taharqa Obika: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and it gives me great pleasure to contribute to this, the final and last budget presentation of the Rowley PNM. [*Desk thumping*] Because when you look around Trinidad and Tobago citizens are asking for a government that delivers. The UNC has the track record of listening and working for the people. Over the past three months, Mr. Vice-President, we have listened to over 100 pre-budget, public budget consultations from as far South as Cedros, Point Fortin, Moruga, St. Mary's, Rio Claro, Mayaro, San Fernando, Couva, Chaguanas, Laventille, John John, Port of Spain South, Diego Martin—[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: The East-West Corridor.

Sen. T. Obika: The length and breadth of the East-West Corridor. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Rambharat: Even in Chaguanas East.

Sen. T. Obika: Even in Chaguanas East, for our good friend.

Hon. Senator: Tobago too.

Sen. T. Obika: And we have had many consultations with stakeholders from Tobago as well. So, we have held consultations with persons from all walks of life in this society. We have produced our National Economic Transformation Agenda. Note the word, not diversification. We are beyond that. We are here with a plan to transform this economy, because the UNC works for the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, it would grieve every citizen in this country to recognize that after four years in a budget consultation the PNM is still looking backward, still trying to dig up the ghosts of the past. In fact, Sen. Foster Cummings, in a very vacuous contribution could only quote houses built in 1975, but could not tell the population how many houses were built in this last four years. [*Desk thumping*] Of course, we know he is a construction man, he is familiar with the building of community centres—

Hon. Senator: And HDC developments.

Sen. T. Obika:—in HDC developments and so on. But, how much delivery have they given to the people? They have failed. They have failed, and as they have dropped the ball, they are trying to find someone to blame for their failure, incompetence and inability to serve the people. The PNM talks, the UNC works.

You see, after four years of the Rowley PNM, the people are saying they have no jobs, they have no jobs. After four years of the Rowley PNM the people

are saying they can find no CDAP medication in the hospitals.

I met a woman in our consultation in San Juan, in the Croisee, she was saying that she spends \$2,000 a month on medication, and she called a list of things: Pressure, diabetes and so on, and she said that under Kamla Persad-Bissessar governance she had that taken care of. So, she has to use her pension to pay for medicine that a government promised to deliver, but has failed. So, after four years of the PNM and Rowley, now the Prime Minister is reaching 70 years today, and in an unrelated news the mark in *Play Whe* apparently is 36, but the people of Trinidad and Tobago “doh want any lagniappe.” He makes some three score and ten, we do not want any “lagniappe”. Next year is time to go. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Vice-President, it is shameful when the General Secretary of the PNM, Sen. Foster Cummings, could come to Parliament and try to claim UNC projects, the Point Fortin Hospital. When you step out my gallery you see the Point Fortin hospital, and in 2015 you saw the Point Fortin Hospital. It is the same structure in 2015 that they are just dressing up and it would hurt many citizens to know despite Sen. Foster Cummings boasting about that hospital, that they delayed, that should have been completed two years ago, as we speak this week, work has stopped on the hospital. The contract has not been paid, so they are just talking, talking, but they are not working for the people.

After four years people are complaining about bad roads, but in the last year they want to come and rush now, after you have lost your shocks, your suspension, your ball joints, your bearings, everything gone in your car, they want to come now and pave the road to give people for election. But when you go down by the golf course in Chaguaramas the road smooth, you could roll a ball straight across the

road, it is smooth like that. Come down by me, Mr. Vice-President, you will lose your vehicle in a pothole. The schools are overcrowded in many areas, because this Government, in the most wicked act, has decided to keep closed schools that are a 95 per cent complete, so you have children in many areas having to double up and triple up, in San Juan and in Laventille having to come by the roadside to catch a maxi to go to a school quite up in the East. When all they had to do, was you see that \$18 million they spent in the palace for the Prime Minister in Tobago, they could have spent that on fixing the schools for the children in Laventille. [*Desk thumping*] PNM constituents in Laventille. The PNM constituents in Point Fortin, in Chatham, and they like to talk about geography. The UNC does not know about the north-west. Most of the schools that you are seeing now, the new schools built in the East-West Corridor were built by the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] We had a school here from Tobago today, Goodwood. I was a teacher in Tobago in Elizabeth's College. The school in Tobago, Goodwood, was built by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, as Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*] So, the UNC has always has a track record of working. Working for the people.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, another matter that is very shameful. This Government they come to “mamaguy” people with day-care for children up to three years old, but when they turn three years old they have to go to preschool, but this Government so wicked, took away the funding, the tuition for preschool children three years and four years old. So, you are “mamaguying” them, telling them single parents would get to send their children to day care, but when they are ready to go to school at the age of two and a half to three years nothing for them. But their children, the Ministers children and grandchildren, to go to top preschools in Maraval, in Moka, in Glencoe, but the children of Trinidad and

Tobago do not deserve preschool education because they stopped, they robbed the children of preschool tuition. That is the most wicked act by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] The most wicked and sinister act, when children cannot have rights in their own country to be educated.

And then, Mr. Vice-President, after such is callous act, they have closed the Petrotrin health centres. They have closed the Petrotrin health centres, and I know someone personally suffered from that, suffered and paid the ultimate price because of the lack of health centres in south. Now, the United National Congress as a party did not take any legal action against of the sale of the refinery to patriotic. However, we cannot help but notice this Government's excitement about a withdrawal. They are always moving like they have something to hide, but my understanding is the Minister of Finance moved quickly to take front and convene the Joint Select Committee of Energy Affairs after much calls to put the Petrotrin issue to the JSC before the wicked act of shutting down Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*] This JSC has not met—

Hon. Senator: About two years.

Sen. T. Obika:—in years. Almost two years. We stand for accountability and transparency in the United National Congress. And as we stand for accountability and transparency now as we have always did then, when we were saying do not close down the refinery, and to all the workers in Trinidad and Tobago, my great-grandfather, Parris, was an oil worker from St. Madeline. My grandfather graduated along that line and became a manager in administration in Trintoc. I come from an oil family in south.

And Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler would be turning in his grave to know that this callous bunch, this callous set of Ministers closed down the refinery and are

now playing games with the lives of the ex-oil workers. When the United National Congress comes to power in a few months' time, we will reopen the refinery for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Now, the people ready for a government that listens and leads, a government that goes to work for the people, a government that has a plan to transform the economy, a leader who would not be in midweek on golf courses, driving on smooth roads to golf courses while his constituents suffer from bad roads and bad health care. The people are ready for the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] So all around the country they are asking what is the time. I am the time keeper, and is only one time people want to know. Election time. [*Desk thumping*] And they are ready to bring back the leadership, the stewardship, and the government that listens under Kamla Persad-Bissessar. PNM talks, the UNC works. [*Desk thumping*]

So, I want to respond to some of the comments made today. So, I am looking at the responses of the Minister of Trade and Industry. I have said from my first budget contribution two years ago, that the Minister of Trade and Industry gets no resources, and I will demonstrate that with no resources the Minister of Trade and Industry had no deliverables. In fact, the biggest indictment is after speaking for 40 minutes, the Minister had no plan to show how they would bring back or cause to be created, these 60,000 jobs for the 60,000 jobless citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. Not even an idea of a plan. [*Desk thumping*] You see, taking away the rights of children from preschool education was not enough. They did not stop there. They did not stop there, Mr. Vice-President. I want to give you a story in the life of a citizen in this country to show you where their rights have been robbed, have been denied, have been taken away callously by this Government.

You see, you have nine health centres in south, and for persons who like to believe the propaganda about south and UNC, there are many electoral districts in south that are in the hand of the People's National Movement, and when the PNM speaks they forget that their leader before, Patrick Manning, is a southerner, so they always have a convenient memory. So, when someone is born they have challenges getting access to health care in the hospital. When you close nine health centres, it puts severe pressure on the limited hospitals in south. There is only one general hospital in San Fernando, the rest are health facilities. Now, when the child is finally born, after you suffer through that stress, and the child is born, they have taken away the milk grant and they are talking about they want to help single mothers now, but they have taken away the milk grant. They have taken away 18,000 food cards, so whilst the children are trying to find their way in life before they reach to school, before the parents can get any help, the Government has taken away 18,000 food cards, by four persons in a household on average, they have taken away almost for 80,000 citizens food support at home. Then when you reach to school, the child reaches the age of three, they have taken away preschool tuition, \$400 a month to \$500 a month, they have taken that away; then when they reach primary school, they have cut down on school feeding support.

Sen. Cummings talked about social services that the PNM invented, what have you done for the people of Trinidad and Tobago lately? What have you done? [*Desk thumping*] And then when they finally reach to secondary school, laptops, the children who are here, except those who are in sixth form, they would not know what is it to have your Government provide you with a laptop, and book grants, they have cut back significantly on book grants. So, they are not giving

you the laptops, they are taking away the book grants, I mean, how wicked, how wicked can a government be? And then on top of that, school feeding, not paying the contractors. There are some contractors they provide the children with just rice and peas alone, and the teachers say, “Well this is not nutritionally good for the children.” They say, “here is what, this is from my pocket, the Government not paying me.” So you do not even want the children to have food in school. I mean, oh gosh, and then now you are not paying for transportation.

They are not paying the providers of transportation, so it is like, Mr. Vice-President, this Government, this PNM Government under Keith Rowley, is telling the children of Trinidad and Tobago you do not deserve education. They are telling them, you do not deserve education. Sen. Foster Cummings should have been ashamed to mention the name of Eric Williams, who said the future of the children is in the schoolbag. But they have taken away the books from the schoolbag, they have taken away the laptops from the schoolbag, they have taken away the food from the tables [*Desk thumping*] and they are trying to prevent the children from getting to school by taking away the money for transportation. Then, when the children finally survive, through resilience that we have as citizens in this country, and graduate from school, whether it is at Form five or Form four, and they want to go and learn a trade, they are taking away the skills acquisition centres, even the ones that were built and opened by Patrick Manning, they closed down those too.

There are three centres in PNM-held constituencies right now, Mr. Vice-President. NESC centres: in Point Fortin, in Moruga and in Palo Seco, they closed them down. They do not care if the youths in Point Fortin, Moruga and Palo Seco cannot acquire skills for the energy sector. Then on top of that, those that could

ascend to university level, they closed the GATE Programme shut to many institutions. They talk and talk, plenty talk about tourism, plenty talk. They say Sandals was a big thing, “all yuh doh wah good thing.” Talk. How will we get the skills to go to Sandals? How will we get the skills to go and work in these hotels? At the hotel school, for just under \$2 million a year, this Government has denied the children there funding situation for tuition. Now they have to pay from their own pocket. It is cheaper than the painting “they buy” in England. Cheaper than the paintings “they buy” in England. They denied children access to a university education in the tourism industry. They do not care about tourism development. They do not care about the skills acquisition, and then now if you finally graduate, the job market, no jobs. Over 60,000 jobs gone. The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development says they have to, they have to what? The have to sit quietly and take it. The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, Mr. Vice-President, said they have to sit quietly and take it.

So, the Petrotrin workers who lost their jobs, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development telling them sit quietly and take it. The 600 people from TSTT, who have lost their jobs, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development is saying sit quietly and take it. Now, Mr. Vice-President, if even you manage to get a “lil” end, the Government has cut significantly the housing programme, so you cannot even get a house. There are many graduates who will never qualify for a mortgage because of their tenure, they get a three years contract here, break in service, once you break in service that is it, you start back from scratch, you “geh” a next five-year contract somewhere if you are lucky then. So, they are not building houses.

In one budget presentation, the Minister of Housing at that time, Minister

Randall Mitchell, came and said, well, we build 1,000 houses, we do not have any home-owning democracy plan like the UNC, we have a roof-over-your-head democracy. After that year they stopped saying how much houses they built, because they are ashamed, because they have not built to meet any demand. And imagine, even if you look at Patrick Manning's record, over 10,000 houses built, they could not even match that. The United National Congress built over 8,000, delivered over 7,000. Delivered over 7,000.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, if even you are finally—you have struggled, you reached the age of 50 and you say what, “I want to retool myself for the job market”, this Government, in their crazy mind, took away GATE access for persons over 50 years. You know what they are saying? You know what they are saying, Mr. Vice-President? And there is talk of the retirement age it has already increased to 65 in some institutions. So what they are saying is, when you turn 50 you do not deserve to benefit for a better job in the society that you have laboured with your tax dollars to build.

Now, and finally, when you finally managed to reach retirement age and you have medical issues, no CDAP for you. Now, when you really sit down and you think about it, this entire Government should just be ashamed. The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister said life in Tobago is good. Life in Tobago is good for her. Life in Tobago is good, so she is saying there is no problems in health care; no problems in education; no problems with businesses, despite all the cries of the business chamber; no problems in the sea bridge. No problems in Tobago. Mr. Vice-President, the callous nature, and then on the talk of the OJT Programme, now the CSO is hiding data, but I got from the CSO at least first quarter 2016, number of young persons employed, and the number of young persons employed

by the second quarter, 2018, and when you do the maths, Mr. Vice-President, 36,800 less persons, from the age of 15 to 34 are employed in this country. Thirty six thousand, eight hundred, but you are adding back 3,000 to the OJT Programme, and that is a success. But within your own term, 36,000-plus young people have lost their jobs. Thirty six thousand plus.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, the statistics will bear out the truth, but I want to turn to business. The PNM is crippling businesses. They raised taxes from 25 per cent to as high as 35 per cent in the case of banks, collapsed the housing programme, the VAT refunds that they envisaged is just pure wickedness. When you look at the yield curve on the Central Bank for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, they are paying 1.5 per cent on bonds. That is below the yield for a six-month bond, below the yield, based on the Government's yield term. The only bond that should attract that rate is a three-month instrument, and we know that the VAT refunds that they are talking about for businesses, is not going to be for three months. It is going to be held for a long-term to maturity. So, if you are holding a bond for five years, when you have to give persons a yield that matches with the Government's yield curve, which is over 4 per cent. In some cases, it depends on the time you look at it, but it would definitely be higher than 3 per cent, but you are paying persons 1.5 per cent.

And even the businesses, Mr. Vice-President, will know that is a rubbish bond. Which business is going to hold a bond like that? From the day you buy that bond, if you want to trade it on the secondary market, the price will drop to make sure you match the payment in interest that you have to pay, so immediately the bond will be trading at below its face value. So which businessman in their right mind is going to buy this useless bond that the Government is offering?

Unless, of course, what they are doing is looking for those businesses that are suffering so badly that they just need to get some cash, and that they will trade at a loss to take some of these bonds for their VAT refunds, and then you are not telling them how they can get them disposed of.

Now, forex is a next issue. The closed down the Tourism Development Company, and the sector is in shambles. Now, Mr. Vice-President, this Government is a government that has no respect for women. The Government has kept the report on the MP for Diego Martin Central, MP Darryl Smith, facing sexual harassment allegations and sexual predator allegations, and so on, hiding him behind the Prime Minister's coat tail, would not bring the document—they must bring that document to Parliament and release it. Release the report on Daryl Smith. [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

Now, I grow up in NJAC, Mr. Vice-President, I have much respect for Folade Mutota, so I am sure that the report there will be a proper report and that is why they are trying to hide it. Now, let me turn to three Ministries as they appear in the Development Programme. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Now, when you look at the Development Programme expenditure, Mr. Vice-President, they put for the TTBS \$1.5 million and they reduced it down to \$128,000, the year prior. For inward investment in petroleum initiatives, last year, the Revised Estimate of \$1.5 million, it went down to \$176,000, and this year they put a \$1million figure. What does that mean? That means that the Government has no desire to attract inward investment in non-petroleum initiatives. What is non-petroleum initiatives, Mr. Vice-President? Diversification initiatives.

So the Government, under the Minister of Trade and Industry puts a line item for inward invest in non-petroleum initiatives at 1.5 million and only spends one hundred and something thousand dollars and puts back a lower figure this year. Means that they do not care about diversification. That is why Sen. Dr. Henry could have come and tried to pour cold water on diversification because maybe he is shouting in the wilderness, because after they closed the Economic Development Advisory Board, this Government has no think tank anywhere. They are just running away from the people and the people are suffering.

Now, when you look at the Infrastructure Development Fund for the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the single economic window comes up again and then the construction in Moruga for agro-tourism, but what they did, last year before, \$23 million was the allocation, they only spend \$5 million. And so this year they come with a next allocation. The people of Moruga, I want to tell you this, just as the PNM got under this Minister, a complete e Teck Park in Point Fortin and the only thing growing there is donkey grass to date. Pardon the colloquial expression. The only thing growing there is grass. The only thing that they will see in Moruga is the same grass from this PNM Government.

So, Mr. Vice-President, in public sector investment, there were no big ticket items that lead to transformation of the economy. I felt as if I wasted my time reading these documents that the Government presented to us. It was a significant waste of time. No trade policy has been tabled in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] They are running two years by December with no trade policy and I feel like if, if it was not for me, Mr. Vice-President, there would have been no talk even of a trade policy, [*Desk thumping*] because every single Finance Bill I have come to put pressure on the Government for a trade policy. [*Crosstalk*]

Now, Mr. Vice-President, the manufacturing sector, and you know there is a new head of the manufacturing sector, TTMA. And the vice-head was on TV6 before I appeared on a programme and he was chastising the Government saying, “Remember your record, you need to pay VAT refunds”. That was the morning of the budget. Then the budget came, nothing about VAT refunds except some worthless bonds. [*Crosstalk*] No, this person was TTMA.

So, Mr. Vice-President, the Government, the TTMA is looking at doubling the manufacturing. But you know what they did? They put it up to 2024, because they know that nothing under this Government can work. What they are looking at cannot work under this Government because there is not even a trade policy to guide Government’s expenditure in the relevant areas.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: But I spoke about it.

Sen. T. Obika: The fact that the Minister can laugh means that the relevance of a trade policy is lost on this entire Cabinet.

So, the SME sector. The only mention of SME sector is a \$10 million facility procured by the development finance. But I listened attentively to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, Mr. Vice-President, and you know, normally if you want to say what you are doing for small and micro enterprises, you would look at the delinquency levels in NEDCO; you would look at the size of the fund and you would also indicate what percentages of the loans are taken for which type of businesses; which business can lend to export orientation in the near term or the medium term. The Minister gave no analysis whatsoever.

Now, the other thing that is callous in the budget presentation, is a fire sale of lands. This is a sellout Government. They want to sell everything out, sell out

the patrimony of the people. And the question that we ask is, which local consulting firm has been given the contract to divest our national lands?

Now, Mr. Vice-President, tourism arrivals. Every year since the PNM has come to office, tourism arrivals have declined: 2014 and 2015, 2015 it was 439,000; 2018 it dropped 375,000. Significant decline in tourism arrivals and there is a big issue that we are facing in tourism. Thomas Cook Airlines has collapsed. Thomas Cook Airlines flew from Manchester to Tobago and the head of the Tobago Tourism Authority Limited said that that is a disaster for the Tobago tourism industry, a disaster. The Minister of Trade and Industry made no mention of that. The Minister of Finance is probably—the fact of this is probably oblivious to the Minister of Finance.

This Government has totally ignored the cries of their own Tobago Tourism Authority Limited head, who is saying that—I believe he is our Caribbean brother from St. Lucia—so he is trying to be objective—who is saying, here is what? You need to address the issue of Thomas Cook Airlines collapsing that brought chartered flights regularly to Tobago. There is nothing, silence from the Government, and they are saying they care about Tobago. Which Tobago they care about, Mr. Vice-President?

Now, when I look at housing, Mr. Vice-President, the Government is saying that they would build houses and Sen. Cummings talked about \$870,000 to build a house under the UNC. The Minister of Finance himself on page 58 of the budget document said that it cost their Government \$1million to build an HDC house. The PNM Government, this is in the budget document on page 58.

Sen. Ameen: He did not read it.

Sen. T. Obika: So he is saying that they will build 6,000 units by December 2020,

6,000 but it costing a thousand. When you look at the allocation for HDC, 300 and something million. No mention of the money, the proceeds from the bonds. So that mean these bonds that are being purchased are not going to be given to the HDC, they are not going to be used to build houses for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They are going to be using it to buy votes for election.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, I believe my time is running short—

Sen. Le Hunte: Thank God.

Sen. T. Obika: And I know the PNM is very afraid, but as I say I want to raise, the Minister of Communications, I know that the Minister has just landed in the jurisdiction and may not be aware that we have a Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries headed by the head of the Government in the Senate. Because the Minister said that she looked high and low and saw no initiative to conserve energy in terms of the house lighting programme. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries can show a document in his very Ministry where there was a programme to that effect with pictures of Philomena, Aunty Philo, [*Crosstalk*] large in the programme and there was a supporting document behind that where the recommendations, which are the most important, because I know you are an academic, Mr. Vice-President, the recommendations had in it that we should move to LEDs, we should move to LEDs. At least three of the recommendations referenced LEDs, out of six.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I would invite the hon. Minister of Communications, our friend—

Sen. Sobers: To communicate.

Sen. T. Obika:—to communicate with the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Sen. Sobers: Yes, yes.

Sen. T. Obika: So our friend who has said that she is an Ambassador for Laventille, I do not want Her Excellency to be miscommunicated upon.

Now the issue that we have also in this country is debt servicing and we always talk about debt to GDP is managed well, debt to GDP is managed well, but when you look at the *Review of the Economy* you see for every dollar that we earn—

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

Sen. T. Obika: Thank you. For every dollar that we earn on account of public debt, charges on account of public debt verses total tax and non-tax revenue, shows that the Government has been incurring cost of borrowing on average for the first three years in office as high as 28.39 per cent in 2017 and in 2018, 22.3 per cent. So that means for every dollar that we earn as a country, 22 cents is going to pay debt.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, when we consider that it means that they do not have funds to pay for things that are relevant to the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and this Government must be careful by the way that they are borrowing that they would not be able to provide anything in the future. They are already suffering the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, there is something that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would want to learn from. In our national transformation agenda, for agriculture we will create 10,000 new jobs, cut the food import bill by 2 billion, generate an additional 1 billion in agricultural exports, an increase to 5 per cent agriculture's contribution to GDP. [*Desk thumping*] They give to agriculture what they already have in essence, for the most part, a tax free

operating environment. But what the farmers need is agriculture access roads, they need flood alleviation programmes, they need lighting and water access closer to their farms, they need praedial larceny squads to be upgraded, not the one in Couva and the Sub-Unit in Grande.

The issue is, the Government has no clue as to what are the requirements to deal with agriculture. And even the use of CEPEP, Sen. Ameen will tell the population that under the Partnership Government the CEPEP workers were used to work hand in hand with farmers. There was a programme where farmers could have accessed CEPEP workers. We have already been doing “FarmPEP”, not CEPEP, “FarmPEP” in this country. This Government is far behind, now talking about CEPEP and using them.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, in terms of tourism and our Senator from Tobago, Dr. Dillon-Remy, would be heartened to know that our focus would be to invest in small hotel operators in Tobago, alongside having a flagship hotel. But invest in small tourism operators, because the best beach in the world is a beach called Pirate’s Bay. I know Castara is nice but the best beach to me in the world is a beach called Pirate’s Bay in Charlotteville.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: It is nice.

Sen. T. Obika: So the small operators—I have a few minutes but I will give this story before I close. I used to teach in Tobago and I had a student whose mother had a restaurant on the bay in Charlotteville. I know you would be very familiar with that as a fisheries expert yourself. And there was a tour where we sat in the boat—but I got the tour for free because I was the teacher. We sat in the boat and they carried you around the bay, because Charlotteville has three beaches in the one bay, to Pirate’s Bay. It was the most beautiful experience in my life. So, Mr.

Vice-President, I am saying Tobago has a lot of to look out for under a United National Congress government. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I want to close by saying that after spending over \$250 billion, the people of Trinidad and Tobago do not feel safer; after this Government has spent over \$250 billion, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have less access to education; after spending over \$250 billion, they have found it fit to remove access to child care education, kicking the children out of preschool; closing down access to CDAP; closing down Petrotrin health centres; keeping the road conditions horrible. Today they opened piece of a part of a road to Point Fortin and it have no shoulder. You should see the memes on social media, Mr. Vice-President. A car shut down, nobody could pass on the Creek to go to Point Fortin. It was basically worse than it was before, because the Creek had a shoulder. They built a road without a shoulder.

Sen. Ameen: Where is Rohan today?

Sen. S. Hosein: “Where Rohan, he gone to open ah next road ah wat”.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Who is Rohan?

Sen. T. Obika: People want people centered development, pro-business and deepening economic reforms with a human face.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are saying they want to know one time, when is election time. When they look at children suffering they want to know when is, election time [*Desk thumping*] and that is the only time we will have time for the PNM, to vote them out of office and to bring in the United National Congress. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, I thank you very much for the

opportunity to close this afternoon and to come after my illustrious friend Sen. Obika. It warmed my heart this morning, [*Crosstalk*] it warmed my heart this morning to walk in the Chamber and see the gallery filled with the participants from the secondary schools around the country. I think we are all happy to see them. But in the last 40 minutes I wondered if they left one behind. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] I wondered, because [*Continuous crosstalk*] my friend had me worried and I will get to that. But, Mr. Vice-President, unlike the four Opposition Senators who have gone before me, I am here to speak on a Bill for:

“An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending...30th day of September, 2020.”

You see, my friends have gotten carried away with their transformation plan and their pseudo manifesto. And we might be lucky because there are two more left and they will come back tomorrow, so I will help them prepare for tomorrow. But this Bill is before us, Mr. Vice-President, and I intend to address the mind of the House and the country to the Schedule to the Bill, in particular, Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. But, Mr. Vice-President, before I get there, my friends have a problem in learning and I listened to the call for the Darryl Smith Report and blah, blah, blah, blah.

Hon. Members: “Ummm!”

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: And we have schooled you in this already. I remember very distinctly you were demanding a report to be laid, to be brought to the Parliament or something and I reminded you, Claim No. CV2014-03943, Ashwin Creed, former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Sport, Cornelius Price, Theodore Charles and Ronnell Barclay and the Central Audit Committee, the defendants. And you know this case had to do with LifeSport which, of course,

is a load you have to carry and your decision at paragraph 29 of the judgment of Madam Justice Dean-Armorer, paragraph 29 sets out your behaviour. And it reads:

“It was accepted by all parties that the Final Audit Report was laid in Parliament on the 24th July, 2016...It received wide media coverage, and was subjected to press commentaries.”

But you never gave the claimants the opportunity to see, read or respond to the report.

Sen. Ameen: Sexual harassment in the workplace.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: It does not matter.

Sen. Ameen: It does not matter?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Sexual harassment is as grievous as LifeSport. LifeSport, the criminal funding machinery you established on the East-West Corridor to take control of the 2015 general election. [*Crosstalk*] And then on paragraph 79 of the judgment of Madam Justice Dean-Armorer, this is what the court declared:

- “1. The Central Audit Committee comprising the Defendants acted in breach of the rules of natural justice in relation to the Audit into the Life Sport Program.
2. The Audit in relation to the...Program was made in breach of the legitimate expectation of the Claimants.”

So that we have traversed this already and it is well established. We cannot bring this and give you, it is not roti sharing. [*Laughter*] This is a serious matter. And if it is that anything is to come out of that investigation, there is still an opportunity to retrieve the situation. But we cannot and you ought to have learnt

your lesson with the Ashwin Creed matter. You ought to have done that.

And then how could you lay claim to having something called “FarmPEP”. I would gladly take you now to the farmers in Tableland, the pineapple farmers whom you promised this thing called “FarmPEP”, that you are going to take CEPEP workers and put them on their farms and so on. they are still waiting for you to do that. And I have warned you on many times do not get caught up with old talk. CEPEP in agriculture makes no sense. I have cautioned you about that.

But listen to what you really did with CEPEP. And this is *Newsday* 11 April, 2018. And it is the case where Tora Bora Construction—I am sure you are familiar with Tora Bora Construction, Imtiaz Mohammed. And this was a failure of CEPEP to pay money owed since March/April 2015. The sum was \$1.9million. But what you think Tora Bora Construction was doing, planting pineapple and picking coconuts? What you did, you got involved in—I do not want to use unparliamentary language, you were very creative in discovering work that was supposed to be done in the health sector, car park to be paved in Mount Hope, buildings to be repaired and so on. And having discovered work to be done, you or your minions created these contracts. Whether the work was performed or the work was not performed is immaterial now and you ran up a bill via CEPEP of about \$100 million which you left unpaid. If you were serious about CEPEP and agriculture, \$100million in labour to farmers would have gone a significant distance.

But what you did? You did—we do not know if the contracts were real; we do not know if the work was ever done; we had claims which had to be paid; the claims generated interest over the period of time as CEPEP tried to manage the debt and pay it off; legal fees were incurred and that is your story with CEPEP.

That is your story with CEPEP. And just like LifeSport you have to live with it and you have no “FarmPEP” and “FarmPEP” sounds just like the 40 things that the hon. Leader of the Opposition set out in relation to agriculture and I think I dealt with that in the other place.

And then when I listened to Sen. Obika, Mr. Vice-President, it reminded me that in my mother’s time as a seamstress she used to make this mat; she used to take all the scraps of cloth, pink, green, red, yellow—not yellow, sorry, never had yellow in our house [*Crosstalk*] and cut it into pieces and make a mat with it. So your mat had a piece of CDAP, a food card, a grant and was all over the place. It is like Snakes and Ladders, “ah going up and ah coming down”. But to what effect, to what effect. Nothing except towards the end a little reference with the Development Programme. You talked about GATE, you talked about the Trade Centres, but we have assisted you, Sen. Obika, in your Motion in relation to the trade centres. We told you that there was only one trainee and we consolidated. But the overarching thing about your contribution is this. You have dealt with CDAP, food card, grants, preschools, school feeding, skill training, GATE, housing, jobs, but at no point have you addressed—this is a budget, this is a Bill dealing with budgetary provisions and you have not spoken about revenue verses expenditure. [*Crosstalk*]

Before you get to debt servicing you have to incur debt. If you are running a household, Ms. Joyce in Enid Village, Rio Claro know that. If you are running a household it is, a household is calibrated on what comes in and what goes out. So if you are making these statements in relation to these things, I have not heard you say we have to cut this, just as my mother cut the cloth and put, I have not heard you—and it is amazing that a man of your “paper talent” [*Laughter*] could not

address a simple matter of revenue and expenditure. You made no mention. You know we have a \$5 billion hold in this budget. We did not hide it like you hide the Petrotrin debts, you know. We put it there, we put it out there.

Hon. Members: Malcolm Jones there.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: No, we did not hide it, because we understood that the equation of this budget, all these yellow books and all these books and this is weeks of talking amount to one thing and one thing only, revenue and expenditure. And we told you from the start [*Crosstalk*] there is a \$5 billion difference between the two. And we have to—we have told you continuously, every year we have told you.

You see, we understand your problems with the FCB/IPO for example. We understand your problems. And you have a problem in understanding and we try our best. So that each year we have come and we have said “This is the gap”. The revenues of this country fell apart. We had something called “Spotlight”. You should “ah” come. And it was not me, it was PS Dhanpaul making the presentation and setting out the debt ratio, setting out the shortfall, making the point that the salaries and wages in the public service are consuming the recurrent expenditure.

Hon. Senator: That is just bookkeeping. Ideas, changes—

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: No, but talk is cheap.

Hon. Senator: PNM talk.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: You see, you think in word, Microsoft Word, a budget works on Excel and you have to put something in the expenditure column and you have to put something in the revenue column. That is how it works. These words are simple you know. Anybody could open a laptop or even “doh”

need a laptop, anybody could write the words and that is what the hon. Opposition Leader did in the House for 17 minutes on agriculture. [*Crosstalk*] But how? CDAP.

If you want to advocate for an expansion of the School Feeding Programme, no problem with that. This Government invent that. We invent providing food in school. We invent that. My uncle used to drive a Morris that you have to crank up bringing school feeding, bring the food into the schools. PNM invent that and we expanded it and we introduced the breakfast and you corrupt the system. But if you are saying to me which is a policy position you are advocating on putting a meal in the hand of every hungry school child in this country then tell me how “ah” paying for it. Tell me how I am paying for it. And if you advocate towards the—in my university time as Sen. Mark knows, in my university time we were at the end of the communist era, I was among the last set of students making the trek to communist Europe.

So I understand as I am sure you do what is a welfare state and if you want the State to provide a house to every citizen of the country and you are aware that it cost \$1 million to build, then you must tell us where the revenue comes from, where the funding comes from. Is it going to be funded through bonds? Well, you tried to give us a lesson in bonds. And my question in relation to your lesson in bonds is this: Which government takes on a \$7 billion highway project and funds it out of recurrent expenditure, out of revenue, at a time when global interest rates were at their lowest?

6.45 p.m.

So I am not taking a lesson from you on bonds, because it seems as though you did not understand what you did in Point with the hospital. It seems as though

you do not understand. What you did, you engaged in discussions with the Austrian government, and you are very good at that. You like drama and scene. We like action on this side. You engaged in a discussion with the Austrian government to grant a loan for the construction of the hospital in Point, but you never entered into any loan agreement with the Government of Austria. In fact, we had to come and negotiate, make alterations to the documentation. We had to find money to fund that during the period when we were negotiating and it is our Government that put in place the financing through the Austrians for Point Fortin. You were happy to go along with the revenue stream, which was disappearing. So we will take no lesson from you on bonds and GATE.

You know, where in the world—let us use North America. The average cost of the average student in a university in North America is going to exit with about US \$80,000 in debt and the likelihood of getting a job is very low. It is not Trinidad alone, you know. You look at the level of joblessness and underemployment of university graduates across North America, and it is significant, and you look at the debt load they carry. As they step out the university they are carrying debt that they will never pay. And in this country you could study law, medicine, engineering. You could get a university education here straight up to PHD level, and owe nobody. And that is carried on the back and the strength of the taxpayers of this country. But the average householder in this country will tell you, if less is coming in, you have to adjust and do with less.

And what drastic change has the Government made in GATE? We got rid of those people who were not able to be accredited because we insisted that you must be accredited. The school must be accredited to the ACTT and many of those schools did not have accreditation, and the individual programmes had to be

accredited. I remember my colleague, Sen. Khan, when we were going through the GATE documents, and Sen. Khan “laugh” and say, “All yuh have GATE for braiding hair?” Not that I have a problem with braiding. I mean I “doh” need braiding, and I “doh” have a problem with braiding, but could you imagine a policy crafted by this PNM to lift people in the country who may not have been able to afford education, to lift them out of that through tertiary education suited to the development needs of the country and it gets so watered down and out of control that you could go to an unaccredited school, do an unaccredited programme and that programme could be braiding hair? And all we did is to put some controls in place and establish a means test, and you said the 50—people above 50. But how many were affected? And if we have to make a sacrifice, do you think we should sacrifice the 19-year-old accessing a university or sacrifice a 50-year old, having completed 30 years of work—sacrifice that person? And that is what we did. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: I am going to retire in 10 years.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: That is what we did. And I have listened to all you said on these bogus job loss figures that you have been throwing about. Let me tell you this. As I said in the debate of the Petrotrin Motion, I said that on that side, and a few on the Independent Bench, were talking about the 9,000—“Ah” using your figure because is not 9,000. You spent all your time talking about the 9,000 Petrotrin workers, and I asked you what about the 1.2 million that is saddled with the US one point something odd billion dollar payment. And throughout all the debate, and in the length and breadth of this country, as you march with the OWTU and against the OWTU, as you go to court against the OWTU, you have never, up until now, you have never offered this country a plan for Petrotrin other than to

hide the debts in the bogus accounting of Petrotrin. You have never. You have never come and said how you intended to address the two bullet payments. [*Crosstalk*] You have never. You have never dealt with it.

Sen. S. Hosein: One hundred million dollars in payments.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: And just as I asked you then what about the 9,000 people, what about the rest of people in this country you have not addressed your mind in all of these things? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: One second. Could we stop shouting across the floor at the Minister while he is making his contribution, please? Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: I have heard different people talking about the IMF, but I will say it in a way nobody else may have said it. If the IMF imposes a programme on Trinidad and Tobago, the public service is going to be decimated, and I will tell you why later on. So it is not how many jobs—not that anybody wants to send anybody home, you know. But if TSTT cannot compete with Digicel, and if TSTT—if a tea lady in TSTT is getting \$30,000 a month and you cannot sustain that, then something has to give. So jobs went.

ArcelorMittal, jobs were lost. But address your mind to the Government's inability to pay the monthly salary bill in the public sector; the Government's inability to service its debt; the Government's inability to keep this country afloat, and the entry of the IMF and the cuts are going to be deeper and more significant, touching every single household in this country. And thank God we are on this side. [*Desk thumping*] Because in trying to give everybody in this country, with your fancy talk, in trying to sell everybody the idea of a government house and a government job, a government grant and government Cafenol and Panadol, you have not addressed your mind to how the bill will be paid.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: And this debate is about two matters and two matters only: revenue and expenditure. And if you are not talking about revenue, you are wasting the country's time. And I will tell you this in relation to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. This is my third opportunity to address this matter of the budget for this year, and I thank the other place for the opportunity to speak. I was before the Standing Committee. I spent an hour and a quarter there and I thank the Opposition and I thank everybody for giving me the opportunity to go through the books and go through the numbers. But at the opening, this was the figure I highlighted.

This is the thing that I grappled with as a Minister, and that has to do with the recurrent expenditure. And when I see 72 per cent of the recurrent expenditure in our Ministry going to wages and salaries, I have said, debate after debate, we have a problem in the country. Because if that significant part—you know, if you get \$100 to go to school or go to work with—if you get \$100 and 72 of that is going into something that will not feed you, clothe you, or make you more productive, you have a problem. If you are spending your \$72 in the casino and you are a loser every time—We have a problem in this country, and anybody looking at the structure of the expenditure in this country, and anybody looking at what the taxpayers pay for on a monthly basis, will come and tell you, you have not to tinker with; you have to make drastic changes in the public sector. That is the reality and that is what we have fought to stave off. And hopefully there will come a time when, as we fix, we tackle that issue. But as a Minister, speaking in a budget debate, I want to remind you that we are paying for something that does not produce for us in the way it should produce; that is bureaucratic; that is unwieldy;

that is unmanageable and the problem is growing.

And I will give you some information in relation to how it hurts me. Because in the current construct, I cannot hire and fire “nobody, yuh know.” I cannot discipline or give instructions to anybody. But let me tell you how it matters to me and how it hurts me. Among the public servant establishment in our Ministry there are 2,005 positions; 1,411 are vacant. Could you imagine that, that I am supposed to be working with 2,005 persons but 1,411 not there, because the positions vacant, and I cannot fill it, and the people who are filling it, I cannot talk to them? I “cyar” make demands on them. And where are these vacancies? Agricultural assistants, the people who I need to be out with the farmers and engaging the farmers; 60 per cent of the positions are vacant.

In Forestry Division, 63 per cent of the technical positions are vacant. In the professional and scientific category, 76 per cent are vacant, and in the technical category in relation to supervision, 59 per cent are vacant. And across the board, every Minister and every Ministry, that is what is happening in this country; 72 per cent on wages and salaries. And amongst those persons, the core of your business, the technical and professional, senior administrative, senior supervisory staff, they are not there. And when you put people to act, you cannot do succession planning. You cannot invest in training. You cannot invest in development. Somebody moves from this Ministry to that Ministry, to that Ministry. And that is what these numbers—for these numbers to ever matter and make sense, if we ever have to bring these numbers alive, we need bodies; we need people to do it, and that is what hurts our Ministries and that is what hurts this country.

On the issue of debt management, as my friend Sen. Obika said, I made the point, we are constantly catching up. I am paying bills. In this fiscal, I am going to

be paying internet bills from 2012, '13, '14, still. Forestry Division was bought into this Ministry in 2014. They brought with them \$8 million in internet bills. We still have a debt to Flow, \$8 million. Before we even embark on spending for this fiscal year, I am bringing an \$8 million debt from Flow. So debt management has become a problem, that the way we budget the revenue flow—my colleague in the other place, MP Bodoie, did a very good job of talking about making requests for releases; the timing of the releases and the link to the availability of funds; the cash flow, and if you come to the end of a fiscal and you have not paid your bills, you carry that over, and the ones from this year, you carry it over, and eventually you find yourself with a mountain of debt and 72 per cent in wages and salaries and the other 28 per cent goes to debts incurred in previous financial years.

I addressed my mind to the issue of revenue and I said, in this country people look at expenditure, just as my friend did, look at spending, and nobody is addressing their minds to revenue. There is a book on revenue. You know what? You have a problem when your expenditure books combined are four inches and your revenue book is six millimetres thick. You have a problem. And when I went—some years ago when I first came in, I went into the book on revenue. I identified, for example, on land for this, we project for 2020 on state land—the most valuable resource in this country—we project to cover only \$2.7 million in revenue. And you know why? Because we have gone for years of not collecting rent; not billing rent; not doing rent reviews. So what we have been doing in land is, apart from investing heavily in the technology to allow us to manage files in an electronic format to be able to track, to be able to manage files and do rent reviews, and so on, recruit people—and not just recruit. I am on record. It was all over the papers in 2016 when I told the country of 160-something people employed in the

land management division. Many of them were daily-paid workers, brought in by my predecessor, just holding job titles, no training, no subjects, come in as a daily-paid and next thing you have a fancy job title.

And we have spent a significant amount of time dealing with the land matters, dealing with the backlog, introducing the technology, finding the right people, but the focus is—because I believe that without much effort the Commissioner of State Lands can bill and collect about half a billion dollars in outstanding revenue, but nobody focuses on that. Everybody complains: We “doh” have this; we “doh” have that; the leak in the roof, and everything, and nobody is attempting to identify the leakages in the revenue streams in this country and deal with it. And the TTRA would have been a significant step, but our friends “doh” want to help us.

Hon. Member: At all.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: The gambling legislation, significant step. Can you imagine in which country, which civilized country you have a flourishing gambling industry and you are not collecting a cent from them? Even the smallest part of gambling, which is the tax that is already existing on the tables, not being collected. Because unless you leave an electronic footprint in a country, you are leaving yourself open to theft and corruption, and all of that. And everybody—
[*Crosstalk and laughter*]

So, Mr. Vice-President, those were the headlines that I wanted to share, and then I wanted to go on this issue of land, because I listened to my friends in the other place and I wanted to emphasize that when we talk about agriculture—I have said it over and over—nothing is going to happen in agriculture unless we deal with this issue of land tenure. And I want to tell you it goes beyond agriculture,

this matter of land. But I wanted to place on the record and to remind my friends—because they feel that this issue of granting leases is a new thing. You know, the PNM created this system. The PNM established Wallerfield, Carlsen Field, Goldsborough. The PNM set that in place. But, you know, 30 years and 25 years down the road when the leases expired, we had no system; we had no system to renew them.

But let me tell you, from November 2015 to early 2018, I and my colleague, Sen. Singh, with the support of the staff of Caroni (1975) Limited, the Commissioner of State Lands, and so on, by that time we had given out 7,000 instruments relating to land title—7,000. And my colleagues, I know, get upset with me sometimes for not talking about it, but, you know, I am so busy. I “doh ha” time to do that. But I just want to tell you, this business of giving out and granting leases, we have mastered that, and if it is one thing, when we go out on the hustings, I would remind the country of how great our track record in the PNM is in relation to this matter of handling land. [*Desk thumping*]

The state land. I said it was unfair that once again this Caroni land distribution had to be given priority, because every time—you know, the Caroni programme, as well-intentioned as it is, set out to create farmers, you know, and what we did was that we just set all the real farmers aside.

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

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: So by 2018 we started to deal with the real farmers, and we have dealt with thousands and thousands and thousands of files across the country. It will not finish with me. It may finish after my next five years, but we have been dealing with it. Because you cannot talk about farming—whether you talk about modern farming, hydroponics, use of technology—agriculture in

our part of the world essentially is going to be done by farming families and on a small or medium-sized scale. But at the heart of it is this issue of land tenure.

And I want to tell you something. A lot of times I talk about the leases, the policy, the distribution. I want to tell you two other things. Once I found questionable behaviour in our land management division. I am the Minister that took the steps to have disciplinary action taken against the senior officials in the Ministry who were involved in questionable behaviour. And one of those files, by the way, is one that is now making the news again, Queen's Park East, the Royal Air Force Association land. That is among the corrupt transactions that I have dealt with in relation to senior officials in the land management division of the ministry.

And there are other matters, particularly Caroni matters, where people have sold and sold the same parcel of land to two and three people, where somebody went so far as to take a Caroni two-acre parcel of agriculture land, create forged documents and the signatures and the stamps and all of that, and got a multi-million-dollar mortgage to establish a commercial medical facility in the land. That is the extent people are prepared to go, private individuals, many times aided and abetted by corrupt public officials in relation to land. So it is not just giving out leases, and it is not about dealing with squatters, it is also about tackling the corruption in land management in a way that had not been done before.

And in my few minutes, I want to say this issue of squatting, we have a problem, but not the problem that everybody complains about. And that problem is the fact that successive administrations, including yours, when it was time to make some political promises at the end of your administration in overtime, you tried to deal with the LSA legislation by expanding the sites. But here is the real problem with the squatters in this country. The LSA has said continuously, it is only 28 per

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cent, and on the LSA site—not outside the LSA site, on the LSA site, it is only 28 per cent of the persons living there fall within the strict requirements of the LSA legislation and 72 per cent of the people living on LSA sites, which are scheduled in the legislation, have no any of ever getting tenure. So right now we are giving consideration to two things. One I have said publicly already: expanding and dealing with this situation where only the Commissioner of State Lands could deal with squatters, by expanding the power and giving it to LSA and maybe, eventually giving it to the municipal corporations. And secondly, finally giving consideration to some policy that will address the 72 per cent of people living on approved LSA sites who have no way of ever getting a title because of the way the law is constructed. I thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I now beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Friday, 25 October, 2019 at 10.00 a.m. and those of you waiting for me to speak you will have to come back tomorrow. [*Laughter*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.09 p.m.