

**SENATE***Friday, October 25, 2019*

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES****(APPOINTMENT OF)**

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from the Speaker of the House of Representatives, hon. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP:

“Establishment of Joint Select Committees

At a sitting held on Wednesday October 02, 2019 the House of Representatives agreed to the following resolutions:

1) ‘Resolved:

That, the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2019, be referred to a Joint Select Committee hereby established;

That this Committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committee in the Fourth Session, and report by December 31 2019; and

That subject to the concurrence of the Senate on the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2019, that the House appoint the following six Members to sit with an equal number from the Senate on this Committee:

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis, MP

Mr. Anthony Garcia, MP

Mr. Esmond Forde, MP

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan, MP

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, MP

Ms. Marlene McDonald, MP'

2) 'Resolved:

That the Private Security Industry Bill, 2019, be referred to a Joint Select Committee hereby established;

That this Committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committee in the Fourth Session and report by December 31 2019; and

That subject to the concurrence of the Senate and the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on the Private Security Industry Bill, 2019, that the House appoint the following six Members to sit with an equal number from the Senate on this Committee:

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP

Mr. Stuart Young, MP

Mrs. Glenda Jennings Smith, MP

Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine, MP

Mr. David Lee, MP; and

Dr. Roodal Moonilal, MP.'

3) 'Resolved:

That the Cybercrime Bill, 2017, be referred to a Joint Select Committee hereby established;

That this Committee be mandated to adopt the work of Joint Select Committee in the Fourth Session and report by December 31, 2019; and

That subject to the concurrence of the Senate on the establishment of

the Joint Select Committee on the Cybercrime Bill, 2017, that the House appoint the following six Members to sit with an equal number from the Senate on this Committee:

Mr. Faris Al-Rawi, MP

Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edmund Dillon, MP

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP

Ms. Shamfa Cudjoe, MP

Dr. Roodal Moonilal, MP and

Mr. Barry Padarath, MP'

4) 'Resolved:

That the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016, be referred to a Joint Select Committee hereby established;

That this Committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committee in the Fourth Session and report by December 31, 2019; and

That subject to the concurrence of the Senate on the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016, that the House appoint the following six Members to sit with and equal number from the Senate on this Committee:

Mr. Colm Imbert, MP

Mr. Faris Al-Rawi, MP

Mr. Stuart Young, MP

Ms. Nicole Olivierre, MP

Mr. Ganga Singh, MP; and

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, MP.'

5) 'Resolved:

That the Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters Bill, 2018, the Tax information Exchange Agreements Bill 2018 and the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill 2019 be referred to a Joint Select Committee hereby established;

That this Committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committee in the Fourth Session and report by December 31, 2019; and

That subject to the concurrence of the Senate on the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on the Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters Bill, 2018, the Tax information Exchange Agreements Bill 2018 and the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2019, that the House appoint the following six members to sit with an equal number from the Senate on this Committee:

Mr. Colm Imbert, MP

Mr. Faris Al-Rawi, MP

Dr. Lovell Francis, MP

Ms. Marlene McDonald, MP

Mr. Fazal Karim, MP; and

Mr. Rodney Charles, MP.'

6) 'Resolved:

That the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2018, be referred to a Joint Select Committee hereby established;

That this Committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committee in the Fourth Session and report by December 31, 2019; and

That subject to the concurrence of the Senate on the establishment of

the Joint Select Committee Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2018, that the House appoint the following six Members to sit with an equal number from the Senate on this Committee:

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis, MP

Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh, MP

Ms. Shamfa Cudjoe, MP

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, MP; and

Ms. Ramona Ramdial, MP.'

7) 'Resolved:

That the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago Bill, 2018, be referred to a Joint Select Committee hereby established;

That this Committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committee in the Fourth Session and report by December 31, 2019; and

That subject to the concurrence of the Senate on the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago Bill, 2018, that the House appoint the following six (6) Members to sit with an equal number from the Senate on this Committee:

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis, MP

Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh, MP

Mr. Randall Mitchel, MP

Ms. Cherry Ann Crichlow-Cockburn, MP

Mr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, MP; and

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, MP.’

I request that the Senate be informed of these decisions at the earliest convenience please.

Respectfully,

Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, Speaker of the House”

### **PAPERS LAID**

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Arima Borough Corporation for the fiscal year 2017/2018. [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein)*]
2. Annual Administrative Report of the San Fernando City Corporation for the fiscal year 2016/2017. [*Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein*]
3. Annual Administrative Report of the San Fernando City Corporation for the fiscal year 2017/2018. [*Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein*]
4. Annual Administrative Report of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the fiscal year 2014/2015. [*Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein*]
5. Annual Administrative Report of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the fiscal year 2015/2016. [*Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein*]
6. Annual Administrative Report of Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation Limited for the period January to December 2016. [*The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat)*]
7. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the expenditure and internal controls of the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited. [*The Minister of Public*

8. *Administration and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West)]*
9. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Mayor's Project Fund Account of the San Fernando City Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Sen. The Hon. A. West*]
10. Water Pollution Rules, 2019. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]
11. Annual Report of the Police Service Commission for the period January to December 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]
12. Annual Administrative Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the year ended September 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]
13. Annual Administrative Report of the University of the West Indies for the fiscal year 2016/2017 [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]
14. Eighth Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority for the period 2017/2018. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]
15. White Paper on the National Policy on Sustainable Community Development for Trinidad and Tobago 2019-2024. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]

## **JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **(Presentation)**

#### **Human Rights, Equality and Diversity**

**The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein):** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I have the honour to present the following reports as listed on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye:

**Sexual Harassment in the Workplace**

Thirteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.

**Sexual Harassment in the Education Sector**

Fourteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity, Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament on Sexual Harassment in the Education Sector.

**Social Services and Public Administration**

**Sen. Paul Richards:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Good morning colleagues. Mr. Vice-President, I have the honour to present the following reports as listed on the Order Paper in my name:

**State's Intervention directed at Socially Displaced Persons**

Eleventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration, Fifth Session (2019/2020), Eleventh Parliament on a Follow-up Inquiry into the effectiveness of the State's interventions directed at Socially Displaced Persons.

**Current Level of Childhood Obesity**

Twelfth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration, Fifth Session (2019/2020), Eleventh Parliament on an Examination of the Current Level of Childhood Obesity and the State's Interventions to Promote a Healthy Lifestyle among Children.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, we have one other report to lay and we will just revisit that, thank you.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES****UNREVISED**



**(APPOINTMENT TO)****Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2019**

1. **The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** Mr. Vice-President, having regard to the correspondence from the Speaker of the House in relation to the establishment of the Joint Select Committees to consider the report on the following Bills, I beg to move that the Senate concur with the House of Representatives in the establishment of the respective Committees that said Committees be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committees appointed in the Fourth Session Eleventh Parliament and report by December 31, 2019; and that the following Senators be appointed to serve. The Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2019:

Mr. Clarence Rambharat

Mr. Kazim Hosein

Mr. Daniel Dookie

Ms. Khadijah Ameen

Mr. Paul Richards and

Mr. Deeroop Teemal

*Question put and agreed to.*

**10.15 a.m.**

**Private Security Industry Bill, 2019**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** The Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the Private Security Industry Bill, 2019:

Mr. Clarence Rambharat

Mr. Nigel De Freitas

Mr. Foster Cummings

Mr. Saddam Hosein

Mr. Paul Richards

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh

*Question put and agreed to.*

### **Cybercrime Bill, 2017**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** The Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the Cybercrime Bill, 2017:

Mr. Clarence Rambharat

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon

Ms. Donna Cox

Mr. Wade Mark

Mr. Paul Richards

Mr. Anthony Vieira

*Question put and agreed to.*

### **Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** The Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016:

Ms. Allyson West

Mr. Robert Le Hunte

Mr. Foster Cummings

Mr. Wade Mark

Mr. Paul Richards

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Tax Matters Bill, 2018, the Tax Information Exchange Agreements Bill, 2018  
and Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2019**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** The Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the tax matters Bill, 2018, the Tax Information Exchange Agreements Bill, 2018 and Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2019:

Mr. Clarence Rambharat

Mr. Daniel Dookie

Dr. Lester Henry

Mr. Saddam Hosein

Mr. Paul Richards

Ms. Charrise Seepersad

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Constitutional (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2018**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** The Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the Constitutional (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2018:

Mr. Clarence Rambharat

Mr. Nigel De Freitas

Mr. Foster Cummings

Mr. Saddam Hosein

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh

Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy

*Question put and agreed to.*

**National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago Bill, 2018**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** The Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago Bill, 2018:

Mr. Clarence Rambharat

Mrs. Paula-Gopee-Scoon

Dr. Lester Henry

Mr. Taharqa Obika

Ms. Amrita Deonarine

Ms. Charrise Seepersad

*Question put and agreed to.*

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES**

**(APPOINTMENT TO)**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move the following Motion:

*Be it resolved* that this Senate agree to the following appointments to the Joint Select Committee committees:

1. On the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee and the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises:

Mr. Foster Cummings, in lieu of Mr. Garvin Simonette.

2. On the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity:

Mr. Sean Sobers, in lieu of Mr. Ashvani Mahabir.

Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, please permit me to revert to the previous item where we were laying Papers on the Senate table. Leader of Government Business.

### JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

#### Finance and Legal Affairs

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Sophia Chote SC:

#### Non-Custodial Penalties in the Criminal Justice System

Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs, Fifth Session (2019/2020), Eleventh Parliament on an Inquiry into the wider application of non-custodial penalties in the criminal justice system of Trinidad and Tobago.

#### APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2020) BILL, 2019

[Third 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:** List of those who spoke on Wednesday, October 25, 2019, we had 11 speakers. On Thursday, October 24, 2019, we had 12 speakers. Who is next? Minister of Public Utilities. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte):** Mr. Vice-President, it is always an honour to stand before this esteemed House to give

account of the work that we have done in the Ministry of Public Utilities over the past fiscal and share our plans for 2019/2020. But before I get into my actual work, let me just take some time, short I hope, to just deal with some of the issues that I have heard mentioned in this House and in the other place.

You know, it was ironic that I heard my colleague, my economist-trained, Robert Le Hunte-trained colleague, Mr. Obika—[*Laughter*] I take responsibility. I always take responsibility as a Minister, but I am sure I did not, in all the training I gave him, clearly I realized that he needs to— That is why I was coaching him a little bit on his contribution because I need to propel him a little bit higher, so that at least his words will be able, and his coaching and training would be able to reach the ears of his leader. Because clearly, I could see that based on what I heard the Leader of the Opposition put out there as the economic manifesto plan, I know for sure at least Sen. Obika would have been able to guide her differently, and therefore, it is surprising that we have heard nothing about this economic plan that they put out to save Trinidad and Tobago in this contribution in the Senate. You know, my colleague yesterday made the point that a budget is not about a Word document. It is also about Excel, it is about figures, it is also about numbers, and I want to continue to say that you know, glib talk, gallery, mamaguy, would only get you that far.

Clearly, we heard about a budget, we heard about a plan, and I mean some of the highlights of that plan that was put forward talked about increasing the repo rate. And again, as my training as I gave to Obika—

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Obika.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:**—Sen. Obika, when I spoke to him about repo rates and so forth, and the implications, he knows that that has a benefit on one side, it will increase investments, but it also has a consequence of also increasing lending

rates. And therefore, when you are talking about reviving an economy, and you are talking about stimulating an economy, good economic practice will tell you, you do not stimulate an economy, you do not jump start an economy with sending up interest rates on borrowings. And therefore, again, that plan as was put forward, increasing interest rates was also as the big economic plan, was clearly one that was “misfounded”.

We also heard about allowing market forces to determine the exchange rate and, again, we all understand the reality of market forces being put on the exchange rate. We are again talking about a devaluation in the currency and, again, the implications of a devaluation in the currency to Trinidadians, and Tobagonians, is that the prices of goods, the inflation level that we have fought so hard to keep at below 1 per cent, will now skyrocket. You know they have a way “they does” talk about poor people, and I am for poor people, and so forth, but if you look at their budget, if you look at the implications of what they are proposing, you get a real true picture and the veil is removed. Again, they put forward a plan that talked about wanting to balance the budget, but you want to balance the budget—whilst balancing the budget I am also not doing any tax, I am reducing taxes, reducing taxes to the business community, reducing taxes, and also at that time no Revenue Authority and no property tax.

These populist statements, again, is only an attempt to show one side of the story because it makes people feel good. Talking about it again, about words, budget is not about words, it comes down to hard facts. Managing a country is not a part-time job. It is a full-time job meaning taking decisions, not just talking. And therefore, when you talk about that, clearly you are balancing a budget whilst reducing your revenue, therefore, we know how you going to pay for it, how you going to make it happen. What you are in effect telegraphing is a whole reduction

in the public service because you would not have money and sending home 20,000 people.

Finally, sneaked inside there somewhere—and you know no one has spoken about it—you remember, Mr. Vice-President, when this Government early, faced with a time of revenue dropping from 58 billion to 35 billion, you would recall a sensible government at the time, what will you do, as I broke it down once in your personal life, you will turn to your savings to provide some buffer. So what did this Government do very early? We turned to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and we had a withdrawal from the Stabilisation Fund—that made sense—until we stabilized the situation, and now we are seeing that Heritage and Stabilisation Fund growing. And you heard the Opposition at that time—because it is not about what is right, it is not about economics, it is not about common sense. It is just about rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, and therefore, remember they also got on like if the world was falling down. The worst thing could have happened. How do you want to touch our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in that way?

By the way, in their so-called “voop” budget, and in the so-called cut and paste manifesto, they talked about using, entering, and taking the interest payments out of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund for two years. Well, people, that is just a next way of saying that they are going back into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. We did it once. We took out 500 million. They are talking about the interest payment for two years. I will let you know that payment is equivalent to close to \$1,800,000,000 depending on the interest and the returns, based on the size to \$1 billion.

So the same Heritage and Stabilisation Fund that was crazy, that was taboo not to do. It is all well and good to be done by the UNC government, as I said, in their populist manifesto typed arrangement where they are now just trying to make



people, mamaguy the people with a bunch of things. So clearly we have a good indication of what the UN's plan, economic recovery plan is for Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Economic plan.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** No, no, no, no. Economic transformational plan is what they talk about—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Right.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:**—and therefore, I dare say if you put and you listen to the other side of the story, which I am sure if they just had a conversation with Sen. Obika, he would have been able to guide and tell them that interest rates will go up, that means poor people will not be able to afford their mortgages and they will also have to pay more for the mortgage payments that they have.

He would also have been able to tell them that when the dollar is devalued that inflation will go up and poor people will also suffer because the prices of goods will also go up. He would also tell them that there is no way that you could balance the budget at the same time of reducing taxes, and if you do that you will be sending home over 20,000 people. So, Sen. Obika, again, I urge you please, to continue to give some advice because clearly someone is not listening to you because that is not how I taught you.

I want to also take the opportunity, again, in my contribution—and I do not want to go too far. I will leave those conversations—or only to also add, Sen. Mark, we continue to speak ill—I mean, a banking—and I know this House allows us to say what we want and that is for a reason, but it does not mean we have to be irresponsible, and therefore, the statements and the wild statements made against—Credit Suisse was one again— You know, you made the same statements again, NCB Jamaica—one of the big financial institutions in the Caribbean—a bank

works on confidence. Therefore, the idea when we brought Bills here concerning FATCA, money laundering charges is as simple for a bank as what we try to prevent from happening with our financial system. You just take money into a bank, and that money is traced that comes from a wrong source, and that money is transferred to someone else in the banking system and you are charged for money laundering, hence the reason why we have been speaking so much in tightening up those laws. So in one way we criticize and we understand how people—if you criticize other banks like that, how our banks will be criticized if that happens to them, and yet still when we try to bring Bills in this House to deal with tightening up the financial system we meet with some type of opposition from your side. So we need to be careful.

Mr. Vice-President, during the budget presentation, the Ministry of Finance indicated that the Government of which I am part of, is taking a lead in adopting and implementing a sustainable energy road map for Trinidad and Tobago as we integrate energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy as key pillars of a sustainable energy transition over the next four years that we will be in office. Mr. Vice-President, we talked about energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy, and I want to just take a little segue and let us understand the links between the two, or between the three.

There has been a lot of conversation and people talk a lot about renewables, and there is a lot of talk around about we need to get in renewables, we need to get in renewables, and the importance and what is happening with fossil fuel, and I agree with that. But again our journey into renewables there is a pendulum, energy conservation, energy efficiency, renewables, and there is a journey into renewables that you need to take depending on your own country's circumstance; and let me give you an idea. Our circumstance in Trinidad and Tobago from an energy

perspective is what you also—you have to always remember you have to be constantly cutting your cloth to suit your style as you talk about budgets, and hopes, and aspirations, because all of that comes down to money and how you are going to pay for it.

So, in Trinidad and Tobago, we pay, we buy, we purchase, we spend money, we have contracts that we have to fulfil for 2,000 megawatts of electricity. Today, we only use 1,200, 60 per cent, and therefore, as much as we want to add new power agreements on to our grid, that comes at a cost, bearing in mind we have projected in T&TEC for the next six to seven years, we will not be using it. So, yes, you want to be able to grow, and you want to get it, but you will be paying for something that you are not using. And therefore, Senator, I want to also—you know you made a point about diversification and I will segue a little bit from my energy conservation discussion and just get into that a little bit. You know I agree with you, but we need to stop talking about diversification, and as a country we need to then move forward, and everyone when it is happening we need to stop—well bad PR is why we did not do that one, and therefore, we have to go bigger than that if that is important to us as a country.

You know why we are here where we are with regard to 2,000 megawatts and we are only using 1,200? The maths behind those figures I will share with you. We are where we are because the big diversification project that was attempted, that was there, that was ready to happen, was the Alutrint and the aluminium smelter. Remember that aluminium smelter that we were supposed to have? Well, the reason why we have all this electricity and which we are paying for and not using, and as a result has resulted in almost TT \$471 million to T&TEC annually for that amount of electricity that they are paying for that they cannot use, is because as part of our diversification we had talked about getting into

aluminium. Just for information, if we had that today, if we had it today because we had diversified, we would have been—aluminium now is trading at a price and the average price on the market is about US \$1,800 per tonne—we would have been producing anything like about 343 tonnes per day. If you do the maths—just do the math—today we would have had aluminium smelter plant up, and we would have been having income of over TT \$1.5 billion in revenue.

Forget the thousand jobs that would have been created, forget the downstream industries that would have been created, forget all of that. Think about this country getting foreign exchange of about TT \$1.5 billion more in revenue. That is what would have happened if we had taken the opportunity then to diversify and make that happen. I hear people speaking about also what is the amount of that HDC contract, what is the cost when you cost a contract, and when you shut down a contract there is cost. Did anybody ask the question what was the cost of shutting down that aluminium smelter project contract with the Chinese [*Desk thumping*] and what is the type of bill that we have hanging over our heads then?

So as a country we cannot just talk it. We lost that opportunity. That is gone. We lost it. It is gone. And in addition, we have moved from not only losing it, and not giving up, and not getting the revenue, we would now— What we did was to incur a legal cost that hangs there and puts us in a position where T&TEC has to pay for something—\$471 million—that we are not even using. Think about that money, because people I always want to remind us, there is one pool of funds. When we make these decisions, we make these mistakes, we make these decisions, there are cost implications to them. [*Desk thumping*] And this is just— [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Ameen:** You bringing back the smelter?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** I am putting it on the table as to what it is. That was the reality. So we like to make these—we have to be mindful of how we make decisions by “voop” because we realized that we have an Opposition who could put forward an economic plan by “voops”, and therefore, they are not about putting plans that make sense. So be careful when we listen to those types of statements because they take—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Ameen:** Will you bring back the smelter?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:**—because they take us down a path of nowhere.

Now by the way, I want to, again, when we talked about diversification—and, again, everything we just like to rationalize it, but understand as I have a conspiracy theorist, like my colleague, Sen. Richards, and there is always somebody to benefit. Why it is when these things happen we get all these professional people saying a lot of things, and then they rise up when the country is supposed to do something, and then they go back down quiet afterwards and say it, put it under, you did not do a good selling job. We talk about diversification, and I tell you today I have looked at the numbers myself. I have looked at the numbers myself. If you go back, one, this country lost a great opportunity this time around again. So the last time, in 2000, the last time in the PNM we had the aluminium smelter, we lost it. This time that Sandals project was a fantastic project. If you look at it, it was the same approvals that were given to Clico to build a same sized hotel on the same site.

All the environmental issues that we talked about were covered when Clico did it. So it was okay for that hotel to be built by Clico on that site. All of a sudden the Government wants to do it and it becomes an issue. I assure you, the people of Tobago, when I go there, all of them continue to say—all but a few and I wonder why—all but a few, they are now saddened that that project is gone,

diversification opportunity gone. That would have given us an opportunity to jump start Tobago tourism, improve training, improve airlift, improve agriculture. Everything would have improved, and therefore, we would have been, three year from now—Sen. Richards—while we are talking diversification, we would have had some anchors and be able to stimulate the diversification process. So it is about all of us taking that responsibility, and when we are seeing it stopping the naysayers, and understanding that it is a bigger goal that we are going for, and that is what needs to happen.

**10.45 am.**

So that is a little segue into that. So let me continue about my energy conservation and energy efficiency, all right? So let me then say, all of these are things that were said in the budget. We were very clear, right, we are moving to a road map and we have a document where we have pulled together all the—everyone in the society, not just public servants, the Chambers, and we have put together a policy document and a road map for implementation over a five-year period.

This road map includes energy audits and the road map, the backdrop to the road map is really about the Government leading by example, Government leading by example. We talked about energy audits in the buildings and we talked about retrofitting the buildings so as to allow them to use less electricity and by extension less natural gas. We spoke about that, right. We talked about working with the private sector and the small business sector in encouraging them to do the same, and I must say, my conversations so far with members of AMCHAM and other individuals and other chambers, about getting on board and being part of their social responsibility, not because they get the electricity, because at the end of the day, energy efficiency and energy conservation has the additional benefit of

reducing our carbon emissions down to—carbon emissions are expected to come down by 6 million tonnes in the first four years and by 2030 to 18 million tonnes.

That is significant, significant and therefore, that is why we are going down this road. So we are working with the private sector both large and small. We are leading by doing the energy audits in our buildings. We talked about dealing with it in the school system and the reason for us going in the school system is because it is not only geared towards financial and economic savings, but it is also geared towards ensuring that our nation's youth have the opportunity to observe and study the benefits of energy efficiency technology for themselves. So we are looking to retrofit over 30 primary schools and 30 secondary schools, but allow the students to experience it. This is not about bulbs, this is about changing a mindset, this is about leading from the front.

We also talked about the whole residential sector and therefore, as we talked about the residential sector, yes we recognized the importance, right, and the net present value benefit of doing the bulb replacement. Because you know, to poor people, a poor person with a bill or someone, not even the poor, someone that has a bill of \$400 will see themselves that bill reduced to as much as—less than 300. There is more than a 25 per cent and for those of you who are aware, if your bill is over—under 300, all right, you also get a 25 per cent rebate. So if your Bill today is 400 and we change the five bulbs for you and you see the benefit, your bill will reduce to 225. That is close to 45 per cent reduction in the bill, the savings to someone. That is significant. But this is just—this is a net present value benefit of about \$500 million, benefit. That means even if you have to pay for the bulbs, the benefits and the savings you get via the gas, it is still positive to the economy and it is not going to cost us.

However, what it does is that it allows you to experience the savings and to

continue the process. But that was one aspect of that particular programme. We are also going to augment and it is all in a—you see, when we do things as I said, we just do not do things by “voops” and “vaps”, we do things with a plan. So as I said, you have a document with a five-year plan, year one, year two, year three, year four, what you are hoping to achieve each year for it, by it. And therefore, we are also going to go out there and improve the—

**Sen. Richards:** Could you just—thank you—could you just outline the name of the document for me please?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** The document is the Energy Conservation and Energy Efficiency Policy and Action Plan for Trinidad and Tobago 2020 to 2024, Building Our Sustainable Energy Future. This was a document that was done by a Cabinet-appointed committee, made up of Members of the Chamber, members representing different Ministries, members representing other sectorial professionals in the industry and they put forward a plan that is now before your Cabinet for approval and implementation.

You will also recall this plan, it was publicly presented to me, it is now before the Cabinet and we have gone as far as publicly announcing that we had put a Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Public Utilities, Mr. MP Adrian Leonce who will be primarily responsible for the execution of this plan once approved. But let me continue to give you some of the highlights of it. And I am fine, the budget outlines some of initiatives and therefore a budget—the Minister of Finance spoke for three hours—three and a half hours, he could not say everything.

We are also going to be working with the Bureau of Standards as part of the education programme to improve—to install a label programme, a label, so that you will know when you go to buy which appliances are energy efficient, which



ones are very energy efficient, which ones are less energy efficient. And of course, based on what we have been seeing in models used, there will be certain incentives to allow for you to make the right choices in your purchase.

So, Mr. Vice-President, this is not just a bright idea or a giveaway programme. It is a clear signal of the direction that the country needs to go in terms of energy efficiency and it is economic common sense. Mr. Vice-President, we also—and again, sometimes like again, you know, and I could understand during this budget debate we all get muffled with a number of side talk. But if you listen sometimes inside there, and again the people who account they do listen because in that budget document they spoke about—which went over the heads of a number of individuals in the opposition, we spoke about future industries, we talked about future. Well, the biggest future out there for us—and yes we have to deal with the end, but right now we are an energy society, we are an energy producing country, we have natural gas.

And therefore, we have to always stay on the cutting edge of what is coming for us to try to continue, whilst we are working on diversification, hopefully together we will get one right when we start. But in the meantime, natural gas and that process is where we have to hang our robes until we get there. So the budget spoke about Government will commence the exploration work with regard to the hydrogen economy. Now, when we talked about this hydrogen economy, I mean, again, just to let you know, a lot of Trinidad and Tobago, we are the largest exporter of methanol, urea, ammonia and therefore all of those things, we take natural gas, we take natural gas and the first part of taking the natural gas is to break it down into hydrogen. And then take the hydrogen and do that.

So you know in Trinidad and Tobago what happens in Point Lisas, right, we are probably one of the largest producers or use hydrogen more than anybody else.

And therefore that industry, that industry projected by bp President, is expected to grow to \$150 billion. You understand the size of that industry? It is supposed to be the size of the LNG market how it is today. So it is a big thing and therefore we, as we talk and we fight and we quarrel and we deal with balancing the budget, we are futuristic in our thinking. We were the one by the way who set up the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. We are the ones who did that. That allows for us to be where we are today. So as we think futuristic, that is where we have to put our mind and we are not—we are saying that we need to work with the private sector, we need to work with the necessary individuals and like other developing countries like Germany, Australia and Japan, we need to explore it and see where it could go.

There is a lot of conversation. When you are speaking about just—so now the conversation, the conversation, Senators, needs to come to not just producing renewable energy, renewable energy is one thing, under our circumstance, I hope I have shown you that we cannot just do that. We could do it yes, and yes there are some savings that you could get with the gas, but the math does not add up in this point in time, all right? If you do the arithmetic it does not add up, it will cost you. But, you know, there is something called blue hydrogen and there is something called green hydrogen. And do you know what is the beauty of hydrogen? You could store it. So think about it. So yes, we are interested in renewable energy, but we are also telegraphing that we are interested in this also. So we are talking about the growth of a new industry. And we are signaling our support for that industry and more work needs to be done in that regard.

**Sen. Vieira:** Sir, just a quick question. In your renewable energies will you be revising the T&TEC legislation to do away with the monopoly, so to pave the way for these other renewable forms of energy?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Mr. Vice-President—

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Mr. Vice-President, yes that is something but again, if you could—if you will as I mentioned, if you take where we are now, where T&TEC is losing that amount of money when they have excess demand. That is something that will have to come, it will come, it will come but at this point in time, when you say T&TEC, by the way, T&TEC is all of us, we all own 100 per cent of T&TEC.

The PPAs right now, I have 800 megawatts of electricity to sell. If I allow for everyone to bring on their own electricity, it means therefore, that T&TEC, all of us, right, need to pay more money because the loss associated with T&TEC is going to be greater. So it is better for us at this time to focus on energy efficiency, because energy efficiency gives you the benefit via the gas, that you will have less, that you could sell at an opportunity cost, without having to buy on the other side and move your 2,000 up to 2,001.

Energy efficiency is making the better use of what you have. So instead of 1,200, the gas to produce 1,200, we will now be selling gas for 1,000 instead and therefore, we will benefit there without having to pay for a PPA to get it. That being said, we understand our responsibility under the Paris Accord, and that is one commitment that we are continuing to look at. But as you go beyond with the Paris Accord, you will go to 2,200 and you are still down at 1,200. So now the country, all of us, from our little pool of money that we have, will now be paying for 1,200, right, and we are only using—and with energy efficiency in place, we could end up in a situation where you are paying for 1,200 and only using 1,000. So you have to work it on both sides.

So we also talked about, again, in the budget, we talked about Tobago, we talked about creating an environment, a zero carbon in Tobago using energy

efficiency and energy conservation to help sell and promote Tobago. We talked energy efficiency in water heating.

And we also talked about a national sustainable energy engagement education programme. It is within the context of encouraging a widespread public participation that we will launch, a national sustainable energy engagement and education programme. Public education and awareness are critical elements of the strategy to promote conservation behaviour and efficiency practices. Government will utilize public awareness ICT-based campaigns to continually supply the public with tips, recommendations and best practice as it relates to energy conservation and energy efficiency.

**11.00 a.m.**

Right as we speak, we are working on enhancing the T&TEC app so as to allow you to be able to measure your energy usage on a daily basis, and therefore you should be able to put targets for yourselves, and just like when you are on your prepaid phone, be able to get messages letting you know how you are going versus where you want to go and what do you need to do to be able to cut back. These are all within the plans and I agree, these plans, and for some—that is why I am spending the time to speak to you about it now because I recognize that a Minister of Finance will not be able to say all of these things.

So I want to assure you that unlike when this was introduced before and a lot of talk was made about this in 2010, you know, and if you go back in the 2010 budget, you will see some actual incentives that were actually put out. The difference between us, we do things, we get things done and—ole talk. Then, it was just old talk, it was not part of a plan. And over 2010 to now, there was nothing put in place for anyone to be able to access the incentives that were put there, and therefore, it resulted in it falling “vaps”, “voops”, nothing happened, “ah

nice talk”. This is about a plan as you will have probably heard now, and I am sure you understand, this is not a fly-by-night something, this is a real plan put together to save this country. I thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Saddam Hosein:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to rise and join this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2019. I would like to thank yourself and all of my colleagues in the Senate as this is my second anniversary of my maiden contribution in this august Chamber. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** You have done well. Better than the others. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** And, after listening to the contributions of the Government Members, they have lacked substance or any real plan to get this economy moving. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] It was just promises and “Coming soon to a Parliament near you”. [*Laughter*]

Because, how can we take advice from a Minister of Labour who went into hibernation after 63,000 persons lost their jobs [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] but found her voice to tell people to go to Canada and drive trucks and pick apples? How can we take advice from a Minister of Trade whose grand plan was to build a pool for \$8 million and sell tamarind balls and toolum on Caribbean Airlines? [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] How can we take advice from a Minister of Public Utilities who just spent 40 minutes in a budget contribution and not a second about water? [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] How can I take advice and this Parliament take advice from a Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, who, after four years, did not plant a single “peas tree” in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] And then, Mr. Vice-President, my friend, the Minister of Works and Transport, he opened a road that is a construction site, because, Mr. Vice-President, I am to understand the road, the Mosquito Creek road that was opened, in haste, does not even have a shoulder. It does not have a shoulder.

This, what we are dealing with right now after four years, is a population inflicted with cuts and bruises, but they sat with patience, because they knew that this will be the final and last budget presentation by this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] For the last four years, Trinidad and Tobago's economy was engineered by an engineer, but instead of constructing an economy, he caused it to collapse to death. This Rowley-led Government presided over four years of austerity, frugality, pain and suffering. For four years, they have imposed heavy taxes, major cuts on social programmes targeted at the poor and vulnerable, refused to open nearly completed schools, mass overcrowding at hospitals, shortage of medication and over 63,000 persons being left jobless. That is the legacy of this Government. After four years in office, they have spent over \$200 billion and people in this country are still suffering from no water, bad roads, high unemployment, unprecedented crime rate and a failing health care system. [*Desk thumping*]

But this budget was anticipated and predictable "electionomics" at play. Typical PNM style. Goodies are expected in the budget just before the local and general elections. After battering the people for four years, they believe that they can come now and throw crumbs at the population to gain support for their unpopular regime in an election year. The people of Trinidad and Tobago will not be fooled. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago deserves better. And I take this opportunity to commend the Leader of the Opposition, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, [*Desk thumping*] the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Senior Counsel, for delivering the alternative budget for Trinidad and Tobago. It was a brilliant speech that inspired the population that is calling out for good leadership. It shook this nation so much so that the election date fell out of the Prime Minister's pocket whilst she was contributing. [*Desk thumping*]

The Leader of the Opposition laid out the national economic transformation plan 2020 to 2025 with a wide-ranging suite of policy initiatives and programmes which is geared towards getting our people working again [*Desk thumping*] and getting Trinidad and Tobago working again towards a better future. Economic transformation and diversification is at the heart of the economic master plan with special focus on agriculture, the creative industries, tourism, infrastructure, renewable and non-renewable energy, the digital economy, recycling, [*Desk thumping*] biotechnology, foreign policy, jobs and skills. We created 55,000 jobs in five years and we will do it again, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*] For 47 years and 133 days, the PNM has governed Trinidad and Tobago and they could not deliver what we did in five years. [*Desk thumping*] And you know, they will campaign, Mr. Vice-President, but the first thing anybody notices, when the PNM comes knocking at their door, is the audacity; the audacity to ask this population for their vote. [*Desk thumping*] Because you know why, Mr. Vice-President? The PNM talks while the UNC works. [*Desk thumping*]

And this Government continues to move backwards because when the Minister of Finance presented the 2020 Budget, it was like “ah blast from de past” because if you rewind to 2007, which was an election year, 12 years ago when Mr. Manning delivered the 2008 Budget, you know what Mr. Manning did? You know what he did? He increased minimum wage, he increased CEPEP by 15 per cent, he increased URP wages by 15 per cent. So fast forward to 2019, the Minister of Finance plagiarized Mr. Manning’s 2008 budget by doing the exact same thing. Exact same thing. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] And you know what? This is due to the incompetence of this Rowley-led Government that they cut, copy and paste “ah Manning budget”. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] They have now admitted and it is clear that this Government is intellectually bankrupt. [*Desk*

*thumping*] They are a millstone around the neck of a developing country. [*Desk thumping*]

They told the country if they remove the fuel subsidy, there will be more money for schools and hospitals, yet today, students have no textbooks, schools are overgrown with bush and hospitals remain unfinished and closed.

**Sen. Obika:** And Deyalsingh “buff” them yesterday.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** They have increased the cost of fuel not one, not two, but three times in the last four years and then throw \$2.50 to the population. It is hypocritical to throw \$2.50 to the population when the family members of one Member of this Government receives \$51,000 per day in Government rentals. They spent \$3 million on paintings rather than \$1 million to open primary schools for children who are housed under tents in this country. It is cruel to spend over \$150,000 of public money to settle sexual harassment suits [*Desk thumping*] but cannot buy a tablet to save someone from a heart attack that costs 5 cents. It is shameless upon this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

And you know what, Mr. Vice-President, what shocked me? It is because at page 1 of the budget speech of the Minister of Finance, page 1, you know, the first page, the Minister of Finance, he indicated that corruption is no longer a feature of public transactions. That is what the Minister of Finance said. I want to say that corruption is a characteristic of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM cannot divorce itself from corruption as they remain in an adamant love affair. Corruption is the foundation that keeps the walls of Balisier House upright. [*Desk thumping*] It runs through the veins of the PNM.

And historically, Mr. Vice-President, because this is a very important point I am going to raise now, is that the PNM has used state resources as a means to further its party’s objective and fulfil its political agenda.



**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** What? No, no, no, no.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** I have the evidence. [*Crosstalk*] I have the evidence. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] In this case—

**Mr. Vice-President:** Please, you are speaking through me, and Members, there is no need to shout at the Member speaking. Continue, Sen. Hosein.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Thank you. Thank you for your protection, Mr. Vice-President. I need your protection. I speak specifically to the misallocation of financial resources of the taxpayers to undermine the democratic process in marginal constituencies. The instrument of work that is being used is the URP. You would have observed increases in the wages of URP workers which is to take effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, 2019, one day before the local government election and while we must protect those who are vulnerable in society, the Government should not take advantage of those workers because of their situation. Mr. Vice-President, I have received an interesting bundle of documents in my mailbox which implicates a high number of high-ranking Government officials involved in a scheme to use the Treasury as the purse of the PNM.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, thank you. So, I am listening to the line that you are going down in relation to your contribution and I am just cautioning you at this point in relation to the Standing Order that speaks to imputation of improper motives, so just be careful along the lines that you are going down.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** I promise not to call anybody's name from this House or the other place. I promise, I would not call names. I can go outside and call the names. I am informed that the hierarchy of the URP from high up in the programme management level, instructions were given to a constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo that persons who belong to the 18 PNM party groups should be rostered to work with a gang of eight persons. So in one marginal constituency,

144 persons will be hired belonging to PNM party groups, spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars for your selfish political purpose. This is a scheme that is going to be used to influence voters in the elections and to set up the PNM's election-day machinery through the URP.

Mr. Vice-President, I have several pieces of documents in my possession and if you permit me, I will read those documents because Sen. Cummings will know about them. There is a memorandum—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Mark. And this is exactly why I ruled just a few moments ago to be extremely careful. So as much as you are broad-brushing in that light, when you call a Member's name in this Chamber, anyone listening begins to infer and that is where the imputation comes out.

**Sen. Cummings:** He has to withdraw that.

**Mr. Vice-President:** So just be very, very careful.

**Sen. Cummings:** "I doh work URP."

**Sen. S. Hosein:** I am guided. I am guided, Mr. Vice-President. I am guided. So the memorandum states:

2) Regional Co-ordinator URP, La Horquetta/Talparo from Chairman.  
 Party Group Number 14, San Rafael, date, June 25, 2018.  
 Subject: Names for Employment.

Please note that the undermentioned persons attended registration sessions but are yet to receive their debit cards.

I will not call the names of the persons on the list.

This was submitted for your attention.

Signed by Helen Wharton,

Chairman, Party Group Number 14.

Mr. Vice-President, Party Group Number Seven, signed off by Lynette Joseph-

Sandyford with a list of 16 names and I am informed that Mrs. Sandyford works at the Office of the Member of Parliament for La Horquetta/Talparo. Mr. Vice-President, I also have other documents in my possession.

Party Group 4; Heading: La Horquetta/Talparo—

**Sen. Cummings:** Mr. Vice-President, I wish to invoke Standing Order 46(6). The Member is imputing improper motives. He made an allegation and in the same breath, called my name. I wish the Member to withdraw that statement categorically. 46(6), please, Mr. Vice-President.

**Mr. Vice-President:** So, again, this is why I am very specific in my ruling when certain commentary is being made. Sen. Hosein, in relation to the comments that you are making now—I have already ruled, Sen. Cummings, in relation to that comment that was made where your name would have been called and any inferences that could have been made. I am making it very specific for the *Hansard* and for those listening and continuing in this debate that nobody's name is to be called in this Chamber when making those types of comments. Continue, Sen. Hosein.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** I am guided, Mr. Vice-President, and I will tailor what I am saying.

La Horquetta/Talparo, Party Group Number 4, Job Location: Light Pole, 30 to 35 Daniel Scott Street, Mundo Nuevo, Chairman—  
 —of that constituency, it is signed by.

La Horquetta/Talparo, 5 to 10 Phipps Trace, Talparo, Party Group Number 4—

Signed again by the Chairman of that Party Group Number 4.

Light Pole 37 to 41 Daniel Scott Trace, Talparo—

Again, Party Group Number 4, signed by the Chairman of that party group.

Light Pole 74 to 77, Maximillian Trace, Tamana—

Signed by the Chairman of that Party Group Number 4. That is one party group, again.

Party Group Number 5, Light Pole 8 to 17 Fletchers Road, Todds Road—

Signed by the Chairman of the party group. Party Group Number 5, again, signed by the Chairman of the Party Group there. And, Mr. Vice-President, there is more:

Party Group Number 8, Light Pole 119 to 12 Manodath Road, Las Lomas No. 2—

Signed again by the Chairman of PNM Party Group Number 8. Mr. Vice-President:

Party Group Number 10, Light Pole 50 to 55 McLovely Trace, Four Roads, Tamana—

Signed by the Chairman of Party Group Number 10.

Martin Salazar Trace, Four Roads, Tamana—

Signed, again, by the Chairman of Party Group Number 6, and the list goes on. I have all the evidence in my hand and this matter ought to be investigated. [*Desk thumping*] There must be a forensic criminal investigation launched into the operations of the URP for using public resources for party purposes. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, when you think that is enough, there are ghosts on that list. Persons who are dead, their names are there. Persons who have migrated are collecting salaries under the URP payroll. That is what this PNM Government is doing with public resources. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] And this is not the first time this allegation is being made because in the *Guardian* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, 2018, the Programme Manager of URP was accused of threatening

workers to vote for him in the internal elections of the PNM. Mr. Vice-President, it is in the public domain. This URP needs to have a forensic criminal investigation launched. It must be immediately investigated. The workers of URP should be protected from political abuse by this Rowley-led Government. [*Desk thumping*] They should be protected because if corruption is not a feature of public transactions, why is the URP operating in this manner? It is corruption to the high heavens. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] Corruption. It is corruption. [*Crosstalk*] It is corruption.

And while they continue to haemorrhage this country's Treasury through corruption, I want to share a real life experience I have had. A real life experience because I went to a copy shop in Cunupia recently and it was in the afternoon around the time when primary school was dismissed and to my amazement, about 10 children came around and they came with their parents and the question that came next hurt my heart because the little child had her copy book in her hand and she asked the lady who is copying, "Ma'am, can you help me do my research"? It was about 10 pictures that the child had to get for the other day for a project with some plants and animals and things like that. Mr. Vice-President, it hurt my heart to know that poor people in this country have to go and pay to use a computer, to pay to have persons help them to do their projects, to pay to print, when under a Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led Government, we were giving out laptops to thousands of students in this country [*Desk thumping*] so that they would not have to be in that situation. Mr. Vice-President, we were equipping the primary schools with computer laboratories so that the children can remain in the school and do their work.

It is shameless for this Government to spend millions of dollars in rentals to their own, when children of this country are suffering because they do not have

computers to use. [*Desk thumping*] They do not have computers. The children of this country want computers and not light bulbs. We gave them laptops that you all took away. We gave box lunches while they cut it. We introduced free transport while the PNM took it away. We opened the GATE while you all shut it down. [*Desk thumping*] We gave jobs while you gave severance. We gave bright ideas while you give light bulbs. [*Desk thumping*] And, Mr. Vice-President, after that budget that the Minister of Finance read, LED can only mean one thing: Losing Elections Definitely. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President, I move to national security. The current state of our economy and joblessness contributes to crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. Just a few days ago, a video was circulating in social media where a woman was caught stealing food items from a supermarket. She stole meat and Crix. While I am in no way condoning the acts of stealing, it shows when desperation kicks in, what happens, as there were reports where the woman indicated that she had no money to buy food to feed her children. I was extremely hurt to learn of her condition and the manner in which she was treated but she is just one example of what the reality is out there. So when this Government talks about “Stability, Strength and Growth”, wake up and smell the coffee. [*Desk thumping*]

We intend, Mr. Vice-President, to create 55,000 jobs because we know we can do it to assist in reducing the scourge of crime specifically with respect to national security. The Minister of Finance had the arrogance to tell this country that this Government through the measures that they have implemented, have ensured that our citizens lead normal lives. Does the Minister even live here, Mr. Vice-President? Because it clearly shows that he lives in his own protected bubble. They claim that our citizens are leading normal lives after they spent over

\$6 billion per annum and the murder rate crossed 2,023. The Prime Minister has forgotten his words from his time in Opposition that a government that cannot deal with the crime problem does not deserve to be in Government.

The year 2019 began with 22 murders in the first 17 days. One of those persons who lost his life in this killing spree was Akash Dookie, age 20. He was at a birthday party when gunmen opened fire shooting Dookie and another man. Akash Dookie was a young aspiring medical doctor. I can assure the Minister that his family is not leading a normal life. On the morning of Tuesday 16 July, 2019, our country awoke to the shocking headline of eight people dead including local theatre icon Raymond Choo Kong, being murdered between Sunday night and Monday afternoon in a bloody frenzy that pushed the murder toll from 272 to 280. Is this the Government's definition of people leading normal lives? It is clear that this Government cannot deal with the crime situation. Imagine they cannot get CCTV cameras working but passing legislation to admit those evidence into the court.

What would a UNC Government do differently? A Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led Government was able to bring serious crime down to the lowest level in 30 years [*Desk thumping*] by spending less and achieving more. It was done not only by the passage of legislation and the voting resources to fight against the criminal element, but it was done by putting a team of people who were competent and placed the safety and security of our people as their number one priority. [*Desk thumping*]

In our economic master plan, several initiatives were outlined such as filling vacancies at the DPP's office; establishment of a national operations centre as originally designed instead of the watered-down version that exists now; quarterly releases of funds to the police service, rehabilitation and proper training for police

officers in forensics, and these are just a few of the plans that we have to get Trinidad and Tobago working again and making the people safe. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, in our economic transformation masterplan, we outlined 12 prosperity engines that will mobilize and engage the private sector, both local and international and they are: number one, the Brechin Castle Agro-processing Complex, the Organic Sugar and Sucrose Derivative Manufacturing Facility, East-West Biotechnology Manufacturing Corridor, Sevilla Digital Innovation Park, Tamana Solar Renewable Energy Park, West Port of Spain “Trini Creative Arts Street”. [*Crosstalk*] “Ah getting to Tamana just now.” East Port of Spain Steelpan Manufacturing Facility, Piarco Aircraft Maintenance, Repair and Operations Hub, Cedros/Moruga south-west peninsula Economic Zone, Point Galeota Energy Logistics Hub, Plymouth International Cruise Ship/Marina Complex, Tobago’s first locally branded hotel. These are the plans of a United National Congress Government. [*Desk thumping*] These are our plans. Our plans are not to give out lightbulbs and throw \$2.50 and insult the population. Those are not our plans. Our plans do not involve discriminating against persons who are not PNM with respect to employment because we have governed this country fairly and squarely, Mr. Vice-President, upholding the fundamental rights and privileges under the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Mr. Vice-President, I want to get to an issue, an issue that has disturbed the population. That issue has to deal with eTeck because eTeck was one of those flagship projects that was mad with controversy. In June 2005, eTeck made a \$35 million investment in Bamboo Networks Limited under a board of directors chaired by Mr. Ken Julien. Up until today, nobody knows where that \$35 million has gone. We did not even get “ah pen”, we did not even get “ah sweetie” for that investment. We did not even get “ah toolum or ah tamarind ball”. Under a



UNC Government, in June 2011, legal proceedings were commenced against Ken Julien and the board to recover the \$35 million investment. I have in my possession the legal opinion of Vincent Nelson Queen's Counsel before the initiation of the court action where he stated that there is evidence that the Ken Julien board acted without due diligence, that moneys were invested without any proper investigation into Bamboo Networks. It was negligence on the part of the Ken Julien board, Mr. Vice-President, hence an action was being brought against them to recover \$35 million to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

But as soon as that action was filed, that board went to court to strike out the matter on a technicality stating that four years had expired and that the claim was statute bad and you cannot sue them in an action in negligence. Well, the High Court ruled, the Court of Appeal ruled, the Privy Council ruled and threw out their argument on this technicality and told them to get back to Trinidad and face the court, face the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**11.30 a.m.**

And while we think, Mr. Vice-President, that this Ken Julien board was coming here to account for that missing \$35 million dollars, it came like a "tief in de night" when this Government took the decision to withdraw that \$35 million claim against the Ken Julien board. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, with a fall in revenue, that money would have been useful to provide for goods and services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to ask, Mr. Vice-President, why was this matter withdrawn on the eve of the trial after all of the witness statements in that matter had been filed? Questions are now being asked. Why did this Government drop the matter against Ken Julien to recover the \$35 million? Why did you withdraw a matter where Trinidad and Tobago was winning at every stage of the court; High Court, Court of

Appeal, Privy Council and withdraw the matter? [*Desk thumping*] This is another Malcolm Jones scenario where the Government withdraws the case before the court makes a decision.

The Minister of Trade and Industry spoke in the Senate and in the other place and not a mention of this was made; not a mention. [*Desk thumping*] Why is this Government favouring people who have claims hanging over their head? Why was Ken Julien, after a \$35 million claim hanging over his head, appointed on the Cabinet energy sub-committee? Why was he appointed as the UTT Chairman? Why was he appointed as the Chairman on Alutech, Mr. Vice-President? Why it is that the Prime Minister invited Mr. Ken Julien to travel with him to Africa, as reported on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 2018, in the *Newsday* Mr. Vice-President? Why? Mr. Vice-President, do you who represented Mr. Ken Julien when he was at the High Court? Then Mr. Stuart Young who is now the Minister of National Security and the Prime Minister's personal attorney, Mr. Michael Quamina, Mr. Vice-President. These are the persons who were representing the board.

Mr. Vice-President, do you know when we won at every stage of the court proceedings, that costs were awarded to the people of Trinidad and Tobago? When this matter is withdrawn now, where has all that cost gone? Is it that the Ken Julien board will not be paying the people of Trinidad and Tobago the legal cost that was given to them by the courts of Trinidad and Tobago and the Privy Council? These are pertinent questions we need to ask. Why are you all withdrawing claims against your friends, your families and your financiers? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, the time has come that this PNM Government must be held accountable for the decision. The time is short but they will be judged at the polls, Mr. Vice-President. They must produce every shred of paper and explain to

this country why this decision was taken to withdraw a \$35 million claim. Why? Why, Mr. Vice-President? Why?

Mr. Vice-President, that \$35 million could have been used to build roads, build schools, to buy medication, to increase the wages of teachers and other public servants, but they withdraw the claim against Ken Julien and raised their pensions because they know they will be demitting office very shortly. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has already indicated that she will be demitting office very shortly, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, the country is now poorer because of the decisions taken by the Government. Had this Government allowed this matter to proceed, it would have given the people of Trinidad and Tobago their day in court and an opportunity to recover \$35 million.

And it is shameless, shameless, that I opened the *Express* newspaper yesterday to hear Mr. Ken Julien announcing to this country that that case was a nuisance. Mr. Vice-President, he is a nuisance to this country because \$35 million, you have failed to account for because the Government has protected you. [*Desk thumping*] You have made Trinidad and Tobago \$35 million poorer Mr. Ken Julien.

And then I heard this Government talked about solar water heaters. Mr. Vice-President, do you know what you need for solar water to work?

**Sen. Cummings:** Have respect for your seniors.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Water. Water. Water, Mr. Vice-President. Have respect for my seniors, Mr. Vice-President? Mr. Vice-President, let me address that point.

**Sen. Cummings:** Have respect for senior citizens.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** I am glad “you is ah senior citizen”, but because you are old does not mean that you should not face the court. [*Desk thumping*] Because it was the

taxpayers' moneys that were involved in those deals. It was the taxpayers' money that was involved to those deals.

Mr. Vice-President, this Government continues to talk about the UNC spending and overspending. I did my research, Mr. Vice-President. I did my research. "Dey talked about we withdraw NGC dividends." The Minister of Public Utilities loves to talk about that; \$16 billion, correct. No, no, no, no, no. Sorry, sorry, sorry. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] I can give you the figure; 12.3 billion. No, no, no, no; 12.3 billion.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, Senator, Senator. Okay, so obviously the noise in the Chamber is getting so loud that Sen. Hosein has to actually raise his voice to try and get over it. As much as there may be some quips and barbs going across the floor, and there will be that sort of passion by way of response, we still have to maintain a certain level in the Chamber that allows me to hear the proceedings. Continue Sen. Hosein.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*] They like to talk about NGC dividends. Well, from 2010 to 2015, \$ 14.8 billion, for the record, was withdrawn. Mr. Vice-President, it is shameless for them to laugh today. Because you know why, Mr. Vice-President? In the corresponding four years, the four years that the PNM has ruled Trinidad and Tobago from 2015 to 2019, they withdrew \$7.628 billion from NGC; 7.628.

When you compare that to the corresponding period for the People's Partnership, we withdrew 6.3 billion, one billion less than this PNM Government; one billion less. And Mr. Vice-President, when moneys were being withdrawn through dividends from the NGC, at that time from 2010 to 2015, NGC was making super profits, super profits. At this time, from 2015 to 2019, NGC is not making the kind of profits that they are making before, but yet this Government is

scraping out the dividends from NGC.

**Sen. Cummings:** Shameless.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Yes, it is shameless. I agree with you; it is shameless. It is shameless Sen. Cummings. It is shameless. [*Crosstalk*] And then they come, Mr. Vice-President, to talk about borrowing.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Okay. So again, I am rising to my feet to indicate that there is a Member speaking, and then there are other Members for the Member on his side, as well as the opposite side, shouting across at each other. That cannot happen.

**Sen. Ameen:** “Put dem out.”

**Mr. Vice-President:** Continue, Sen. Hosein.

**Sen. Mark:** I agree with that too; “put dem out.”

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Mr. Vice-President, they have taken public debt up to the highest level ever. The overdraft ceiling, Mr. Vice-President, they come and they increase the overdraft ceiling so they can get more money out of the Central Bank, Mr. Vice-President. And you know what? The people of Trinidad and Tobago are not benefitting from those decisions.

But I want to go through some figures here, Mr. Vice-President—

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

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Thank you very much—with respect to flooding, because flooding is an issue in Trinidad and Tobago and I thought those yellow books had to be inaccurate, because Mr. Vice-President, when I look at the estimates of expenditure for major river clearing programmes, let me start with 2016. \$11 million was estimated. Do you know how much they spent? Three million. In 2017, 8 million was estimated. Do you how much they spent? \$146,000. In 2018, the estimate was 9 million. Do you know how much they spent? Six million. In

2019, the estimate was 10 million. Do you know how much they spent? Seven million.

Infrastructure rehabilitation and flood mitigation programme. In 2017 you estimated 9 million, you spent none. In 2018, you estimated 9 million, you spent none. In 2019, you estimated 8 million and you spent \$486,000. And then we have to sit down here and wonder what is contributing to flooding in this country. It is because this Government is not allocating the resources to the regional corporations and to the various bodies—[*Desk thumping*—in order, Mr. Vice-President, for them to do their exercise to clear the waterways, Mr. Vice-President, so that there could be no flooding. Because every time, there is a flood, people in this country have to suffer, Mr. Vice-President. They lose everything that they have in their homes, and yet I have information from my colleagues in the other place, that persons in their constituencies are yet to receive the flooding grant from the last flood. I call on this Government to pay the people their money, Mr. Vice President. Pay them their money. [*Desk thumping*]

And this is what is happening in the Ministry of Works and Transport, Mr. Vice-President. This is what is happening. We left them with so many plans, Mr. Vice-President; plans in the Caroni River basin that, over a period of 10 years, if you do the infrastructural work you would not get any kind of flooding, because flooding, Mr. Vice-President, it is not just simply clearing rivers and drains.

We must be cognizant of climate change and we must prepare ourselves for climate change, Mr. Vice-President, and that is why the Government must do more in order to alleviate flooding instead of clearing rivers and drains only. They need to build their retention dams, Mr. Vice-President. They need to build proper infrastructure to store water at times in which there is excess water, Mr. Vice-President. Because it would be very sad that something like what happened

in Greenvale happens again to any part of Trinidad and Tobago.

But this Government is only a bunch of talk, Mr. Vice-President, because the UNC works, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*] It is a time, the country has come to a point where a decision has to be made. Let them, Mr. Vice-President, judge us on our performance, Mr. Vice-President, with what we were able to deliver. Because you can drive from Port of Spain to Cedros to Mayaro to all over every single part of Trinidad and Tobago and you would have seen development like never before, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

When you go to Tobago, Mr. Vice-President, while material in the Scarborough Hospital was walking out of the compound, we completed the Scarborough Hospital for the people of Tobago, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*] We never suffered the people of Tobago, Mr. Vice-President. We had a properly working sea bridge, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*] It is hypocritical of this Government to come to boast that they fixed the sea bridge when they are the same people who destroyed it, “yuh know. Dem mash it up yuh know and then coming to boast that we fix dis ting.” It is shameless, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, while my time is almost expired, I would like to say that come next year's budget, this UNC Bench will be sitting on that side of the House, Mr. Vice-President, [*Desk thumping*] and the people will vote for a government that performs, a government that works and not a government that talks. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. Avinash Singh):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr.

Vice-President, for the opportunity to contribute on this Bill:

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

Mr. Vice-President, before I go into my contribution, I want to spend some time in correcting the records and putting on *Hansard* the facts in relation what is going on in this country at this point in time. While my friend from the Opposition Sen. Hosein came here today with two copy book pages that he brandished that he photocopied—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Ameen:** "Is ah whole file."

**Sen. A. Singh:** I was silent when you all were talking.

**Sen. Ameen:** "Doh put yuh head on ah block fuh dem, yuh know."

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Ameen, Sen. Ameen, Sen. Ameen, I am on my feet.

**Sen. Ameen:** Or, sorry. I was distracted, sorry.

**Mr. Vice-President:** So, the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry has just started his contribution, and he is absolutely right in his comments in that he did maintain silence when the Member on my left was contributing. Could you please afford him the same courtesy? Continue.

**Sen. A. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. As I was saying, while the Member came here and brandished and called poor person's name in this august Chamber, that he photocopied in the parlour in Cunupia, I want to place on record, and I want to read from an official report of the Central Audit Committee. So this is not no photocopy or any documents I received in my mailbox or things like that, Mr. Vice-President, but it is the Central Audit Committee's final report on this whole programme about LifeSport. And I want Trinidad and Tobago, I want Trinidad and Tobago, [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*] the listening and viewing population to take note. And this, Mr. Vice-President, is the reason why we are



here and the Opposition will stay right there for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Vice-President, let me go on to read this report. I had no intention of going. I really come here to talk about agriculture, but I need to correct the record. So, Mr. Vice-President, the Central Audit Committee lists their findings, and let me put on record the facts. This record, Mr. Vice-President, on the first bullet point 1.1 of the Central Audit Committee, and I will happily make this report available to every Member of the Senate and the population if need be.

- “i) There were widespread breaches of proper procurement practices;
- ii) The approval given by Cabinet was not strictly adhered to;
- iii) Persons at the coordinating level may have been involved in criminal activity;” [*Desk thumping*]

“...There were several instances of fraudulent activity by suppliers to the programme;

...There were many widespread theft of equipment from the programme;

...There may have been breaches of the Proceeds of Crime Act;

...Exorbitant and questionable payments were made in several instances;

...There were poor control and monitoring of the Programme...”

And let me go on to some of the actual details, Mr. Vice-President. You all remember the jingle in the piggy bank? That happened under Kamla Persad-Bissessar, \$34 million to eBeam, jingle in a piggy bank. Let us go on.

“Payment process”

And this is not Avinash Singh talking, Mr. Vice-President.

**Sen. Ameen:** No, that is Clarence Rambharat.

**Sen. A. Singh:** This is the Central Audit Committee of the Ministry of Finance.

“Payments process

Initial payments were paid in cash to participants. This meant that there

could be no or little verification or control over the payments.

Centres

The Ministry of Sport increased the number of”—LifeSport—“Centres without Cabinet approval “

And Mr. Vice-President, several of these centres could not be located up to today.

“...Coordinators seem to have had criminal records which made them unsuitable as role models for participants.”

That happened under Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

“The officers have alleged that in few such instances in the East/West Corridor...” [*Interruption*]

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Here look this document, look this document.

**Sen. A. Singh:** “...are currently under police surveillance for illegal...”

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, Senator, Senator, Senator, please.

**Sen. Le Hunte:** Nooooo. “Yuh getting hot”. I understand.

**Sen. Rambharat:** You should copy that.

**Mr. Vice-President:** So, again, again—

**Sen. Ameen:** "De police get dat."

**Mr. Vice-President:** I am on my feet. In the course of any debate there is going to be quips and barbs thrown. That is the nature of a debate. Hypocrisy does not look good on anyone. If you are throwing, you must be able to take.

**Sen. Obika:** “What you really trying tuh say?”

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Obika.

**Sen. Obika:** “What you really trying tuh say?”

**Sen. Ameen:** What?

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Obika, please leave this Chamber. Leave this Chamber now.

**Sen. Ameen:** No, you accusing people—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Leave this Chamber now. Sen. Obika, exit the Chamber—  
 [*Continuous crosstalk*]—and do not return until I allow you to return.

**Sen. Obika:** You are out of place.

**Hon. Senator:** Leave the Chamber.

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** Suspension.

**Sen. Obika:** You are out of place. That is unbecoming of a presiding officer.  
 [*Crosstalk*] You crazy or what? Hypocrisy. What nonsense is that? [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Members, I am on my feet! There will be silence in this Chamber. I will not tolerate this behaviour, period. We have been going quite fine in day one and day two. This is the final day of the budget debate 2020 in Trinidad and Tobago. I will repeat myself. Members will make contributions, there will be passion and emotion when they are doing so, from both sides. This is why we maintain silence when a Member is making his contribution, so that this level of decorum does not drop.

Going forward, as the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries makes his contribution, no one is to interrupt him. Continue.

**Sen. A. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I know the truth offends and the facts will be placed on the record for the population to see. Let me go on, as I was on the point of this Central Audit Committee. And this is not me speaking. This is the audit committee telling the last administration what was taking place under their watch.

In coaches, Mr. Vice-President, the number of coaches being paid in the register was actually higher than the persons actually attending the programme,

which suggests a real possibility of fraud, Mr. Vice-President.

In terms of the catering services, a number of irregularities were observed involving the caterers. People were overbilling. More food was being provided, and so on.

“Janitorial services

Payment of janitorial services appeared exorbitant, questionable and fraudulent in many cases.”

Mr. Vice-President, examination of the item claim for work performed by some of these janitors appear to be inflated and duplicated.

Mr. Vice-President, I go on and on this whole issue of LifeSport. But let me also indicate to this population the response by the Prime Minister in 2014, when this matter came to her attention and her summary of this whole incident, after it was made public, the review has revealed a number of discrepancies which include, and this is the words of the Hon. Prime Minister then, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar:

“...Procurement breaches”

This is her words, not mine.

“...A deviation from the mandate of Cabinet;

...The involvement of some persons of criminal activities;

...Fraud by suppliers;

...Theft of equipment;

...Breaches of the Proceeds of Crime Act; and

...Poor control and monitoring by officers of the Ministry.”

Mr. Vice-President, this happened under the watch of the United National Congress, and this led to the population dipping their finger in that electoral ink and removing them from office once and for all and they will stay right there.

[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, the Opposition also came where with their mantra their praise and their line, in terms of the PNM talks and the UNC delivers or the UNC works. Let me tell you what the UNC work; their mantra. Let me tell you what the UNC work on. And that is why they are there, because any right-thinking citizen will know, if you claim to be so good and you have done so much in deliveries, why did the population reject you outright? Why?

Mr. Vice-President, the UNC was working on hiring a clerk to the head of the SIA. They were bulldozing acres of crops in the Easter weekend of 2011. We remember that, Mr. Vice-President? In Egypt Trace, D'Abadie, over a hundred acres of crops bulldozed. In fact, one of their members were brandishing the name. He was happy to be called the bulldozer Minister. Not a single inch of agricultural land was bulldozed under this Dr. Keith Rowley administration, none.

They were working, Mr. Vice President, with NP to award a \$40 million contract to a personal friend, the owner, the tenant of which was the former Prime Minister, to award a \$40 million contract. They were working to arrest hundreds of innocent persons under the failed SOE. We all remember, they were cooking up section 34. They were paying \$6.8 million to recover a seven-year-old fire truck. You all remember that? Six point eight million dollars to recover a seven-year-old fire truck. And you know what the notes in the Cabinet was, Mr. Vice-President, from the Chief Fire Officer to the Cabinet? The whole argument was whether the truck fall from 15 metres versus 150 metres. Mr. Vice-President, that is the argument and the justification of wanting to pay \$6.8 million to recover a truck. Mr. Vice-President, you remember the \$400 million consultancy for the Couva Hospital; close to 40 per cent of the cost of the construction of the hospital?

Mr. Vice-President, cooking up a \$36 million contract to the same company

that I will come to in a short while, to supply buses to PTSC, who never even bring in a foreign used car, Mr. Vice-President? The UNC was working on cooking up a \$60 million contract to clean a few drains for the same company that the Prime Minister then was a tenant to in the house. You all remember the name of that company?

**Hon. Senator:** Gopaul.

**Sen. A. Singh:** Mr. Vice-President, I am coming to that. The UNC was working on paying for a bulldozer for National Quarries. You all remember that? They paid for two bulldozers for National Quarries. "One end up by the same Gopaul", used by him in his arrangement in his quarry.

Mr. Vice-President, the UNC was hard at work cooking up the Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant, over \$1 billion. And that is why we come here today, Mr. Vice-President, we come here today and we want to blame the Minister of Public Utilities for all sorts of things. But this is what he met, Mr. Vice-President.

You all remember when we bought the Apsara and Tamnak Thai Restaurants for \$37 million when it was only worth \$17 million? That is what the UNC was busy doing. They were working. They were hard at work paying \$36 million for the jingle and the \$34 million for eBeam.

They were paying—not to forget, Mr. Vice-President, in central, where I come from, you remember they paid \$175 million for a piece of land that was valued at \$52 million? My question: Where did the balance of that money go? The right-thinking citizens of this country need to know: Whose pocket did it go into? All of these things, Mr. Vice-President, where a contract was entered into— In fact, that is the only thing anybody in this country should remember the UNC for. They love the word "contract". They love the word "contract" because in every single contract that the UNC was involved in had some discrepancy, had

some arrangement of inflated cost that went somewhere. Mr. Vice-President, why did Stacy Roopnarine lose her job? You all remember that? It was because of a contract. Mr. Vice-President, legal fees at the AG's office, \$400 million, contracted to attorneys.

Mr. Vice-President, you know, in the last Administration my senatorial colleague Foster Cummings indicated that the UNC made some millionaire contractors, but he is incorrect. They made some billionaire contractors. Let me call out one such, Mr. Vice-President, and this is the heart of it all why the Opposition will remain in Opposition under their current organization. And that is why they are falling apart. Not even the UNC members, some of them may have some right-thinking sense in their head, want to stay in the UNC. They all coming across to the PNM, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

You all remember, Mr. Vice-President, a company and the quote here is: From Bankruptcy to Billions. I remember a pastor had a programme called from Rags to Riches. But this is a company from bankruptcy to billions, Mr. Vice-President. SIS, you all remember SIS? We begged him to come back; come back to this country that you once claimed that you love. Come back to the country that made you a billionaire. Come back and give back to the society, Mr. Vice-President; \$1.2 billion wastewater treatment plant; \$1.6 million for 59 hydrological stations for WASA; \$15 million for the design/supply/installation for the primary school in Febeau; \$1.5 million for New Grant Primary School; \$24 million for Kanhai Presbyterian School; \$12 million design/plan/service for a community centre; \$1.7 million for work in Malick Secondary; \$3.5 million for wastewater services at Sangre Grande Hospital; \$202 million for work in the Motor Vehicle Authority; \$100,000 to the subsidiary. Mr. Vice-President, this thing could go on; \$6.8 million for Lange Park wastewater; \$130 million to a

subsidiary for Penal Recreation Ground. Mr. Vice-President, and they want to talk about if we living in a real country, when one man, a company, claim to be bankrupt to benefit from taxpayers money? This is where it went, Mr. Vice-President; \$8.4 million in Arima wastewater; \$25 million from NGC for landscaping work in Couva/Preysal; \$9.5 million for contract in Phoenix Project Management Design, Lower Cumuto recreation; \$3.2 million from NGC, Gasparillo park recreation; \$5 million for NGC corporate campus; \$5 million from Nipdec under Midway Construction; \$2 million from Nipdec under the Los Bajos Beach Facility.

Mr. Vice-President, \$2 billion in work to SIS, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar. And not only that, you have seen recently certain court matters with their former acclaimed financier, the man who I fought in Chaguanas West, going to court on a matter on allegations of funding and campaign finance and all of that.

You all remember that matter, and this issue I am bringing here to the forefront has serious implications in terms of where the UNC got their funding from and that is why they were able to mount Cambridge Analytica on us. But at the end of the day like this festival of lights, light always overcome darkness, good always overcome evil and that is why the people voted them out, although they had the whole Cambridge Analytica.

### **12.00 noon**

Mr. Vice-President, let me turn to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries now. Mr. Vice-President, we at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries we have been granted in this Bill which apparently none of the Opposition Members took the time to even read or even speak to—Head 77 received \$758,916,840 and this is the expenditure. My colleague, Sen. Rambharat,



would have taken some time to indicate that in this Ministry, we have streamlined our operations and we have put the people and the workers first, and that is why we completed and commissioned our new head office building in Chaguanas, we have relocated the head office to Chaguanas. The Praedial Larceny Squad was also relocated from St. Joseph and Beetham Gardens to El Carmen, closer to the farmers. We have constructed and in some cases upgraded buildings in Brechin Castle in Couva; in Mon Jaloux; in Cunupia and other parts of this country to further decentralize its services.

Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Member, Sen. Richards, would have taken some time to elaborate on ICT, the world is moving in that direction. I am happy to report under the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Sen. Clarence Rambharat, we in the Ministry have been able to digitize 80,000 land files. Mr. Vice-President, and that is a significant accomplishment in managing land tenure in this country. Because as a farmer, I will tell you, anything in relation to agriculture cannot happen without land, and this Government understands the significance of land, land tenure, and all the issues surrounding land in relation to the farming population, our major clients and all those who require land.

Mr. Vice-President, a land file—80,000 files digitized, what does that mean to the average citizen? Mr. Vice-President, there are hundreds if not thousands of persons, families in this county that depend on a simple piece of paper to tell them that they have a valid lease, they can go to their financial institution, they can get funding for their agricultural production, and they can prosper as a farmer or an entrepreneur in this country. The UNC did not see it fit to deal with that, but they come here to paint this picture about they are so caring to the agricultural sector, and all of these false promises, the people would judge you for all of those manifesto items you claim to be bringing at this point in time.

Mr. Vice-President, these files relate to families. Some of these families involve generations, and it is extremely disheartening and disappointing to know as a young person wanting to venture into the agricultural sector, seeing your parents or your grandparents go through this whole process of having their land tenure regularized or having their land tenure renewed or having it transferred to you as a next of kin. Sometimes they go through years, some farmers we have met, they are waiting 60 years, and it is not a governmental thing, it is not a political thing; it is a national issue we have in dealing with this matter.

And in the digitization of those files, Mr. Vice-President, I actually saw the hon. Minister dealing with a file one day, turning the pages of that file, and while the pages were being turned, pieces of the page were remaining on his fingers, the file was close to 100 years old. And that moving with the technology, putting that into a digital format, where it does not matter who comes to work tomorrow, it does not matter which officer is assigned to your land review matter, it does not matter who has to move this paper trail from point A to point B, it will rely heavily on the technology and the database of the Ministry to deal with your matter and fast track your land tenure or regularization. That is what the Ministry has been significantly doing in getting land matters dealt with once and for all in this country.

Mr. Vice-President, we have established a new framework for oversight of State agencies responsible for agriculture including the Agricultural Development Bank, NAMDEVCO and the Cocoa Development Company. I do not need to stand here and talk about the action taken by the last administration relating to the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board. In one line in a finance Bill here once, I was sitting across there and they just disassembled, they crumbled the entire cocoa sector by just one line and they left absolutely nothing in place of the farmers. We,

in the Ministry, have worked with the farmers, we have given them the necessary tools and equipment that they require to boost the cocoa sector and the chocolate sector in this country, and it is well advanced with the assistance of the grants being funded through the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Persons are utilizing the enabling environment created by this Government to prosper in those sectors.

Mr. Vice-President, we have completed a comprehensive review of the legal policy and organizational arrangements for the administration of state land and that in this year, we will be also concentrating on in assisting this country in dealing with the land issues that we have.

Mr. Vice-President, we hear a lot of people talk about why we did not open the pack house for NAMDEVCO, the Brechin Castle and Brickfield, those matters—nobody took the time under the last administration to actually furnish these pack houses with even a table to wash pumpkin in, Mr. Vice-President. How could you open a pack house with no machinery, no equipment, in some cases not even an electricity connection? But they come here and they talk about they are serious about agriculture. We did the responsible thing, Mr. Chairman, we executed a PPP initiative and those advertisements would have gone out to get whatever intention from the private sector who wishes to manage these facilities.

Mr. Vice-President, we also completed a national review of the legal and administrative arrangements for wildlife conservation. In particular, hunting of wildlife and implemented a suite of legislative changes and completed a comprehensive review of all matters related to forestry. That matter was left idle by—not a pin, not a point, not a “t” crossed under the last administration. We have dealt with it.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of infrastructure, because I go around this country and people always claim to say, “We are doing nothing for agriculture”.

The taxpayers of this country spend significant amounts of money in projects and programmes of this Ministry and I will just go through a few in terms of the infrastructural projects we have undertaken since coming into office.

Mr. Vice-President, this administration, we would have built roads in bp Coora; Siparia; Re network, Los Iros; Hart Trace, Tableland; American Flats; Gasparillo; the Rio Claro food crop project; Dades Trace in Rio Claro; Tableland, Gran Couva, all of these areas have benefited from access roads, but yet you will hear the Opposition say we have not built a single access road. They come here with this Cambridge Analytica advice to spread fake news and misinformation, propaganda, hoping that somebody will believe them, but the documents and the facts at the Ministry say differently.

In terms of fishing facilities, Mr. Vice-President, this administration would have done work and completed the Cumana, Balandra, Otaheite fishing facilities, Carenage fishing facility. Erin and Bonas fishing facilities, works are ongoing.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of training, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has trained close to 13,000 farmers in all in various training programmes, in terms of getting them with the level of technology in terms of getting them with the right approach to doing whatever programme they would like, but giving them certification in terms of some of these programmes, 12,000-something farmers trained by the Ministry.

In terms of plant material Mr. Vice-President, most persons will know, if you go to a private organization to buy an avocado plant, or a mango plant, a grafted dongs plant it is a significant amount of money you have to pay. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries continues to highly subsidize plant material available to all persons in the public, both farmers and non-farmers. To date, Mr. Vice-President, we have produced 1.4 million grafted fruit plants that

were offered for sale to farmers and members of the population. Mr. Vice-President we have produced 20,000 kilogrammes of local seed from bodi, ochro, saime, persons may not even know what “sapucha” is, who knows what “sapucha” is? Mr. Vice-President, I am not sure if you know what that is but that is a local jhingi, very nice when curried. All of these local commodities that we have in this country, that we beat our chest towards, we at the Ministry invest in ensuring that our genetic material is well secured, in fact many countries long to see the day when they could have a genetic pool of material stored and housed at the Ministry.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to turn to something that has attracted a lot of questions in the Standing Finance Committee. And, you know, in the line of questioning in the way the Opposition puts this point across is that we do not give anything towards the farming population. I want to talk about incentives and subsidies, Mr. Vice-President, and that area, you will be shocked to know the significant amount of money that is spent in those areas. In terms of agricultural incentives and I am sure you are well aware of some of the grants available in the agricultural sector relating to the fisheries department, which I know you are an expert in and in terms of the agricultural departments. From 2014 to 2018 to date, the population of this country would have expended \$130 million in incentives to the farming population. And these, there were just around 12,000 persons making those claims, and when you check it over the years, Mr. Vice-President, each farmer of this country when you actually look at the dollar-value, each farmer an average all the farmers in this country come down to around \$10,000 per person.

Mr. Vice-President, you know, I am a farmer “eh” and I will tell you something, sometimes we in the agricultural sector, we are very “shy”, I will use that word, we are very shy to publish or indicate our profitability, or we are even

more “shy” to indicate that we received a cheque from the Ministry. We “doh” ever talk about that. Farmers do not ever come on the TV, or they do not even mention that they just received a flood compensation grant issued by the taxpayers of this country, or farmers would not even tell you, Mr. Vice-President, after they purchase a brand new pickup truck, they just receive a cheque in the mail courtesy the taxpayers, of \$50,000. They will not tell you that they received a one-time cheque, payment after they purchased a brand new tractor of \$50,000 in a one-time cheque. They will not tell you that, Mr. Vice-President.

In terms of flood compensation, oftentimes I hear people say, well WASA claims ownership of all the water and when the water end up in their plots then the Government should pay for it. But we actually do. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries courtesy the taxpayers have footed a Bill, Mr. Vice-President, of close to \$200 million to the agricultural population to the farming population since 2014 to today, \$200 million in flood compensation to farmers in this country. And while I am on that, Mr. Vice-President, so, to the Minister of Public Utilities, kindly indicate to the farmers that you know, you have the facts, that these persons are compensated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. So they do not have to tell you about taking the water and putting it where.

At the end of the day, Mr. Vice-President, I have listened to persons in this country, persons claiming to represent farmers organizations and organizations, but when I look, it is a one man team, or a one lady team representing nobody. Who are these persons representing? Where is their membership? At the end of the day, Mr. Vice-President, the records at the Ministry show we have a population of just around 30,000 active farmers in this country of which 23,204 are registered farmers, and 10,000 are unregistered, but we have them on the database.

So, Mr. Vice-President, when these persons go and tell you—and sometimes

we actually believe them—that only 1 per cent of the population of farmers in this country are registered again Cambridge Analytica, fake news, propaganda and misinformation. The records show 77 per cent of the farmers in this country are registered bona fide farmers. So all of the tax breaks, and the incentives, and the subsidies and all of these things, Mr. Vice-President, 77 per cent of the population of the farming community actually benefits individually from all of these incentives and subsidies.

Mr. Vice-President, when you turn to what we have done in terms of getting investment in the sector. Mr. Vice-President, how much time do I have again?

**Mr. Vice-President:** You finish at 12.22.

**Sen. A. Singh:** Mr. Vice-President, when you look at what the Government via the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has managed to do in terms of stimulating investment and giving agriculture the boost it requires, it is something to take note of. And I will spend a few minutes in a couple of these decisions, the Government would have taken in getting significant amounts of money being invested in agriculture. Because we will always hear people talk about diversification putting a switch on and hoping that the agricultural sector comes out to bail out this country. It could never happen that easily, Mr. Vice-President, because I could tell you in the agricultural sector, yes, there are challenges, but with the right approach and the right leadership which we have at this point in time, we will get the job done. And I assure the population that the benefits we reap from the agricultural sector will be felt at all levels.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has gone on record on a number of occasions in actually identifying to the population this whole issue of food fraud. Mr. Vice-President, and as a consumer, I am speaking from my own point of view now. When I go to a restaurant and buy something to eat, I may

order fish, I know the Vice-President is well expert in the Tilapia production, but when you go to a restaurant and you order fish on the menu and they bring the fish and they serve it to you on you platter, you pay whatever. How do you know when that fish was harvested, where it was harvested or what that fish was fed on, you do not.

Likewise, sometimes you go and you buy chicken, cooked chicken and I have nothing against the Minister of Trade and Industry, I like the Minister of Trade and Industry and all her policies. But in terms of when you eat, you must be concerned whether or not that chicken that you are consuming, whether it be the Parliament, the barbecue shop or wherever, you must be concerned in terms of the health and well-being of your family that that chicken did not cross 180 days and started to rot before it is brought here. You know, we have taken the decision, as a responsible Government to identify some of these concerns, Mr. Vice-President, in terms of how we treat with dealing with our citizens.

Mr. Vice-President, I was at the Standing Finance Committee and I heard one of the Opposition members say that we rushed, and we hurried, and we made this Aripo Livestock Station available and the process was flawed. Let me spend one minute to just correct the record and place on the record the facts. Mr. Vice-President, we at the Ministry we had a livestock station, Aripo Livestock Station, for those of you all who know, and that livestock station was specifically for research purposes, but I will tell you this, you can go through this country and find private farmers who can actually teach the extension officers of the Ministry, belief it or not. So when you have something for research purposes and the taxpayer is footing a bill of a couple million dollars to keep that operation, we must really and truly understand where our priorities are.

In 2017, Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries



conducted a diagnostic review of the livestock sector in Trinidad. In March 2018 the Cabinet approved the recommendations from the review, one of which was to explore private sector participation in the Aripo Livestock Station. Several years before the Aripo Livestock Station was designated as I indicated earlier a research station and therefore, was doing minimal activity in support of the farming community. Because I challenge you, Mr. Vice-President, go to any livestock farmer in this country and ask them what have they been able to accomplish or benefit from the Aripo Livestock Station and they can tell you it is very, very blurred. Invitations were issued in 2018, Mr. Vice-President, in that facility we engaged the bargaining unit, NUG union.

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** NUGFW.

**Sen. A. Singh:** NUGFW union, and all the employees that belong to the State, Mr. Vice-president, all 105 daily-rated workers and 14 monthly paid all of them were incorporated in the Ministries with no issue, no problem, no complaint and they are happy where they are producing for the farming population.

Mr. Vice-President, the process went on, it was advertised, there was an extension in the date. We got some interest being shown by a number of persons and 13 persons actually paid a site visit to the site. And, Mr. Vice-President, after the evaluation process recommendations came and that committee comprised of Mr. Vishnu Dhanpaul, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance as the Chairman; Mr. Farook Hosein, Deputy PS, and a number of experts in the area. And the outcome, Mr. Vice-President, Marilissa Farm a locally established 100 per cent privately owned, producing, marketing in ruminants, livestock and livestock products rank the highest. And, Mr. Vice-President, it must be information to note that this investor pledges up to \$60 million in terms of investment, in terms of this farm. And not only that, the entire livestock sector stands to benefit.

Mr. Vice-President, in the closing seconds that I have, I want to indicate that the theme of this Budget, “Stability, Strength and Growth” is what we in the PNM believe in and in the words of Basdeo Panday, Mr. Vice-President, the former Prime Minister of this country, the PNM will win the next General Election and I will say based on our performance and based on our steadfast leadership in the person of Dr. the Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley, a sober leader that has taken this country to stability where we would like it to be. Mr. Vice-President, thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*].

**Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahje:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate, you got a little worried there. This debate on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2020.

Mr. Vice-President, I always approach any document with figures in it with some degree of trepidation. Like Hamlet, I would much prefer to deal with words, words, words. But there are a lot of words in the document to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore, I will deal with what the good Minister has provided as we look at these documents.

The Social Sector Investment Programme, is the main document that I use as my guide. I want to quote, Dr. Steve Maraboli who once said, “I applaud those who speak, but I admire those who act”. And I really want to admire the Minister of Finance, so I propose to examine his published past and proposed actions in the course of this debate. He has announced that his stated strategy is under certain themes, “Putting people first”, very important without people we can get nowhere, we can do nothing and it is all about them. And the second laudable goal, “Delivering good governance and service excellence”, equally praise-worthy.

I have always felt though that the budget should be delivered in January.

Like Janus, that god, it looks backwards at what the Government has done and it looks forward to what the Government proposes to do. But sometimes although on close examination we find that what the Government has said it has done, it has not. So we look at what it has done and what it plans to do. The budget is a document of achievement and hope. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, every government does some good, if we would only be honest and admit it. It is the balancing of the good with the bad that the electorate needs to look at to decide enough is enough.

I would like to begin with a particular Ministry, a Minister who has been debased, and vilified, and disparaged. But I see so much sincerity of purpose and such hard work, that I wish to thank him for what he has delivered during the course of the year. And I want to say that I was far away a few days ago when I began to put my points together, I was in Pennsylvania. So I had no idea that the Minister had come to Parliament bearing gifts of containers for water and delivered them to us as Senators. So, I am not praising him because of the gifts that he has delivered. “Timeo danaos et dona ferentes”, I fear the Greeks even when bearing gifts.

So, despite not realizing his dream of having a new born baby named after him, I see some initiatives for which he must be commended. “Terrence” is a good name, one close to my heart, so maybe one day before long he will have a baby named after him.

Now, one Sunday, I was not feeling very well, and my deceased sister, who was a health visitor told me, “You know you do not like to go and wait long anywhere, you have been to a hospital along the East-West Corridor and you complain you had to wait for them to call out a doctor, why do you not go to the health centre in St. Joseph”. I say “health centre, me. Umm-umm”. She said,

“Yes, you will be surprised”. And I went to the St. Joseph health centre that Sunday. I was really surprised. I did not have to wait, they attended to me with speed and efficiency. I was amazed and the icing on the cake, free medication.

Another Sunday she came by, and she said, “You know, I just came from visiting a patient”. I said “Sunday, you visiting a patient”. She said, “Yes. It is a new programme, you know”. So this particular patient had been discharged from hospital and there was a programme where they would go and visit to make sure that the patient was doing well. And the Monday morning when I went to law school, a law student came to me and she said, “You know, Ms. Ahye, I met your sister. I said, “You met my sister. Where?” She said, “Yes, she came home by me, because I was in hospital and she came to check to see how I was going”. And that student being from another jurisdiction and having nobody in the house to care for her. She said, “I really appreciated what has been done for me”.

So you have a number of initiatives coming out of the Ministry and I was listening to a call-in programme that is very particular with a certain Minister in this House and during the course of that programme, one of my colleagues was saying, why do they not use the health visitor to go and visit patients, you know, retired people to go and visit patients in their homes and so on. Not knowing that this was in fact something that was already going on. So, the Ministry certainly can be faulted for not having everyone be aware that there are these programmes in place that people, actually nurses, come to your home and check on you, not only when you have newborn babies, but when you come out of hospital as well. [*Desk thumping*]

**12.30 p.m.**

Now, the round-the-clock opening of the health centres, I know some nurses were against it for a while but, in fact, it has proven to be a very valuable service. I

think it was started by the last Government. Correct me if I am wrong. I do not want to give pips where they are not deserving, but it has been going on for some time and this has proven to be very good. So every Government tries to do some good, some try harder than others and therein lies the rub. The equipment in the neonatal unit that was lying dormant for some time under wraps, I understand that they are using it now at the Mount Hope Hospital.

So things are also happening there, and it is a relief to the staff, but much more needs to be done—there is always more to be done—and I expect the money in the budget would be used to address a lot of the suffering that people have with respect to their health issues. The long wait for surgeries is a very sore point. The long wait for assessment is also sad. Surgery delayed is too often a death sentence imposed. So we have to be very careful to work on that issue as soon as possible. I have already indicated my personal interest in the Petrotrin issue and that I will say again, that the issue of the closing of the health centre for the retirees who are dying month after month needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Now, I want to look a bit at the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs, very close to my heart. I have left, physically, the Children's Authority, but it still remains part of me and during the year, this fiscal year, a number of strides have been made to advance the performance of the Ministry, particularly in Tobago. Maybe it is no coincidence that the line Minister is from Tobago, but she has been working very hard, but I still have a problem of the line Minister for the children's affairs not being a Member of Cabinet, and having to wait for another Minister to articulate the concerns of that particular Ministry. I do not think that, because it belongs under the Prime Minister that means it is very important, so there is no need for a separate line Minister.

I was very surprised to learn at a focal point meeting put on by UNICEF in

Trinidad, that Trinidad and Tobago has one of the lowest number of foster carers in this country. We are a caring populace as far as I am concerned. Of course, there are aberrations. There are demons that walk among us in human form but, we are, to a large extent, a very caring populace. And many times I have spoken on pulpits in churches about foster caring, and people have come to me after mass and said, “You know, I am interested in being a foster carer”, and I have referred them to the Children’s Authority, but still, there are too few people and, perhaps, what we should do, is to look at some incentives being given to foster carers because all mothers and fathers know, raising children is an expensive business.

So foster care and adoption, we are making very slow progress—and forgive me for saying “we”—but the Children’s Authority is making slow progress and we need to sensitize more this whole question of adoption. People will have their children in institutions and will not give the children up for adoption. So we need to really work on that, perhaps go to court and have decisions made in the best interest of the child, even though parents want to selfishly hold on to the children that they can do nothing for and who the Government is minding in other institutions. Institutionalization of children is a matter of last resort and should be for the shortest possible time. This is set out in all of the regional standards in the child justice and from the Convention on the Rights of the Child and all of the other standards. Institutionalization is not the best way to deal with children. So foster care, adoption, much better options.

So we celebrate the opening of the Children Court, and I meet a number of my regional colleagues who tell me, “We coming to visit your children court, you know, we heard so much about the children court” and, of course, we are proud of this initiative, just as we are proud of the Family Court, because we always have visitors from around the region coming to visit our Family Court. It is a showpiece

for the region. But I have been disturbed about the number of children who are being brought before this court by their parents—children in need of care and supervision. You call them CHINS. It signals to me that there is a greater need for parenting programmes. The parents should be before the court and not the children. We need more effective measures for dealing with children such as positive discipline which forms part of restorative practices.

So for the last few days, I have been attending the World Conference of the International Institute for Restorative Practices in Bethlehem in Pennsylvania, and it really is a mind-blowing event. When you hear people from around the world talking about what is happening with restorative practices in the education sector, in the prison sector, you know, with child justice—and so much that is commendable, so much that is effective is happening. And every year I meet what I call my Singaporean children. I met them a few years ago and they send a lot of their material for me. These are young people in their 30s, and I tell them, “You know, you could be my children” and they always come around me and tell me what they are doing in Singapore with restorative justice.

Recently, I had a programme for the Law Association and I was able to show them the Singapore model of what we call the social discipline window. I would not go into it right now, but it is a leadership style that can be applied in the home, in business and in the schools—how we deal with the people who come under our jurisdiction as leaders. But what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago? Punishment, jail, institutionalization for offences ranging from shoplifting to serious crime. Community service is a forgotten option. The Drug Treatment Court is sometimes used selectively. It depends on the luck of the draw, it depends on the magistrate you come before. This magistrate may have a bend towards social justice and so, and may not be looking at a punitive approach and

may decide, “All right, you are dealing in cocaine, you are, in fact, a user and therefore, you should go to the Drug Treatment Court and see if we could have rehabilitation.”

So crime pays, I think sometimes for those who provide services for the prisons. It is not a farfetched assumption that there may be vested interest in keeping our prisons well populated. The Archbishop spoke some time ago about releasing from prisons, from Remand, those persons who had their trials being determined, would have been already out of the prison. And the Attorney General came and he said, “Well, you know, it is very few people who are affected by that.” I do not know from whence his information came but, it certainly, from what we read, anecdotal evidence points to—it is not a large part of the population, but I do not know. But the fact is, even if it is one person or two, those persons’ lives are important. One sheep Our Lord was interested in saving, just one.

To return to the Children’s Authority, I want to talk something about this board of management—qualified experts in experience in the field of psychology, psychiatry, social work, paediatrics, education, accounting, family law, youth, NGO, Tobago House of Assembly and so on. So members are carefully selected according to specific criteria and then systematically, I would say, exploited. These are all professional people who work in social services delivery, and people who work in social services delivery—and I have made that point time and again—they are not valued. They are underpaid and overworked.

So we have a situation where members of the board are on several committees. Now, I have sat on boards in Trinidad and Tobago for a number of years—Legal Aid Clinic, the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority. I was on Police Complaints Authority, St. Dominic’s Children Home, boards of credit union and so on, boards here and boards there. I gave them up and I went to the Bahamas to



teach across there. But, as I know it, boards generally meet once a month, but when you are with the Children's Authority, you may have three meetings in one week, three meetings. So you could be sitting on human resources committee, tenders committee, adoption board, care committee, finance, audit and so on, and you are getting \$4,000-odd. Is that what is going to happen if you have someone sitting on energy committees? Other committees that bring money into the country, are they treated in a similar fashion? So outside of meetings also, you have to sit and look at documents, formulate policy, all for a single stipend. I would like the Minister of Finance to look at that and see, is it right?

Remember then there was an adoption board instead of an adoption committee that obtains now. Members of the adoption board were all paid separately. So that now is subsumed under the Children's Authority, you know, and there is no extra money going out, but there is a lot of extra work. So you find members sometimes they can hardly cope. Sometimes you go to a meeting at 7 o'clock and 8 o'clock you are still there.

**Hon. Senator:** 8.00 p.m.

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:** 8.00 p.m. in the night, yes—and this is something very frequently with social workers.

When the social work faculty started at university, I remember I became a practicum teacher. I met with a guy from Africa who came in and started the programme, and I became a practicum teacher, and I would observe the work of their social workers and I was really—I maintain a relationship up to today with most of them, because they used to send the best social workers to me in the Legal Aid Clinic. And I used to tell the law students, you know, these people here are making a greater contribution to the society than the lawyers that we are churning out, but when they go out there, they are going to be paid much less than the

lawyers are being paid. So this is something that one ought to look at, you know, how we treat people who are involved in social work. Not because we have a big heart we must be punished because of it. Fair is fair. And as a former Prime Minister would have said, “This is a wrong that should be made right”.

Now, I read a headline in a newspaper—so I go to the Ministry of National Security—and the headline read—this is the *Guardian* of September 13, 2019, for *Hansard* people—“Forensic Science Centre back to normal”. Now, when I read that headline which was reference to the end of a strike by mortuary workers for unpaid wages, I wondered, which normal? Old normal, new normal? That used to be a sitcom, you know. It did not last past one season. But “The New Normal” was a sitcom or is it abnormal? Which is the “normal” you are talking about in the Forensic Science Centre? Recent events have proven to me that normal at the Forensic Science Centre is abnormal.

It is situated, this building, on Long Circular Road in St. James, Port of Spain. Even one directionally challenged, as myself, can easily find it. Even the visually impaired could find it, just follow your nose. The stench will lead you there. I had occasion to visit that abnormal place, and it exemplifies national unity, love and sharing among fellow sufferers. You have alcolado, Limacol, you have perfume, anything to cover the stench of rotting bodies that permeated the atmosphere, and I wondered, do people work here? Do people work here? That must be inhumane.

Now in 1991, I had occasion to visit a Forensic Science Centre in Bern in Switzerland. Some very highly respected persons came to my other sister’s home and say, “We need, we really trying to develop the steel band in Switzerland.” They used to come here for Carnival—I think probably they still do—“and we need a tenor player to go across there.” So they asked my elder sister to allow her

19-year-old son to go to Switzerland to play tenor pan, and he so loved the pan—the young man who is also my godson—went across to Switzerland. Next day, he drown in the river Aar. So I had to visit the forensic science centre. We did not even know he drown right away, because the other people or the bandleaders and everything, they knew in Trinidad. Somebody went up there. So Prospect shaking the baton like Mr. Prospect. All of them went up there and we did not even know, the young man was dead until sometime after. So I went up there to Switzerland and I visited the forensic science centre, clean and pristine. What a difference? What a difference? But it is not only the physical space, you know.

For years, Dr. Valery—how do you pronounce his name doctor? I am not going to try to bite off my tongue this evening. But, you know, Dr. Valery always used to be in the press complaining about the Forensic Science Centre—how it is understaffed, how he is in danger of losing his licence because he was required to do more than 250 autopsies which is against international standards. Yet the Government is insisting there is an adequate number of forensic pathologists. Now, I challenge the Government to produce the figures to show how many autopsies each pathologist has done over the last 12 months or so? Until then, the credibility remains in question. Investigations do not align with the Minister's assertions. Facts are stubborn things. A properly functioning and well-resourced forensic centre is vital, with personnel who are qualified and follow proper protocols, to investigation of crime.

To become a forensic pathologist, one has to first go to medical school, and then you do a speciality for four years, usually at Mona, and you become an anatomical pathologist. To be a forensic pathologist, you have to do—which is a sub-speciality—you have to do another year, and that is not available here. Now, I have been informed—because I have spent some time within the last few days

researching this matter, and I have received a lot of documents here available to the Minister—that there is a fellowship available to Trinidadians—and I understand this information was set to the former Minister of National Security, but there has been no feedback. So we are not sure—my source said—he is not sure whether, in fact, the information has been passed on for this—somebody here to actually take advantage of that training.

So when the Minister talks about forensic pathologist, and these people have not done that sub-speciality training, are we comparing pommecythere and oranges? Where is the peer review that is essential to accreditation? Who reviews the findings of the pathologists? Who looks at the draft reports of the pathologists using a standardized stool to ensure the conclusions are reasonable? The director of the centre is not a forensic pathologist. So who, in fact, does that work? And, you know, you have to look at the code of practice and performance standards for Forensic Pathologists of England, Wales and Northern Island; you look at Forensic Autopsy Performance Standards, you look at the guidelines for autopsy practice, for sudden unexpected deaths of infants and children under five; you look at the outlaw, the forensic pathology services and there are practice manuals. There is so much information that I have received over the last few days, that I wonder what is happening.

Some years ago, there was a pathologist, purported to be a pathologist, paediatrician pathologist, who was not qualified in forensic science, and he made a whole number of mistakes—his name was Dr. Charles Smith—and arising out of these mistakes that he had made, it prompted an enquiry called the Goudge Inquiry which made 160 recommendations and out of which the Ontario Pathology Service was born. So it would be useful for us to look at those findings and see how many of those we fail or we pass.

So are we serious about crime investigation and crime fighting in Trinidad and Tobago? We do not have a functional X-ray machine at the Forensic Science Centre. We do not have a functional DNA bank. But, you know, when you look at the documents here in the reports put forward by the Minister of Finance, we see that as part of the achievement for last year, the establishment of a National Forensic Data Bank. And when we look at projections for 2020, we see the establishment of a National Forensic Data Bank. So it established last year and it established again this year? Something cannot be right—page 15 not coinciding with page 19. Which am I to believe? My investigation has revealed it is not functioning. So we have plenty theory, nothing happening.

So how many of our fellow citizens are grieving because their family member is missing? If we are a country that talks about putting people first, surely, we would want to relieve them of this daily trauma, surely we would make sure everything is in place to identify bodies and match the DNA of loved ones with bodies that are found. It has been said do not talk, just act; do not say, just show; no promise, just prove. Prove it.

My daddy once won a prize for a speech entitled “A dream within a dream”. It seems a lot of people read that speech. So instead of being defensive and combative, the Minister should be saying, “Mea culpa, I will do better”. We are a forgiving people, but confession must come before forgiveness and the penance before the absolution or else you will be wearing sackcloth and ashes. So my advice, insist that your advisors advise you properly and correctly. Honesty is the best policy and research must be your watchwords.

Education: I am pleased that the Education Ministry, once again, got a lion share in the budget. I am happy about the plans for nursery schools and so on, and I recall reviewing the regulations. So we are talking still about regulations and

standards for nursery. It is about two years ago, I reviewed those regulations and made recommendations, maybe three years ago. What is happening? I really do not know. Sometimes I wonder if we are getting value for money insofar as education is concerned, because I have had occasion to tell my tertiary level students who already have a bachelor of laws degree and coming for the LEC that, you know, my B class students in Common Entrance wrote better than you. They wrote better English than you. My grandmother died when I was born. I never knew her and the grandmother before died before that and I tell them, “You know, I lost my grandma but all yuh never had grammar” [*Laughter*] because something is very wrong, very wrong.

You read the newspapers, you listen to TV and radio talk show hosts, you have to wonder, who murdered the English language. Some talk show hosts are very proficient in swearing and they should desist because the children are listening. Some print and electronic media personnel are not versed in the English language at all. I have had Letters to the Editor edited and to make it wrong. It has annoyed me no end. Public signs now have American spelling and we have adopted American pronunciation. We no longer go to the library, we go to the libra-ry. We no longer have—even before they were called administrative assistants—we no longer had secretaries, we had se-cre-ta-ries. So we gone American but, at least, “leh meh know what is going on nah?” Let me know, because I do not know. “Ah mean, is like ah feeling as if I am in The Bahamas”, because I used to say Bahamians not sure if they are Americans or if they are West Indians.

I had visited youths in custody when I belonged to a group to help in numeracy and literacy. So I am particularly pleased that programmes are going to be initiated to assist them, and when I hear about the library in the prison, I

wonder, you know, how real are we? We know a lot of the people in the prison, they cannot read. Yes, they cannot read. So we have to work first on their literacy before we work on the libraries. And I have said about that library thing about bringing you children in to read, and then what is happening is that when you do not behave yourself, your children cannot come for you to read stories for them. So they do understand the principle of visitation is the right of the child and not the parent. So we are punishing the parent and, therefore, we do not care about the children.

Now, we have had reports about schools in Trinidad and Tobago, the low scores. I have spoken about that before today, and there is an urgent need to address those schools that are failing, those schools that are under academic watch. Every parent knows that all children are not the same and some children require special attention, greater attention. So we ought to look to the see what is happening with those children before they fail, because if they come out not having, you know, qualified in any way, what is going to happen is that they will join the gang culture. So we must fix people before we fix buildings because that is the future of our country.

Now, I have heard, I have been heartened of the response of the Education Ministry to the oxymoronic teacher rage at Tranquility School which should be a zone of peace. "It name tranquility." The Minister's action was correct and decisive and sent a signal to children that we care about you, that somebody is listening, somebody is listening. Children have a strong sense of justice, you know, and when they suffer injustice, that wounds their psyche and follows them for life. That is why when a child is acting out, your response should not be what wrong with you? But what has happened to you? What caused you to do like that? That is the restorative approach.

Now, the Minister must not believe for one moment that the situation in Tranquility was a unique scenario. Children are abused in their homes and schools every day. I received a telephone call at my office one day—a gentleman I do not know of. We still have not met. He said, “You know, my six-year old child is afraid to go to school because the teacher is beating the child and so on.” Well, he went through so much trouble to get my telephone number, I say, you know something, I am going to help this gentleman. So I visited the school. It is a school well-known to the Minister of Education—he will understand why I am saying so—and I went to have a conversation with the Principal. When we got past the initial response of: Why he did not come to me? Why he came to you? We were able to have a civil conversation and she promised to investigate. The long and short of it, I invited her to come to—I gave her a scholarship to attend one of my programmes on restorative practices, and I hope she is instituting it, because usually what they would tell you is that do not happen in my school, you know, but one has to look and see what is happening.

Now, the Minister of Education had the best consultation in this country and I attended quite a few. He would do well to take pattern from that professional approach to consultation—other people will do well to do so—but he has not always done or said the correct thing, you know, and I have told him so. One should not say that a child who hits a teacher has no place in the education system in this country. That is wrong. What ought to be done is to investigate and try to find out the root cause of the problem and deal with that aberrant behaviour. Zero tolerance equates zero justice.

I am disappointed that the revised school of conduct for the schools—the code of conduct, makes no mention of restorative practices. It means we are out of step with the rest of Caribbean where things are going full speed ahead and the rest



of the world. Circles are being used to address behaviour, especially bullying in schools. As I said, I just came back yesterday from Pennsylvania conference on restorative practice and so much is being done, and the success stories I have heard have been really astounding, but we have to change and get out of this punitive mindset and try to institute restorative justice in this country.

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

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:** Now, the Minister has studied, I am sure, the JSC report on Sexual Harassment—thank you—in Education. I was concerned of the lack of follow through and, perhaps, what he should do is investigate a little further about what is happening insofar as sexual harassment of children is concerned.

Now the amount of money spent on scholarships is really commendable, but happens when scholars return home? On the one hand, we say that things like climate change is a critical human development, yet we have a young lady, a recipient of a Government scholarship, came back with her PhD, versed in climate change and she cannot get a job. So what are we really doing with the money?

The removal of GATE for the over 50-year-olds has been a backward step. I did my two masters degrees after the age of 50, but I did not need to use GATE but, you know, there are people who would need to do so. In fact, my daughter told me, “You doing a next masters in your old age”, but she came to witness my graduation in Pennsylvania.

Now, the Minister of Labour, I must commend for a properly well-resourced research department. They make the Minister look good. She is always on the ball with answering questions, you know.

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** I have a great team. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:** Yes, you have a great team. Now, I see that you have now decided to have not a policy, put a law on sexual harassment and I commend

that. I do not have time to tell a story about that, but another time. Now, lawyer's fees, I want to say in the budget is increasing and I readily admit there are times when the State needs to pay lawyers, but one needs to look at, perhaps, increasing the money that you give to state lawyers in Trinidad and Tobago and money that you give to Legal Aid in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] because you really need to—you need lawyers to navigate the legal system and lawyers on the Legal Aid panel do not need to be paid the same as the statutory rate for private attorneys. But you cannot have young lawyers with bills waiting for months and years for Legal Aid to pay them while private lawyers, including foreign ones, are paid in a more timely fashion.

**1.00 p.m.**

So some lawyers have taken to returning their briefs and it does not augur well for those people who cannot, you know, represent themselves. The Attorney General has spoken of matters brought against the State which cost a great deal of money to defend. Surely there are very competent state attorneys, including the Attorney General himself who can handle more of those matters at no extra cost to the State. A well-deserved salary increase for state attorneys could lead to more experienced attorneys-at-law remaining in the service of the State or joining the AG's department. We know what the Naipaul-Coolman case did to the legal aid fund so we need to do something about that. There is a great need for legal literacy in this country. I have heard talk show hosts talking about lawyers not policing their fellow men and so on, but, you know, those cases are sometimes reported in the newspapers, but I have found out that journalists do not even read their own newspapers. Sometimes I talk about something in the newspaper, "Eh heh, you working in that newspaper, you have not even read it".

So there are people who are disciplined by the Disciplinary Committee and,

you know, it is gazetted and it is in the published press as well. I am hoping that something will be done about proclaiming the home for elderly people. That has been since 2007, that has been on the cards and nothing is happening. We are talking about adequate housing and I would like to hope that this will become a reality. When I spoke to the people in Singapore, I say, “You have the same leader”, they say, “But, Miss Ahye, everybody in Singapore has a house, everybody has a job”, so crime is down. So we need to work on that area to make sure that everyone has a home in Trinidad and Tobago as far as possible. Some people have six and seven homes, some people are providing already for the next generation, and some people have not a place to rest their heads. Do I even have a second again? None?

**Mr. Vice-President:** 1.02. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:** Oh, 1.02 “doh” sound so good, you know, that sounds like a hotel room that we heard something about. [*Laughter*]

So I really would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak and to say what I have to say about this budget, and I would just like to end by saying to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, Carifesta was the greatest show we ever had in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I felt very proud to be a Trinidad and Tobagonian. I just want—

**Mr. Vice-President:** Time is up, Senator. [*Desk thumping*] Hon. Senators, the time is now 1.02 and we will break for lunch. This House will now stand suspended until 2.02.

**1.02 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**2.02 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

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

**Sen. Daniel Dookie:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I am delighted

to join this debate and share my thoughts on the matters which are before us though be it very late in the proceedings. There are some advantages and disadvantages in coming in this late in the proceedings. One of the advantages is that I would have had the pleasure of listening to my colleagues articulate the progress of the Government and hearing the balance of contributions from Members of the Independent Bench. But one of the drawbacks is the pain of listening to the Opposition in what I can describe as one of the weakest response to a budget I have ever heard in all my life, and I am no young boy, [*Desk thumping*] both in this House and in the other place. You see, I had the pleasure of listening to Sen. Dr. Lester Henry who, in my opinion, gave an outstanding contribution as he addressed the matter of liquidity and the impact liquidity has on interest rates and the impact interest rates have on borrowing, as he defended Government's position and work regarding its borrowing policy, and also articulate the many variables which impact the exchange rate. And, again, he explained the Government's position in the manner in which the Government is dealing with the exchange rate, and the Opposition had absolutely nothing to say about that.

I also had the pleasure of listening to the very distinguished Minister of Works and Transport, Sen. Rohan Sinanan, who highlighted project after project after project, value for money, value for money, no corruption to be levied against any of the projects, success in the Ministry of Works and Transport and no response from the Opposition. In fact, they choose to talk about elections. Well, the Opposition, you got one election already, "take yuh licks one at ah time." And I also had the pleasure of listening to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, who, in my opinion, was extremely kind to Sen. Obika because he took about half of his contribution to teach him about the budgeting process. After he did that he went on to talk about government's policy and action regarding land

tenure for farmers, and of course, Sen. Avinash Singh also would have provided some information regarding the matter, and of course, the Opposition had nothing to say about that. And it was like the Minister of Public Utilities was not satisfied with the schooling given to Sen. Obika, he too joined in. Sen. Obika is a very special Senator, and provided some schooling for him in economics, as he also provided some information on the repo rate, the impact the repo rate has on lending rates.

He explained why the Government is not taking the advice of the UNC and devaluing the dollar, and after he did that he went on to provide some information regarding energy efficiency and the initiatives, in this regard, from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and of course, the UNC had nothing to say about that. I heard the Minister of Trade and Industry talk about the progress we are making in terms of our balance of trade and trade agreements, no response from the Opposition. I heard the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development talk about the improvements in the OJT programme, not just the increase in stipend but the improvements in the programme, [*Desk thumping*] no word from the Opposition. I heard the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government talk about local government reform. He is cleaning up the place, highlighting efficiency and productivity in local government, but no word from the Opposition. I heard Sen. Moses highlighted the improvement in our diplomatic relations both in Caricom and in the international arena, no word from the Opposition. I heard Sen. Cummings talk about the programmes in the social sector, housing, community centres being built throughout Trinidad and Tobago, the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, but no word from the Opposition. I can conclude, Mr. Vice-President, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is building a new society. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, we are not like the UNC, they flip-flop, one minute because the election has been called they talk about reducing taxes, but right in this House, not too long ago, the UNC told the country that we should increase value added tax to 17½ per cent and we should increase corporation tax to 35 per cent. But the election has been called, flip-flop, now they are saying put them back in office and they will reduce taxes. Which one would you believe? And of course, I heard their plans, balance the budget, that is what they are going to do, but I must remind them, they ran this country with record levels of revenue and they did not balance the budget. How will they do it now? So, Mr. Vice-President, the PNM is working, the UNC is talking. [*Desk thumping*]

I said that, indeed, we are building a new society, one that is more productive, one with a culture of efficiency and effectiveness, one that is promoting behavioural change in a positive way, and I believe, Mr. Vice-President, that there is evidence to this. There is evidence to show that we are progressing with success as we build a new society. I can point to the significant reduction in expenditure, a major success of the Government, and I believe this success has been under-celebrated, Mr. Vice-President. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, in my view, should be commended for bringing expenditure down as we try to keep expenditure more in line with our revenue reality. [*Desk thumping*]

The evidence of this new society, we are seeing a movement from negative growth to positive growth. We are seeing stability in our exchange rate, and of course Sen. Henry also reminded us about the experience in Jamaica and Guyana and why we are not going down that road. We are seeing growth in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. We are also seeing as evidence of this new society, surpluses in our balance of payment, and we are also seeing, Mr. Vice-President, one of the lowest inflation rates we have ever had as a country.

But what I think is necessary to point out, if I go back to 2015, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago called upon its citizens to assist and shoulder the burden of adjustments, and indeed the people of Trinidad and Tobago took heed to that call, worked and contributed, and now that improvements are being seen and improvements are being delivered, the Government, in this presentation and also previous presentations, are saying that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have contributed and they are deserving of benefiting in the growth and development that is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago. And that is why, Mr. Vice-President, I was so happy when I heard the Minister of Finance giving to CEPEP and URP workers an increase of 15 per cent. And I heard on the other side, “Well, the PNM did it in 2008 and we are repeating it”, well, Mr. Vice-President, if it was good once, it certainly would be better another time.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago, especially those who are most vulnerable are desirous of benefiting from the improvements that are taking place in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is my view, Mr. Vice-President, that the increase in the minimum wage which was scoffed at by the Opposition is something that will add value to the lives of those who live at the lowest level in our economic ladder. I can also point out in terms of sharing in the success of the work of all our people, we move into the realm of indexation of pensions and also the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is addressing pensions regarding daily-paid workers. I could point out too, Mr. Vice-President, that our social safety net is currently serving approximately 200,000 of deserving citizens, and of course the increase in stipend for the OJTs, as I referred to, and the increase regarding the intake of 2,000 is showing that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is saying to the people, you contributed, you supported your country, now we can share in the rewards together.

I said, Mr. Vice-President, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is building a new society and one of the approaches in doing so is the Government is building new institutions and strengthening exiting institutions. As we were taught by Michael Porter that even if you have favourable macroeconomic conditions but you have weak and failing institutions, the competitiveness of your firms could be eroded, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is paying attention to our institutions. One of the institutions that the Government is working towards and is making progress is to bring into being of the Revenue Authority. We know, Mr. Vice-President, that there are significant weakness in our tax administration system and processes. We know in Trinidad and Tobago there is a high level of leakage. We also know that there is a large informal economy, there is low confidence in our current system, there is a high level of tax avoidance which means that the tax gap is significantly large, some estimated to be in the tune of \$5 billion, and we believe the Revenue Authority will improve the structure of tax administration, improve service delivery, bring about a more up-to-date system and procedures. Put together, we believe, when operationalized it will result in greater confidence by stakeholders, voluntary participation. It will assist in incorporating the informal economy into the formal economy. It will reduce tax avoidance. It will improve fairness and equity. It will be more independent. It will reduce the tax gap. It means more revenue and that in turn means less need for debt financing. I think the Government of Trinidad and Tobago should be commended for pursuing this initiative. [*Desk thumping*]

I learnt from Sen. Rambharat, he said, “How yuh could talk in ah budget, debate as an economist and doh talk about revenue and expenditure”, well, I am talking about revenue. In addition to the Revenue Authority, as we know, significant work is being pursued with regard to the Gambling (Gaming and



Betting) Control Bill, 2016, to bring it alive. We know, Mr. Vice-President, we do have basically an unregulated gaming sector and where there are regulations, there is non-enforcement of the existing legal framework, and we believe there is the need to improve compliance and, hence, the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016, would assist in addressing this. We know it is before a JSC, we are hopeful of its passage, but what we know, once it comes to life we can maximize the revenue from the gaming sector, something that has been escaping us, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago addressing the issue of revenue administration. And in addition to that, we have heard so much about the property tax, and of course as the Government addresses the issue of revenue, it is also doing what it has to do to bring into being the operationalization of property tax.

We know what has happened in the past and I think we know what has to be done. But I would like to point out, Mr. Vice-President, that the property tax operates on a benefit principle and it accounts for a very high percentage of local government revenue, and we believe it will work hand in hand with local government reform. We believe that the benefits of property tax far outweigh the cash outlay by taxpayers. It has been said by the experts it is one of the most equitable and fairest tax around, and it has also been proven that the use of property tax has contributed to the increase in value of taxpayers' property; the Government of Trinidad and Tobago addressing the issue of maximizing revenue to service the people of Trinidad and Tobago. But that is on the revenue side, and the expenditure side, as we strengthen our institutions, we know that the Government is moving towards putting into place a new procurement regime. We know that we have already a Procurement Regulator in office. We believe that when operationalized it will result in the reduction and/or elimination of wastage, corruption, mismanagement. We believe that this institution, functioning the way

it ought to, will improve accountability, value for money. It will result in the reduction of unnecessary expenditure, and that we think, Mr. Vice-President, would lead to an improvement in the trust by citizens and other stakeholders and, very importantly, it will result in the reduction or removal of the opportunity for corrupt politicians to interfere in the procurement process.

A very important element of this regime which will contribute to ensuring that there is value for money is the review component and the legislation provides for certain skills and competencies that are necessary. I just wish to point out that if you examine the role, or the work rather of David Rosenbloom who highlighted the various responsibilities of this type of institution. He highlighted functions and skills such as strategic planning and scheduling, contract formulation and evaluation, measuring profit leverage effect, grievance procedure, measuring the procurement to return and asset ratio, and that is why the legislation provides for a retired judge, a retired engineer and a chartered accountant. Let me also point out that studies have shown that in the developed world procurement constitutes, on average, 50 per cent of GDP, and in Europe it has been shown that public procurement systems led to a 10 per cent saving on public expenditure. And one could imagine that if we can achieve this result of a 10 per cent saving on public expenditure how beneficial it can be for Trinidad and Tobago.

So we believe, Mr. Vice-President, on the expenditure side, the operationalization of the procurement regime as presented by the Government will have the outcome of independence, the elimination of corruption, mismanagement and will result in value for money. So on the revenue side we have the Revenue Authority, the operationalization of property tax and the coming into being, an operationalization of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016, with the various provisions. [*Desk thumping*] But one institution I wish to close with

and highlight where there has been improvement is, what I would describe as the institution of public health. Some presenters would have referred to the Global Competitiveness Report and highlighted where we are doing well and where we are not doing so well, but one area that is clear that we are showing progress is the issue of health. And if I just look at the 2018 to 2019 period we will see that our ranking would have improved from 90 to 78, and more importantly, in my respectful view, that our score would have improved to 73 to 78. It tells me that something good is happening in our health sector.

But I just want to focus for a couple of minutes on what I can describe as the hard elements in our health architecture. A lot has been said about the Point Fortin Hospital, who started it, who is going to finish it. Let me remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago that this PNM administration, when it came into office in 2015, met a very messy situation regarding the Point Fortin Hospital. The Government would have saved approximately \$300million without adjusting capacity by renegotiating management fees. There was no funding facility in place, large sums of moneys were outstanding to the contractor. The Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago were exposed to hundreds of millions of dollars in damages, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, recognizing the situation, used diplomatic intervention using the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Development ensured that proper financing arrangement is in place, and what we can say with confidence is that the People's National Movement Government will deliver the Point Fortin Hospital to the people of Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*] And the same can be said for the Arima Hospital, extremely messy, but the Government negotiated a loan in October 2018. Additionally, in excess of \$200 million was saved by the Government intervention, again, by renegotiating management fees without

adjusting the capacity, and we can say with confidence as well that the Arima Hospital will be delivered to the people of Arima. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Senator:** By the PNM.

**Sen. D. Dookie:** And I am reminded to say by the People's National Movement.

**2.25 p.m.**

Of course we know the situation with the central block, and the challenges regarding safety, and the Government's intervention on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure that a new facility is constructed, a 540-bed capacity facility. And we believe when that is done, it will improve clinical services to the people of Port of Spain and environment, another project that we know will be completed by the People's National Movement Government. [*Desk thumping*]

So much also has been said about the Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility. Well, what is fact, Mr. Vice-President, is that the Government inherited a construction site which required significant seismic retrofitting. We know that this facility will facilitate training for both local and foreign professionals, and hence usher into Trinidad and Tobago, the realm of health tourism. The Sangre Grande Hospital we know, will soon be a reality. Similar in design to the Point Fortin Hospital, more cost effective because of the economies of scale, and again, this is another project that will be delivered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular, the people of Sangre Grande.

So the hardcore elements in our health infrastructure, the Point Fortin Hospital will be delivered by the PNM Government, the Arima Hospital will be delivered and completed by the PNM Government, the central block in Port of Spain will be delivered by a PNM Government, the Sangre Grande Hospital will be completed by a PNM Government. The PNM is a Government of completion.

[*Desk thumping*] The PNM is a Government of completion. The good works that we have started as a Government, we are faithful enough to ensure that they are completed.

I encourage Trinidad and Tobago, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, to support this Budget, support the work of the Government, and do so by ensuring that on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, you come out in your large numbers and you vote resoundingly for a government of performance, you vote for a PNM government. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Sophia Chote SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to make a few small points with respect to the budget documents with which we have been presented. I think the big picture has already been talked about enough, so, my contribution may result in more question asking or observations than anything else, but certainly there are some things that I would respectfully like to have clarified.

I start by referring to the Commissioner of Police. Now, that Commissioner is not someone who we would call shy, but what I have observed over the last year, is that the Commissioner on two occasions went public with the fact that he was not given enough money to run his office. And that is a pretty serious thing because crime concerns all of us. Now, I do not imagine that the Commissioner—the first option of the Commissioner would have been to go public on a matter like this. I think the fact that he had to go public on two occasions is something which ought to concern us.

On one occasion I recall the hon. Minister of Finance indicating, or at least so it was reported in the press, that he would meet personally with the Commissioner. I wondered, well, why should that have to happen? Because when moneys are allocated in the budget, they are supposed to be distributed to the

people to whom they are allocated. And inferentially, I understood that what was happening is that moneys had been allocated, but moneys were not being paid out. I have heard two Ministers in this Chamber over the last year, Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, and the Minister of Works and Transport, refer to the fact or basically implore that their contractors be paid.

Now, then I got to wondering, well, why are we here? Because we have no control over how these moneys are to be paid out, when they are to be paid out, and to whom. You go to the Hall of Justice and you look at the list on any door where civil cases are heard, and you will see that there are people suing state enterprises in fairly large numbers, because it means that these state enterprises had not paid people who had done work for them. So, this is the problem that I have, and when I look at the disparity between what was allocated in the last budget, and what appears to have been given out, in some instances it is absolutely enormous.

So, when I looked at the 2019 Estimate for the Judiciary, for example, 40 million-plus, and then I see a Revised Estimate of 18,455,000 I do not know if I am getting my figures wrong, or because I am not somebody who is an accountant or someone with a numbers head, but it seems to me that the Judiciary was supposed to have got 40-plus million, and what they actually got was 18 point something million. Now, that would explain to me what I have been seeing as a practitioner in the courts over the last year. It would explain to me why some of the courts cannot photocopy. It would explain to me why personnel, you cannot find people to even assist the magistrates when they sit in the courts. It would explain to me why some departments are unable to serve you on certain days.

So, I think that we have to be up front and clear this up. And if it is that the Judiciary which is a hugely important institution in our lives for the maintenance of the rule of law, and also for crime fighting, if the Judiciary is being treated in this

way then I believe the country is owed an explanation. Now, happily, the Estimate for 2020 I see is 52,000,600, but I say it with some trepidation because I wonder how much of that the Judiciary is actually going to get, and I do not want to guess. So that was one of my concerns.

Now, the other thing that I looked for when I look at these budget documents was I thought to myself, you know, this is going to be a budget that is going to speak environment, because not only new voters, but everybody is concerned about climate change and the impact on the environment and so on. So I was quite happy to see in one of the documents: "Placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development." That was the rubric for one of the headings. So, I went into the figures now to see, well, how is this going to be managed. I thought I would see something along the lines of the creation of at least a department of environment, something which would oversee all the environmental impact agencies. But I did not, I said okay, no problem, so let us look at the major problems which face us, or which we know we have to deal with.

So I saw that the landfill at Forres Park had been allocated \$9,671,000 for the establishment of an engineered sanitary municipal landfill, and less than one-third of that money was given out or paid out. Now, that Forres Park area creates a number of difficulties, number of health difficulties, environmental difficulties, and that landfill has obtained less than one third of what it was allocated. So, are we really placing the environment at the centre of our social and economic development?

I looked at drainage and irrigation. I saw that there was an infrastructure plan for the rehabilitation of flood mitigation, or there was a programme for the rehabilitation of flood mitigation. It was supposed to have got \$8million, apparently it got 486,000. And as we go along we see more and more examples of

that. I see various Ministries have highlighted that there are environmental issues which they take into account. The Ministry of Public Utilities for example, talks about environmental protection and rehabilitation. Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries talks about the acquisition of a synthetic aperture radar for the detection of oil spills. So I paused, that sounds great, it means that we are preparing ourselves for this kind of environmental disaster which would be extremely expensive for us if it were to happen.

I saw that last year it had been allocated—\$1 million had been allocated for it, \$1,600 had been spent on it. I see that \$2 million has been allocated this year, so it means that it is yet to be purchased, but I do not know why it was not purchased when we had allocated money for it in the last budget. So these are some of the questions that I have. And it may be that there are entirely reasonable explanations for them, but certainly as someone reading these documents, these are some of the questions which occurred to me.

Now, I actually felt quite sorry for Tobago when I saw the number of projects which were being reactivated in this fiscal year. And I counted it up, because it means that all of these projects had been stopped or had been put on hold for the last year, and when we consider that a large proportion of people who live in Tobago are employed by the THA, one can only imagine the impact of having these projects stopped, had on their lives.

So, we see now that the THA is going to reactivate 29 projects. Twenty-nine projects had been stopped in Tobago, and are going to be reactivated in this year. And I did not count the new projects because there were not that many. So I just thought that that was unfair to the people of Tobago. Because I did not see that kind of distribution of projects being stopped and being started back in Trinidad and Tobago. The only Ministry which really spoke about projects which were



starting back, was the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. So when I counted that I saw that that Ministry is going to start 14 new projects, so presumably in different places in Trinidad, and they were starting back 15 projects which had been stopped.

So, it seems to me that when we talk about or when people spoke, over the course of the last year, about the decline in Tobago and so on, now I understand why. Because the people of Tobago are largely dependent or were largely dependent on tourism and work from the THA, and if you take away the work from the THA, then you hurt the island tremendously. And that I think is what these figures show. So I am just happy that these projects are started back and hopefully we will see the continuation of them.

**2.40 p.m.**

Now to get back to the courts because, I think maintenance of a high quality court system is something which we as a public must insist upon. I see that the San Fernando Magistrates' Court which had been allocated \$3 million got \$234,600. For those who wonder the San Fernando Magistrates' Court is still sharing space with the High Court. So, inadvertently if you think you are going to a courtroom where you will find a judge sitting, you will find a magistrate hearing court. And it is absolutely unacceptable it has gone on too long. The Judiciary ought to have been given the money to fit out—even if the building could not have been finished in time, the Judiciary ought to have been given the money to have adequate accommodation for judicial officers and for the court system. I think this kind of situation where it seems as though the Judiciary must come cap in hand asking for money is wrong is wrong. It is completely wrong.

In addition to that, the hon. Attorney General has stood here and told us about all of these rollout programmes for the improvement of the systems, the

working of the Judiciary. We look forward to that. It is no fun for lawyers to have to go to court day after day after day and not have their cases go on. We have a vested interest in expedition. So I would have expected to see that all of these programmes which are supposed to rolling out in the next year, I would have expected to have seen money to fund these programmes [*Desk thumping*] but I do not see it. Maybe I am looking in the wrong place and that is entirely possible.

Now prisons, because that falls under Public Order and Safety, \$3,400,000 had been allocated for improvement works to prison buildings. Now remember this is the figure, I could understand that. You have to work with what you have, even though we know the Port of Spain prison should be shut down. You have to work with what we have; we did not have the money. But for goodness sakes, if you have allocated \$3,400,000 for the improvement of these facilities in hard times, let the prisons have its money. Instead they got \$1,715,000 so it is hardly surprising, to learn that the escapees were able to get out of the Golden Grove Remand Yard Prison by cutting a fence. It is hardly surprising that YTC inmates were able to escape, I do not even know if there is a fence. So we cannot claim as Parliament, that we are giving attention or paying attention to the needs of these parts of the community if we do not make ourselves accountable by asking these questions and demanding answers.

Acquisition of CCTV for the Prison Service, because every week almost in newspapers you read about people trafficking stuff in the prison, including today. Eight million had been allocated, the prison service got 674,000. That is not a pretty picture. Now, I know legacy projects and you know big projects like fixing highways or building roads and so on are important, and any Government would want to have those symbols to show that they have worked and that they have worked hard. But to me the price we are paying when we ignore things like these is

becoming too high.

Now, the other thing that concerned me when I looked at the figures, with respect to Ministry of National Security, I saw that a million dollars, which in the scheme of things for a budget is not a particularly large sum, had been allocated for the rehabilitation of young offenders. And we had passed so much legislation over the last year, talking about rehabilitation of offenders, restorative justice, and all of those kinds of things, introducing legislation for the protection of children. You know how much that programme got?—\$40,400.

Forensic Science Centre, computerization, I see that it was allocated \$500,000. There is a dash next to it. So I do not know if they got any. \$10,700,000 had been allocated for electronic monitoring, \$1,583,000 was paid out. One million dollars had been allocated for computerization of the Fire Service, there is a dash next to that. So I do not know if any was paid out. And we continue like that and I say that that aspect of the disparity between allocation and payment is something which ought to concern us. How do we ensure that what is allocated by Parliament and we do not—this is a money bill. The Government has brought these documents to us and the Government has said, this is what we think we can allocate to these programmes and so on.

And if it is for some reason the Government was not able to allocate these amounts, then I think in our budget documents somewhere, when we get them, we should have some sort of brief explanation to say, “Well, they only ask or they requisition this amount and this is why the full drawdown was not given”. That would make us feel a little more comfortable as parliamentarians.

Now, Criminal Law Department, that covers the DPP’s Office and despite the fact that we had a prosecutor killed and despite the fact that prosecutors everyday face security issues. Some have to walk with police officers surrounding

them. There is nothing set out here for the funding of the security of prosecutors at the Office of the DPP. Yes anti-crime is a big deal, anti-gang legislation is a big deal. Gangs are a big problem. But what about the people who have to prosecute these cases. Why can we as country not have security provided for our prosecutors? Now, I also looked at this in the context of how do we treat our vulnerable? So I looked at the Division of Aging, and I looked at the Disability Affairs Unit, in the respective Ministries. Not even in terms of human resources are we up to standard. Division of Aging, I believe is a Director and a Clerk. Disability Affairs Unit, is a Director and Research Officer. Why are we only paying lip-service to matters which are important to the body politic?

I looked at St. Michael's Home, St. Jude's School for Girls and the St. Mary's Home. Well, I suppose because St. Jude's School for Girls is called a school, they lucky enough to be one of the three, to actually have an assistant teacher, because there is no teacher assigned to the other two places. In the human resource pool allocated and paid for, you do not have teachers in those institutions and these are the vulnerable. And these are the people who we want to talk about rehabilitating and restorative justice for—and making sure that they do not get caught up with gangs and they do not become criminals when they enter prison. These are the very same people we might be talking about.

Now someone, I think Sen. Thompson-Ahye, had raised the issue about legal aid and I am not going to repeat what she said, but I think that what we forget when legal aid is funded, because you have a right to legal representation under our Constitution. You have a right. When legal aid is underfunded, the attorneys who may have be minded to stay on the panel to do matters, have decided to come off it. Because you cannot do five cases, for the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority, and be waiting a year and a half to get paid for those cases. And many young

attorneys, bright attorneys, attorneys with the experience to do good work before the courts, have simply come off the list of legal aid.

So what happens then? You have cases which cannot go on, because people are unrepresented, that slows down the system. You have people being represented by young attorneys who ought not to be doing serious matters such as murders and so on, when they are under five years of call. And that also slows down the system because then the judge is not only hearing a case, the judge is teaching the attorney at the Bar. So these things have follow-on effects, and I think too often we look at all of these things in little pockets. Okay legal aid is that, Judiciary is that and so on and we do not appreciate, that all of these things must function well for the judicial system to work well and for us to have the kind of public safety that we wish to have in this country. When you look at what is provided, personnel at the prison, one psychologist is assigned for all three prisons.

**2.55 p.m.**

I know that there is a psychiatrist who comes once every three weeks, and presumably he comes with trainee psychiatrists. So that is the kind of personnel that we have to treat with people who need mental health treatment. I think there was a study, it may have been the Inspector of Prisons study which pointed out that there was an estimate that about a quarter of the persons held in our prisons have mental health issues. Should we not be trying to deal with those issues before they return to society?

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** What is the name of this report?

**Sen. S. Chote SC:** I think it is the Inspector of Prisons report, yes. So we talk so much about making this country a safer place, and giving this to the Judiciary and having CourtPay and so on, and all of that is working well, but we are really not addressing the problems of the Judiciary, the prisons and the prosecutors.

I will give you a funny example, Mr. Vice-President. One of the attorneys in my office went to Rio Claro to deal with a matter earlier this week. So the CourtPay machine was up, very nice, but you know what? Court could not be heard because the person who had the key for the filing cabinet had not come to work for three days. Apparently we cannot afford to cut keys in the Judiciary. So, I think that we have to appreciate that we are all for wonderful new systems, you know, computerization of this, that and the other, but we also have to ensure that we invest in the human resources to make sure that the systems work. Until robots replace us, we are going to be appearing before the courts as lawyers and doing cases.

The Sentencing Commission, appointed I think about 18 months now, has a significant role to play. Any judicial officer will tell you, one of the most difficult things to do is sentence a person. And sentencing has taken on a life of its own because of new procedures, such as the maximum sentence indication process and this kind of thing. The Sentencing Commission ought to be able to do research which can assist the Judicial Educational Institute and the Law Association, so that what we present before the courts is informed and the practitioners are informed. I do not think they have yet received a home. They did their best and produced a report, but they are still in abeyance after 18 months. That is not acceptable, with all due respect.

Just to round up. Now, I do not mean to say these things as sounding critical of the budget, but I just think that if it is you are saying this is the budget and this is what the community is being offered and, in fact, that those are not the figures that we should be looking for in reality, we ought to be told so.

Carifesta I agree was one of the big successes that we had this year, and I saw that there is an intention to create a Music Export Academy. Well, hon.

Members of this House, we have something called a “National Symphony Orchestra”. They are paid, each member, and many of them are leaders of their respective steel orchestras, or deputy leaders, and these are people with Masters Degrees in some cases, they are paid about the same amount as a police constable. And we want to have a Music Export Academy? What is going to encourage them to stay? They cannot even charge when they perform because they fall apparently under the Head of a national organization, so they do not travel. They cannot liaise with other musicians around the world. They cannot develop their skills. They cannot go and teach in other places, and teach people about our musical instrument and our musical heritage.

These are some easy things to fix. So I cannot understand why more attention is not given to streamlining some of the services or institutions which are run by the Government, because some of them require very little effort for improvement. But it seems as though some people are stuck in a situation where they think that we have to say no to everything. We have to put everything down, or think that we are not good enough. But I think there are some institutions which I have mentioned here, which certainly deserve encouragement and funding. If you tell the people you are going to get \$1 million, please let them have the \$1 million, because you could imagine how devastating it is for an institution or a group doing this kind of work to be promised this money and to be making plans and thinking, okay, well, this is how we are going to move forward this year, only to realize that you are sending requisitions and you are writing letters to the PS, and nothing is coming out of it. I think our population deserves better than that.

So, hon. Vice-President, these are some of my thoughts on the figures which I have seen in the budget document. As I say, much of or even all of what I have said might be the subject of reasonable explanations, but certainly it would be nice

to have explanations. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

**Sen. Khadijah Ameen:** Mr. Vice-President, as we are on this third day of discussion and debate in the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago, I thank you for this opportunity to contribute to what is popularly called “Budget 2020” or, in other words, the final budget of this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

A budget is a promise, and for the past four years the Government led by the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, has made numerous promises to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that they have failed to keep. God knows, if promises alone could run a country, Trinidad and Tobago would be booming under the PNM. For four years the PNM has made budget promise after budget promise, many of which never materialized. And they return the following year with not even a mention of some of these previous promises, and then come to promise the nation more. So, Budget 2020 is sadly no different from the other budgets of the term of this Government, heavy on promises, very low on actions and achievements. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, over the past four years we have seen the Government standing in a bucket attempting to lift itself up by the handle, by raising existing taxes and introducing new taxes, and this is because of their failure to find innovative means of generating revenue in this country.

A keen observation: before the budget was read there was some excitement because the country felt that this is an election budget, this is the Government’s last hurrah, you would get some oomph, you would get something to talk about. There is no excitement, there is very little interest from the national community. People are laughing at them. People who do not have food are being promised bulbs. That is governance PNM-style. [*Desk thumping*] The national budget of this 2019/2020 has not stimulated discussion within the nation. It really has fallen flat.

This budget debate, however, has turned into a debate in the Parliament,



both in the Lower House and in the Senate, on what is being deemed as the alternative budget, the national economic transformation master plan, presented by the incoming Prime Minister, Member of Parliament for Siparia, the hon. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] And you know why? That is because that is the only plan that was presented that was worthy of any mature discussion in our democratic society.

In the House of Representatives, the place where people are elected to speak on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, one Opposition MP expounded on some intricate relationships with the transaction with Petrotrin and the whole Government got quiet.

**Hon. Senator:** They get “Pip”.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** The Prime Minister used a term called “Pip”, and it seemed as though all his Members got pipped. They ran from the Lower House. Mr. Vice-President, I have had the honour to sit in this Chamber since 2015 to participate in budget debates, this is the most lacklustre, uninspired debate I have seen from the Government Members in the Senate on a budget—[*Desk thumping*] most lacklustre. Because the budget is just sprinkled with repeated promises, and there are some outright untruths.

You know, there are certain Members on the other side who really worked on their contribution, but unfortunately the thing is, if your entire Government is not performing and you try to show off the good work you might be attempting to do, it really will be a drop in a barrel, and it really just disappears. The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development reiterated a number of issues that she has been talking about for a long time, and unfortunately have not borne fruit. My colleague, Sen. Anita Haynes, spoke well about the promises that were made concerning OJT and so on, and the lack of the vision for development focus on

training and so on. The same with trade. Well, “meh partner” from foreign affairs, he is not here, but—but the Ministers of Government, they really seem to be living in an alternative reality.

We have witnessed a number of them telling us the sky is purple. They are trying to sell us dreams. They are trying to convince us that their truth is the truth, [*Desk thumping*] when it is totally different from what the reality on the ground is. So telling us that you are doing well and telling us in Trinidad and Tobago life is good, telling us that the economy is turning around, telling us that things are booming, does not make it a reality. In fact, it is unparliamentary to mislead the House. [*Desk thumping*]

We have witnessed a Government fire sale on our patrimony for a one-time raise as a significant revenue generator, and the Government who put the assets on sale in the first place, the assets of the State, purchased the state-owned bonds, largely through state-owned companies and then declared the sale a resounding success. Himself onto himself declaring success. We have witnessed the firing of thousands of workers in this country, and yet Members of the Government tell us that unemployment is on a decline.

Mr. Vice-President, the thousands of workers fired under the PNM include 500 workers from TSTT, 150 from CDA, the steelworkers of ArcelorMittal, over 5,000 Petrotrin workers fired, 500 ECCE teachers, 150 traffic wardens, 200 litter wardens, 1,700 CEPEP workers from south, 150 trucking contractors and their employees also make a significant amount. There were 200 from a company under the Ministry which maintains boats. There were 199 workers and 59 lecturers from UTT, and the list goes on.

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** What is your total by the way?

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Yet they are telling us that unemployment is on the decline.

They are living in a total alternative reality. [*Desk thumping*] *Alice in Wonderland*.

**Hon. Members:** Tell us what it is. Give us the figure. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. K. Ameen:** No Minister should be coming here to ask the Opposition to give them figures on employment and unemployment. They are supposed to account to the nation on what the reality is. [*Desk thumping*] I am telling you, Mr. Vice-President, based on what I am aware of that is reported in the media, but the data should be coming from the Minister's office and the Minister has failed to provide that, [*Crosstalk*] because they are trying to tell us that employment is on the increase, that unemployment is low.

So as they continue to tell tales of prosperity, tales of turnaround and good governance, more of our citizens are on the breadline today because of their failure and their incompetence. They talk about prosperity. The prosperity for the PNM has been for friends, family and financiers of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] It is well documented and well reported in the media of a number of wives of Ministers who were awarded Government contracts. Senior Government Members who collected millions in property rentals, and publicly proclaimed friends of the Prime Minister named in allegations, defrauding the State of millions of dollars. That is the prosperity. And they want to tell us that there is no more corruption under the PNM. Totally laughable, totally false. [*Desk thumping*]

I have news for you, nobody in Trinidad and Tobago believes you when you say that. The PNM invented corruption in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] From O'Halloran to One Alexandra to fake oil. The prosperity of the friends and family and financiers. Mr. Vice-President, it does not trickle down to the small businesses in this country that are holding on by razor-thin margins, or in some cases they are being forced to close operations due to the economic downturn, and it is made worse by this Government's inability to manage the nation properly.

The illusory prosperity does not trickle down to the vulnerable in society. This fictitious prosperity does not trickle down to the children of our nation whose futures are being compromised every day because this Government plays Russian roulette with the education sector. It does not trickle down to the mothers who cradle our nation's future, who are forced to steal milk for their babies. This Government has promised sustainable jobs, quality health care, improvement to education, hope for youth, and all we have seen is talk, talk, talk, no action. PNM, promises never materialized. It is their fourth year in office and it is very clear that the PNM talks, but this nation knows that the UNC works. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, the Opposition did an analysis of the four budgets presented by this Government, including budget 2020, and it reveals that there were over 600 promises made in the four-year period. You know, an astounding 65 per cent of those promises were either repeated or failed, but according to the PNM, life is good. I want to very quickly go into a few examples. Mr. Vice-President, the promises ranged in all the areas of governance: energy, social development, agriculture, labour, trade, fiscal measures, and an area of my passion, local government. But I want to spend some of my limited time on an area that I believe really is a core part of national development: education, health, sport and young people.

Mr. Vice-President, in education in the 2015/2016 budget the Government promised the curriculum of our schools would be modernized with a view to generating among our young people an adequate appreciation and understanding of the history of Trinidad and Tobago, especially our history since Independence 1962. "Well, dey eh do nothing concerning dat yet." That is another failed promise.

They promised to develop a culture of personal responsibility and

volunteerism. Well, at first I considered this a failed objective, but then I realized that by September 2019, booklists with supplies requested by students, by teachers, were being circulated, and this is how they achieved this objective. So by suppressing or depriving the schools of their resources, teachers, parents and children now have to walk with their own toilet paper. They have to purchase cleaning supplies, paper. Where security contracts were stopped in schools, the parents have to put up money to pay for security. We also had the contracts of office staff coming to an end and the Ministry not renewing them, and because of the need, again, the parents and the teachers had to pool money to continue to keep the staff members on, and it goes on and on. Even furniture, a lot of fundraising and so on taking place to buy furniture and so on in the schools. So they have achieved that objective to create volunteerism, by force. What they boast and call free education, parents are being forced to pay for it because they cannot buy simple things like toilet paper for schools.

Mr. Vice-President, 2016, again. They said that their investments in the education sector had increased the number of university graduates in Trinidad and Tobago exponentially, and that they would continue to build on this legacy and ensure the future investments in education uphold quality, efficiency, effectiveness and so on. That legacy that they referred to is the legacy of the Government led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that met and passed its own target of 60 per cent tertiary education graduates in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They have reversed that upward trend by the policies that they have in Government.

Curriculum reform—continuing with curriculum reform, I want to move to their ICT education plan which they promised to roll out in the next fiscal year. This was in 2016, eh. They promised to roll it out in 2017, we “eh” see it yet.

They said that they would have the establishment of an overarching ICT in

education in policy. They failed to do that. In fact, Mr. Vice-President, I will tell you, they really had nothing to do in this area. The People's Partnership had already introduced a comprehensive ICT policy in conjunction with UNESCO. "So even if dey doh like Kamla"—let me rephrase—even if they have a dislike for the Leader of Opposition and policies put forward, this was a policy in conjunction with UNESCO and the Organization of American States, and Trinidad and Tobago was appointed the centre for virtual education for Latin America and the Caribbean under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] So they had no work to do there.

They said they were dealing with the training and professional development of teachers and other educators, they have failed to do that. The People's Partnership Government had trained thousands of teachers and principals in ICT at varying levels of competency in addition to the language arts and mathematics mediation and science and so on.

They promised they would have the provision of adequate and appropriate ICT infrastructure in schools, that they have failed. Do you know that not one new computer lab has been established in a single primary or secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago under this Government? Not a single one. There is no increase in the bandwidth connectivity in secondary or primary schools. They promised the curriculum reform which was supposed to include ICT-infused lesson plans for students. ICT in education under the PNM is really a disaster.

You know, sadly, it is a really archaic, dinosaur type of thinking to make fun of the distribution of laptops to children in schools. The Government made fun and they criticized the laptops that were distributed under the People's Partnership, and it was only recently that I understand they purchased 50 laptops for each secondary school, and this was after years of public pressure and scathing attacks

on the former Government. So these laptops are to remain in the schools and are not given to the children.

There was supposed to be establishment of an ICT steering committee; that really has not gone anywhere. ICT is really very non-existent. The People's Partnership between 2010 to 2015 had implemented all of the programmes and policies mentioned in their budgets, in their promises with regard to ICT in education.

Mr. Vice-President, the PNM said that they had a new plan to provide for laptops for each form level in each secondary school, and that laptops would be used during class sessions that require the use of ICT-related tasks. But you know what happened? Students writing CSEC and CAPE were told that they would benefit from, hear what, bring your own device, a BYOD policy for those who would like to use their own device for school based assessments and research. We know that not all children could afford, not all homes could afford the device. But even for those who can afford, having standardized equipment and technology available would allow for proper monitoring, would allow for security and the technology to be installed in case any of these devices are stolen, and to ensure that there is equity across the board with regard to the technology that the students would access. So it is not only about those who can in fact afford, but in terms of what they can afford.

Mr. Vice-President, they also promised additionally the capital investment policy for our schools would ensure that the ageing infrastructure in refurbished and dilapidated buildings are replaced with modern facilities in a timely and cost effective manner. What that means is that they would build up the old schools, the dilapidated facilities and so on. They promised to work in harmony with denominational boards to realize this objective. They have failed miserably.

What are the facts? From 2010 to 2015 there were 106 schools constructed by the Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led Government. [*Desk thumping*] There were 31 primary schools, six secondary and 69 early childhood education centres. In addition, there were a number of additional blocks and labs, extended repairs and upgrades that were undertaken in several schools. I thought the Minister of Education may have taken the opportunity to join this House to add to the debate, but I would like him to visit his alma mater, Hillview, and see that the new block that was started under the People's Partnership is still languishing and awaiting his attention. I hope he could give them some good news soon.

You know what I find tragic though, Mr. Vice-President? In addition to the 106 schools, there are an additional 62 schools that were at various stages of completion when the PNM came into office, that they have left to rot. Nineteen primary schools, six secondary schools and 37 early childhood schools. It is an extensive list. I can submit it for the purpose of the Parliament's record, but education is a cornerstone of national development and it is either pure incompetence or wickedness that you have neglected these schools and neglected that key aspect of national development.

**3.25 p.m.**

You know what is happening to the schools under construction?—children are being placed in buses and being bussed off to rented buildings in other areas. They are being housed in cramped spaces, in buildings that are insufficiently outfitted, and their hours of school are also interrupted. It certainly, Mr. Vice-President, is costing more; the candle is costing more than the funeral. It is costing more in the long run. The price, government funding to rent the building and just to hire the transport alone could have completed some of these structures [*Desk thumping*] but because it was started by the previous government it seems it



is their objective not to complete them.

Recently, an issue with the St. Joseph Secondary School arose and the Minister of Education indicated that the Ministry intended to go and clean-up the overgrown bushes, to put a fence, to put security, to get the public health to intervene to get rid of the rats and snakes and so on, and to minimize the security risk of criminals using the vacant property as hiding space and for illegal activities.

I want them to add up the cost of doing all of that in each school that they have abandoned, and then go and face the electorate and admit the wastage that you are committing in the Ministry of Education; total wastage and total inefficiency.

These new costs, Mr. Vice-President, will roll over to the new government which would be led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and education is a pillar of national development and certainly will not be treated with the scorn and disregard it is being met with by this present Government.

Mr. Vice-President, there are so many broken promises and so little time. I will quickly move to health. 2015, they told us they were going to review the existing hospital strategies and so on, dealing with the construction of hospitals and the refurbishing and so on. The people of Point Fortin and the people of Arima would thank the UNC for starting those hospitals in Point Fortin and Arima. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, these two constituencies have traditionally had more—have had PNM representatives, and these two hospitals were promised by so many PNM Governments “since before I born,” and it took a UNC-led Government to bring this to reality. [*Desk thumping*] So every time—several Members on the other side spoke about that as an achievement, and I know that they are grateful that it was started because it could not start under the PNM at all. In fact, there are a number

of health facilities named as achievements that were started by the UNC, and I really want to see those reach to completion because at the end of the day, it is the people of this country of Trinidad and Tobago that will benefit.

There is not a single new health facility that was started by the PNM Government that they have been able to complete, not a single one. So all of your achievements you boast about in hospital construction, thank the People's Partnership, thank Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

The big Couva children's hospital, of course, a CDAP pharmacy. They have taken—they said they would expedite surgeries and expand and improve the Chronic Disease Assessment Programme. These are actual budget promises, clauses that I am reading, Mr. Vice-President. What they did for the CDAP, they took the state-of-the-art Couva children's hospital with CT scanners and beds and all the equipment, and they turned it into, what they call it?—a CDAP pharmacy?—a drugstore. They really watered-down the quality of it, but I am not worried, the facility is sound and safe, and with the return of the new government, you will see that facility maximized for the sake of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] as the Couva children's hospital; you could call it what name you want.

Mr. Vice-President, they promised to expend substantial resources on training opportunities in all areas of health care, including support staff in professions of allied medicine particularly in the field of nursing. So they wanted to— the goal was to establish universal health coverage for the national community. That was a goal of the People's Partnership as well, and that is why we established the El Dorado Nursing and Allied Health facility that was well-staffed and well-attended. The attendance there, the enrolment has dropped a bit and, in fact, what we are seeing there is a disincentive for persons who want to study nursing because up to very recently the nurses were in the media begging for

their stipends to be paid to them. The Government has been withholding funding from the facility and the stipends to be paid.

If you want these students, some of them really, they really have good intentions and they genuinely cannot afford. The stipend is not a salary, it is just that, a stipend that will allow them to pay their passage to reach to work, buy lunch and so on, and the stipend that is given to the nurses, if they are deprived of that stipend, it could mean that they may have to drop out of studies. And I want to beg this Government, I want to urge this Government, do not let those nursing students be compromised because our nation does need the nurses.

Just quickly with regard to the nursing, Mr. Vice-President, I want to introduce a matter that requires the attention of the Minister of Health. The Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Midwives, and the psychiatric nurses association of Trinidad and Tobago has served a pre-action protocol letter upon the Minister of Health because they are seeking judicial review for a decision taken by him to select a gentleman, whose name I will not call, as one of his appointees to the Nursing Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, the ministerial appointment, Mr. Vice-President, usually comes on recommendation from the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association. The Minister has totally disregarded the representative bodies in making this decision. But what is of significance and why they are asking the Minister to reconsider that appointment, the Minister really has the latitude to choose any person. There are over 8,000 people in the field of nursing and midwifery in Trinidad and Tobago and he can choose any person, but the person he has selected is currently embroiled in a legal matter with the courts, with the other associations, with the other nursing associations and it is proving to be a problem. And I do not

think that it will be harmful, the Minister could choose anyone else, but the person presently selected who sits on that Nursing Council of Trinidad and Tobago is presently embroiled in a legal battle, and I want to take this opportunity to call on the Minister to make another appointment so that you can have better harmony in working with the associations who I have named. Mr. Vice-President, can you tell me how much time I have?

**Mr. Vice-President:** You finish at 3.42.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Good. Thank you. Mr. Vice-President, the Government also promised to review the Children's Life Fund, they are still reviewing it. So many children have died, literally died waiting. There are so many broken promises, Mr. Vice-President, as I told you over 600 promises and more than 65 per cent of them broken. I wanted to talk so much about health and so on, and I will have to put aside for now.

I must touch on local government. Local government reform has been a horse well beaten from this Government. The Government has held a number of public meetings. Those were not consultations. I attended those meetings, and they were public meetings. The local government reform package went to a joint select committee and I am looking forward to that debate. In the budget they have made probably two mentions of things that would be impacted on local government.

The Government brought to legislation to have a new tax on tyres, and they indicated that the revenue from that would go towards establishing a plant or some sort of facility to recycle tyres; that is yet to be established.

In local government we have not seen many promises, but we have seen a number of practices that undermine local government, where regional corporations are being starved for funding, so much so that local government councillors have been evicted from offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago because the rent for

their offices could not be paid, and that is a fact. I can provide information. [Interruption] Yes. Some of it also made the news, I can provide the information and copies of eviction notices that I have. So we had it happening in the Mayaro region, in the Sangre Grande region, we had it happening in Cedros, and I can provide you with some eviction notices from other areas where they gave notices, but they did not proceed with the actual eviction. [Interruption]

So, Mr. Vice-President, quickly I want to respond. You know, Mr. Vice-President, that in 2013 I contested the Chaguanas West by-election [Crosstalk] and Sen. Avinash Singh also contested and we both were defeated candidates. And as young people, Mr. Vice-President, it was a rich, learning experience, so I have a special soft spot for my colleague, Sen. Avinash Singh [Crosstalk] Well, Avinash “geh more licks than me”, so I will bring you the results.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, Senator, there is really no need to shout at the Minister, as much as, you know, she has moved into this lively part of her contribution. Can we refrain— [Crosstalk]—Minister, can we refrain from shouting across the floor at the Member. Continue, Sen. Ameen.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I take all that in good stride. That election really was a wonderful learning experience, and during the campaign and on a number of occasions I had opportunities to sit with now Sen. Avinash who was a candidate at that time, he was the PNM candidate, we met in the temple in Felicity and so on. But, Mr. Vice-President, I want to warm him, Sen. Avinash Singh, do not put your head on a block for your colleagues. [Desk thumping] Do not put your head on a block for your colleagues.

**Hon. Senator:** They will chop it off.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** What you are trying to refer to as “two copybook page”, the file

that my colleague, Sen. Saddam Hosein read from, allegations of serious abuse of state resources, that file, Mr. Vice-President, is worth investigating. And, Mr. Vice-President, I want to tell Sen. Avinash, the note that they passed to him, be careful, when that file is investigated he may have to eat his words.

He spoke about the central audit committee and he read reports from him which was passed to him by his colleagues and, you know, he really made my argument for me. Basically, what he was saying is that the former Prime Minister became aware of wrongdoing, became aware of improprieties within this programme and she acted immediately, she acted on the report and took immediate action, but what does the PNM do? They sweep the corruption under the carpet. The Darryl Smith report on sexual harassment [*Desk thumping*] we are still waiting for it. The Member of Parliament, the sitting Member of Parliament who several warnings went out in public about her appointment as a Minister, they swept it under the carpet until the police arrested the MP. The A&V Drilling, a friend of the Prime Minister, \$100 million syphoned off, they under swept it under the carpet.

So, Mr. Vice-President, the difference with how corruption is responded to by the various governments, I want to tell you, the UNC has an approach where we take immediate action whether it is to have an investigation and have the wrongdoers brought to justice, but the PNM continues to cover upon, sweep things under the carpet and hide for their friends and their financiers. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, [*Crosstalk*] one of the issues as well has to do with the Government's priorities and where they spend the money. But very quickly, Mr. Vice-President, I want to bring to your attention, I want to bring to the attention of this House, there are three companies that I want to speak to you about. One, is PICAL Services Company Limited; two, Clydon Enterprises company limited; and three, Cummings & Associates Company Limited. Mr. Vice-President, I have

documents that were filed indicating who the directors of these companies and the shareholders are, and I could provide it for the Parliament for the record.

Also, Mr. Vice-President, I want to raise some questions. Contract number one, Besson Street demolition. This project was managed by the UDeCOTT, and the contract was to demolish the building, and it was awarded to PICAL Services Company Limited [*Interruption*] and, Mr. Vice-President, based on the documents and the registration of the company, there is a sitting Government Senator who has an interest in PICAL. PICAL Services was awarded the contract through selective tendering. In other words, you hand-picked them. During the demolition the major beam in the building was knocked down and this building collapsed, it was very unsafe for persons in the community and for children in particular; so the work was done badly.

So the facts are that this contract was awarded by UDeCOTT that PICAL Services was awarded the contract, and the contract was awarded by sole select, by select tendering, in other words, they were hand-picked. And the question, of course, is whether a sitting Government Senator has an interest in PICAL. Again, Mr. Vice-President, and coming to the point of—I have five more minutes? Of coming to the point to endorse—[*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Cummings:** Who built the house in Philippine? Tell us that. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. K. Ameen:** So, Mr. Vice-President, I raise this matter because UDeCOTT falls under the Office of the Prime Minister. Contract number two, PICAL with regard to HDC government garbage collection services.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Your time is now up.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** You did not tell me five minutes. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Cummings and Sen. Haynes [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. K. Ameen:** You did not tell me when I had five more minutes.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Minister and Sen. Hosein. Thank you. Leader of Government Business. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I join the debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year— 2020) Bill, 2019. I am the last speaker before the Minister wraps up for two reasons, one, I am protecting my voice; I protected it a little more than Sen. Vieira.

And secondly, I have had the honour and privilege to hear everybody speak, plus I also have the distinguished privilege that after I speak nobody can rebut me [*Laughter*] but I think we have had a reasonably good debate. As normal, the Members on the Government bench distinguished themselves [*Desk thumping*] but I want to pay tribute to three Senators as Leader of Government Business, and it is the three Senators who do not hold executive office. Sen. Foster Cummings, [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Lester Henry [*Desk thumping*] and Sen. Daniel Dookie, [*Desk thumping*] they were excellent, and I think in the next administration we have to reconsider that. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

We had very good and balanced contributions from the Independent bench as per normal [*Desk thumping*] and if I must say, the Opposition was a big disappointment. [*Desk thumping*] They are a beaten team. The match “eh” start yet and they have their hands up on the air. Even captain Mark who normally plays a good inning, if I should say so myself, was so unimpressive, he had no good shots to hit, and that gives you the state of the United National Congress at this point in time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance, again, for an excellent budget, his fifth budget, the members of staff of the Ministry of Finance, the Minister of Planning and Development who I should



say is the unsung hero in the budget presentation because she has responsibility for the Development Programme which is really the true driver of the economy. But when we took office in 2015, I just want to read the theme of the budgets as we progressed.

2016, “Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let’s Do This Together”, you could follow the progression; state of play was bad. 2017, “Shaping a Brighter Future - a Blueprint for Transformation and Growth.” 2018, “Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on the Sustainable Path.” 2019, everybody criticized it, “Turnaround”, and today we say 2020, “Stability, Strength and Growth”. We saw the future, we planned for the future, and today we can say with confidence that we have performed well. [*Desk thumping*]

Despite all the economic pundits, and I am stepping out my crease to say this, but it took a geologist Prime Minister and a civil engineer Minister of Finance to put this economy back on track. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me indicate, and I do not want to repeat too much what the Minister in the Ministry of Finance had stated, but these are the macroeconomic parameters that we have turned around. Improvement in GDP moving from negative 6.3 in 2016, 2.3 in 2017 before stabilizing in 2018, and achieving a 1.7 per cent growth in the first quarter of 2019.

The latest World Bank estimates 0.9 per cent growth for 2019. Growth estimated 2020, 2021 and 2022, 1.9, 4.1 and 3.6 respectively. Inflation, lowest in the world with 0.9 per cent, under 1 per cent. An increased collection of non-oil revenue. Oil and gas royalties exceeding \$2.7 billion, projected deficit of 3.9 billion for 2019 compared to a budgeted deficit of 5.7 million, which is a reduction of 1.7 billion. Net public debt 62.0 per cent of GDP; gross official reserves US 7.1 billion or eight months cover and the list goes on and on.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to compliment Sen. Rambharat because he hit the nail on the head, it could not have been said more succinctly and more articulately. The budget, and all due respect to Sen. Ahye, the budget is not a “Word document”, it is an “Excel document” it is about revenue and it is about expenditure. If your revenue is greater than your expenditure, you have a surplus. This country has not had a surplus for over a decade.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** May I?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Please.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** When I said “Word document”—

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** I know, I know.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:**—it was contrasting with figures, so it has nothing to do with—oh, so you were being funny then? I see. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** And you are one of my favourite Senators because—

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** I thought I was the only one with a sense of humour.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:**—apart from being a natural science student, my love was literature, I just could not see a career out of it. So when you quote all these Keats and Shelley, I enjoy it.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** Okay. I understand.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** It is about expenditure and revenue and then if revenue is less than expenditure, you have a deficit. And I have said this in this House on numerous occasions, there are only three sources of government revenue: taxes, the sale of public assets which is a one-off function, and borrowing. Money does not grow on trees so if you do not deal with your revenue, as was articulated by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, you are out of this game, and my contribution today will focus largely on energy revenues because energy is the driver of the economy. And I do not want to pre-empt myself, but it is not how much gas we

produce, but it is what we earn from the gas, and I will deal with that later.

But, Mr. Vice-President, let me do some rebuttal, and not rebuttal, but some comments in some cases. I particularly enjoyed the contribution of Sen. Seepersad. She got me a little scared when she was asked by the Vice-President, “how long is your speech”, and she said, “38 minutes”. You know, she is normally very brief. So I said, wow! I hope that does not send a signal for later in the year. But having said that, she made some excellent points on renewables, it was well-researched and it was well-presented. [*Desk thumping*]

But I just want to share with her a few facts, and to show why continuation of policy is so important in governance. We were going to build an aluminium smelter, a new source of revenue for this country in foreign exchange; the Chinese got the contract. We built the most modern electricity generation plant at La Brea, the TGU plant with a capacity of 730 megawatts. When the UNC came into office in 2010 they scrapped it, but we were saddled with 770 megawatts of power that we could not use. And to make matters worse, it was way down in La Brea and there was no substation to transmit that power to the north which is the big user. But when you have independent power producers in something called a “take-or-pay contract”, because they would not put down a power plant without a contract to sell the power.

**3.55 p.m.**

When we took office in 2015, T&TEC was paying TGU \$45 million a month for unused power. Thank God we hustled and finished the Ghandi Village substation, so a lot of that power could now come to the north. The bill has been reduced to approximately \$25 million per month. What that means is the country has a generating capacity of 1750 megawatts but it only using 1350 megawatts. There is a 400 megawatts surplus that we have to pay for. We will go into

renewables because we committed to Paris, but we will be paying for that electricity twice. It is a reality we have to face, and that shows when successive administrations go into office they have to be very careful. That is when they scuttle projects of the previous administration. This is a classic example.

The other thing to note about renewables is that Trinidad is one of three countries in the world that produces its entire power supply from gas turbines. Turkmenistan, Qatar, Bahrain and Trinidad, four. I always say, what is the sense of an electric car when you are generating the power from coal? So all the countries that banded they are into renewables, once they are generating electricity from coal that is where the danger is. But, we are committed to Paris. I am not saying renewables is not the future, but I am just showing you the current environment.

Having said that, gas turbines, power generation, and let me deal with Sen. Saddam Hosein. He is a young man. He came in here and I was impressed with some of his contributions. I listened to him on television this morning because I was in some meetings. In China, in Japan, he would have been reprimanded so badly for being disrespectful to your elders. [*Desk thumping*] He called Prof. Julien a nuisance.

**Hon. Senator:** No.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Yes, he did, I heard him on television.

**Hon. Senator:** Yes, he did.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Prof. Julien was instrumental in taking flares low pressure gas off the east coast and started to pipe it onshore to generate power in Trinidad. That led to the formation of the NGC. Look how much billions they took from the NGC. It is Prof. Julien's creation. Prof. Julien was instrumental in Point Lisas. Prof. Julien is the single most important person who convinced Patrick Manning to get into LNG. The most money this country has ever earned in its

history is 2007/2008, and hear this young upstart, sorry to say that, could get up in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and call Prof. Julien a nuisance. He should apologize to him.

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** Shame on you. Shame! Shame! Shame on you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Obika:** Disrespectful.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Shame on you all for dropping the \$35 million case. That is what shame is.

**Sen. Obika:** Disrespectful.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Shame. That is shame.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** I could stop talking now, you know. I have made my point. You have to understand where we came from, and where the wealth of this country was generated, and I take serious offence to that, and umbrage. And this is the generation that the UNC is putting on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Apologize, you know.

**Sen. S. Hosein:** Apologize for what?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Apologize? I want a written apology to Prof. Julien. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Leader of Government Business, so I have allowed, even in the contribution, as you are responding to comments that would have gone before, the little back and forth, because, again, it is a debate, so that happens, but when we get into that realm of pointing and telling people what to do, we are trying to stay away from that.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Please, I stand guided.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Members on the left as well, allow the Member to contribute, and continue. Leader of Government Business.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Mr. Vice-President, thank you, and I am guided. [*Crosstalk*] We are talking about revenue. As I said earlier, it is not about how much gas we produce or how much oil we produce, it is how much revenue the country gets from it. Because oil and gas are depleting assets, they are a wasting resource, and there is a principle of petroleum taxes that has to be honoured. The taxation system for oil and gas, oil in particular, is as follows. You take a royalty from the top, it ranges between 10 per cent and 12½ per cent. That means 10 to 12½ per cent of your gross revenue comes off the top to the State.

Then there is something called Petroleum Profits Tax, which is a windfall tax, because you are in an industry where commodity prices bear no relation to cost of production. So if somebody drops a bomb in Saudi Arabia, the oil price jumps to \$100. You cannot reasonably expect the oil companies to gain all that money, so the State has a right to take back some of that. That is what petroleum profit tax is about, and then there is the normal what is called PPT corporation tax. When we had the decrease in revenue, significantly in 2015, 2016, and 2017, one of the key issues that the country needs to understand is that there are two types of licenses that operate in Trinidad. One is called the Exploration and Production Licence which bp has most of it, and then there is a more advanced contract, which was pioneered by Mr. Andrew Jupiter when he was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, called the Production Sharing Contract, where the State does not take taxes but they take a percentage off the oil or gas.

However, when we moved to gas, gas never had a royalty, and bp was operating only on the Exploration and Production Licence. So bp who produces 55 to 58 per cent of the country's natural gas resources was not subject to a royalty, and when they are only subject—and there is no PPT on gas either. Not PPT, no SPT. So you had a situation, which in my view and in the view of the Minister of

Finance and the Prime Minister, was untenable, that here you have your largest gas producer only subject to a profit tax, which you can know how to manipulate that. So when within one month of coming into office bp comes to the Prime Minister and says, “Sir, based on our capital write-offs we would not have a tax liability until 2024”, imagine you come into a government with three days’ supply because of your overdraft of running the country and your biggest gas producer comes to you and say we will not have a tax liability until 2024? That is where we were.

That is why the Prime Minister—happy birthday, Sir, one day late—had to take the lead, because this was very, very serious matters. They say, “No, one school here to finish paint”, and whether vine growing on it, whether this contractor was not paid, this hit at the heart of the economy. This hit at the jugular. And if that matter was not sorted out, this country write was going to hell in a hand basket. That is why the Prime Minister took the lead, he reconstituted the Standing Committee on Energy. The first thing he did is that he met with the leaders of the oil and gas companies. That resulted in the first policy decision to impose a 12½ per cent royalty on gas effective 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2018.

Mr. Vice-President, this country, on the revenue side, earned TT \$2.7 billion of royalty payments in the calendar year 2018. That is what we would not have had, and even with that we still had problems in 2018, eh. And despite some fairly weak gas prices in the first half of quarters one and quarter two, 2019, we have already earned \$1.3 billion. This is money that was actually sourced and commissioned by this People’s National Movement administration. [*Desk thumping*] And why bp did not have any tax liability? The very boast they boast that Angelin is their project, you know what bp conceded to get Angelin sanctioned?—that they could write-off the full exploration cost on any drilling, full exploration cost against their revenue in the year in which it was done, in one year

amortizing all their capital. Ask Sen. West, you ever hear about that in any taxation regime?

**Sen. West:** Not at all. Not at all.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** You know what is the price to drill an offshore exploration well? US \$100 million. If you are drilling three for the year, that is US 300 million by six. That is almost \$2 billion in tax write-offs in the year.

They went further, the UNC administration, other capital cost was amortized at 20 per cent in a straight line. They went and change it on behalf of the oil companies to 50 in the first year, 30 in the second year, and 20 in the third year, an accelerated depreciation. That is why the revenue dropped, you know, not primarily because of lower production and lower prices, which was a big contributor too, but that was the single most important factor. And when in this year's budget you will see part of the fiscal measure is to bring it back to a straight line, based on the Minister of Finance presentation. So, we dealt with the royalty situation. Then there was another critical matter, revenue leakage, especially out of LNG. That is when the Prime Minister appointed what was called the empowered negotiating team which was led by myself and Minister Young, and included technocrats and members of the National Gas Company. We held negotiation with bp. We got them to pay historical claims, legacy issues we call it, of \$1 billion. They signed up in December 2018, which is the first quarter of this fiscal year.

Then we went into some serious, serious negotiations with Shell. Shell legacy payment amounted to \$1.9 billion, moneys we would not have had, and because we—the Prime Minister went to these companies, the Prime Minister took us on what they themselves called a world tour. For 10 days he left this country, he went to The Hague, he went to London, he went to Huston, leading a team to



tell the oil companies, we have shareholders too, and the oil companies listened. I want to give them the recognition today, that they understood the Government's position and they met us half way.

Mr. Vice-President, at this point in time I want to go on the records and let this country know, and that I want to publicly recognize the work of the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the hon. Stuart Young in this entire House. [*Desk thumping*] They, on the Opposition Bench, both here and in the other place, do call him Minister of everything. Mr. Vice-President, I prefer to have a Minister of everything everyday than a Minister of nothing.

**Sen. Obika:** He is a Minister of nothing, because he gets nothing done.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** You know, they had a lot of Ministers of nothing, you know. I will call one because I know him well, because we fought in Moruga/Tableland. The hon. Clifton De Coteau.

**Hon. Senator:** Who is that? [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** He was the Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration, only God and the UNC knows what that means. [*Laughter*] Eighty per cent of his portfolio, the Minister with all perks like the Minister of Finance, you know; 80 per cent of his portfolio was the historical buildings around the Queen's Park Savannah, nothing was done on it. Today the Prime Minister, leading a small committee of Cabinet, finishing all of them, which is a sideshow on the Prime Minister's main portfolio. Minister of nothing. But I say no more, but I really want to go on record to recognize the work and the contribution of these negotiations from Minister Young. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Obika:** Tell us how you close down Petrotrin.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** I am coming to that now. When we came into office the gas supply was moving south. In 2017 gas production was 3.3 billion cubic feet

per day. Through hard work, through negotiations with the energy companies, we got it up to 3.6 in 2018. It is still a hard fight.

In February 2019 it peaked at 3.9 billion cubic feet per day, and as we speak we are trying to get an average for 2019 of 3.8 billion cubic feet a day. But I make the point of production, but you need not eye production as your eye revenue, because production may not automatically reflect in a proportional relationship the revenue. So, we are getting better in the gas side. I will now deal with the Ryder Scott Report, which is the reserves of the country. In 2016 the Ryder Scott Report indicated—now, Mr. Vice-President, let me just explain something. This country produces 1.3 billion cubic feet—1.3 trillion cubic feet of gas per annum. That is what you produce. If you do not find 1.3 your life is limited. So every year just to stay where we are we have to find a field approximating the size of 1.3 trillion cubic feet. It is called walking up the down escalator. 2017 was the first time we replaced more than the reserves we produced, so a year-on-year growth was experienced for the first time since 2004, and in 2018 we just about even. So, while we are not out of the woods as yet, we are getting significantly better in terms of the gas profile. How much time I have again?

**Mr. Vice-President:** You finish at 4.23.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Right. So, I will leave gas for the while. Petrotrin, we have articulated clearly the haemorrhaging of Petrotrin, \$15 billion accumulated losses over a five-year period. A \$13 billion debt, something had to be done.

We took the bold step, again through the leadership of the Prime Minister, to restructure and to remodel Petrotrin. Everybody knows Heritage is now a profitable entity on the exploration and production side. They have declared, I think, \$534 million in the first three quarters of the operation, and we expect better things from them as they ramp up the production. Virtually, the entire refinancing

package, approved without a government guarantee, was sanctioned from the cash flow of Heritage. They paying the debt from the cash flow of Heritage, because exploration production is lucrative business. The haemorrhage in the whole system was the refinery, and, we said, okay, the refinery had two fundamental weaknesses; one, it had a refining capacity of 150,000 barrels of oil per day, and we were only producing 40-something thousand, so you had to import 100,000 barrels. And the refinery economics based on the cost structure of the refinery, and the age of the plants you were losing US \$5 per barrel on every barrel you refine.

**Sen. Obika:** Would the Minister clarify?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** No. What that meant is that you had to do something fundamental, so we decided that the State will get out of the refinery business. We will put it out on the international market through a transparent process. All that has been explained by the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and myself. At a meeting in Point Fortin, I recall it, early in the day, I was analyzing the current scenario, and I said something, probably out of turn slightly, but I would not deny what I said. I said it seems as though based on what I have just outlined that this refinery will very likely go a foreign investor. I said it. It is on the record.

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** And you got blows for saying that.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** You know how much blows I get from them? [Laughter] They said I had a 1 percenter waiting to get it. They said all kinds of things. I stood my ground. I did not see a need to apologize, but as the line Minister for Energy probably I should not have made a statement like that. I accept it.

Lo and behold, everybody was saying in this country, including you in the UNC in particular, that we should use our best efforts to give it to a local entity. We did not give it to a local entity. We did not give it to Patriotic, you know.

Patriotic won the bid fair and square. All hell turned loose. They are saying it is a political manoeuvre. They wanted to go to court. Yesterday they withdraw it. [Laughter] The Leader of the Opposition asking, “How they going to raise the money?” I say, “Doh ask me, ask them.” Two months before that, the Leader of the Opposition wrote Ancel Roget to come back into an alliance with them, you know, and now because the UNC strategy is to disrupt, not in the positive sense of business, you know, but a disruptive force. “Catspraddle”.

**Sen. Obika:** Standing Order 46(4), Mr. Vice-President, he is insulting, 46(6), imputing improper motives. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Sandals, you see the same thing. What they are doing there is—I do not want to say much on this deal—putting sand in the rice on Patriotic’s attempt to raise the financing, you know. That is all they are doing.

**Sen. Obika:** Standing Order 46(6), Mr. Vice-President, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is imputing improper motives on the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Continue. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** So, that is the state of play. This is a work in progress, I will say no more. As the line Minister I have to be very careful of what I say.

But what I have done today, Mr. Vice-President, albeit late, is that I have shown how important the revenue side is, and the revenue side, a great deal of responsibility falls on the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, because that is where most of our sustainable income, and in particular our foreign exchange earning comes from. What we do there is very critical, and what we do there, we are dealing with international organizations. What we do there cannot be broadcast ball-by-ball commentary to the population. You cannot come here and want a ball-by-ball commentary on everything I do for the day, or everything I did last week.

You have to trust the system, because these are complex international commercial negotiations, and the country has a lot to benefit if it is handled properly but also the country has a lot to lose if it is mishandled.

And, Mr. Vice-President, in closing, again I want to say that this whole energy transformation has been pioneered by our distinguished Prime Minister Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, [*Desk thumping*] ably assisted by Minister Stuart Young, and my good self. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Public Administration and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West):** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I would like to start by thanking my colleagues in this place. They have done such an excellent job of addressing all the issues to do with the budget. I am tempted to accept the recommendation of one of my Independent colleagues, and say, I thank you and I beg to move.

But before I do that, there are a couple of issues that I would like to address: The first one is the allegation that the Opposition keeps throwing out, that the PNM does not have a plan, we put together a mishmash budget, we “doh” have any ideas. They have this national transformation plan and they have the answer to take the country forward. I would like to remind the country that last year they had a green, and silver, and blue plan. I “doh” know where that went to. This year is a national transformation plan. I do not know what it would be next week.

In contrast, what the PNM did, under the leadership of the former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, was called the leading lights in the country together from the private sector, from the public sector, and from academia, and said work, and this was committees put together that was bipartisan. It was not a PNM group of people. It was everybody who it was felt could contribute to a significant way to this. And the mandate that they got was, how do we move this country forward?

What do we want this country to look like? And they sat down over an extended period and came up with a plan that was eventually called *Vision 2020*. And the PNM understanding that this five-year cycle of government does not benefit the country a lot, we have to have a long-term vision, a long-term plan, set out implementing the vision in that document.

**4.25 p.m.**

We were voted out of power in 2010; the people were misled and they drank the Kool-Aid. And because of that five years of mismanagement we were put back 10 years in terms of our development. So we had to change from *Vision 2020* to *Vision 2030*, but the PNM has a long-term plan. And we are systematically putting that plan in place for the development and forward movement of the country of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I read in the newspaper where the founder, the leader of a recently formed political party said, “Well, if *Vision 2020* is a plan, why are we not getting reports on how that is progressing”? I would like to say to that person and to all people who are not sure what we are doing, that when we laid the budget in this House on Monday, among the documents that were presented, it was presented and it is presented every year, is the *Vision 2030 Achievement Report 2018-2019*. So not only are we implementing that vision but we are reporting on our progress. And maybe our progress is not as quick as we would like it to be for all kinds of reasons, but we are heading in a direction.

Another accusation that is often thrown at the PNM is that we do not consult and we do not listen to the people. Sen. Deyalsingh said, I think it was Sen. Deyalsingh, that we need a national plan to take the country forward because the five-year cycle does not work for us, and we agree. When we came into power in 2015, we said to the other side, let us lay this vision that is a vision of the nation,

not of the PNM, before the Parliament, debate it, give us your ideas, we will have a cut and thrust of debate, and come up with a plan that we could all agree on, so regardless of who comes into power we know where the nation is going. The People's Partnership refused to do that. So this Government is proceeding with its plan and we hope that the nation will see the light and determine who is guiding the country in the right way.

My colleague from the Ministry of Public Utilities dealt with the so-called national transformation plan, so I will leave that alone. Another key issue that was raised by several people is the budget deficit. Now, yes, we have been operating a budget deficit for the last four years, but you know the circumstances in which we met the economy; you know what we have had to face; you know what we have had to deal with and therefore, the budget deficit did not come about as a result of indiscriminate spending. We actually worked hard at bringing down the excessive spending that was introduced in the prior administration, moving from a high of 63 per cent to an average between \$50 billion and \$53 billion. And so the objective that we are trying to achieve is to arrive at a surplus budget, but we cannot move from income of \$58 billion in 2014 to \$37 billion in 2016 and balance the budget, unless we fire all the public servants and stop taking care of the needs of the hospitals, and stop putting our children through schools. So it is a process that we have been dealing with. We have brought the deficit down from double figures to single figures and we are heading in the direction where we will get to a surplus budget in the not too distant future.

I would remind you as well that the last surplus budget in Trinidad and Tobago was by a PNM Government in 2008 and the years before that also was surplus governments. And despite the high earnings from revenue in 2013, 2014, 2015, the budgets were deficit budgets. That was a reckless approach to

budgeting; that was reckless spending, we have not followed that pattern. We can explain and justify why in our term we have had to deal with a surplus budget and we have explained to you how we are dealing with it.

In respect of budgeting as well, a couple of Senators, Sen. Seepersad in particular, said we need to revisit the budget process and she suggested that we may want to copy our neighbours who have legislation that stipulates what the budget process is. As far as I could ascertain, all of those countries in the region who have done that, have done that in response to an IMF programme. Because what needs to be put at the top of the agenda when an IMF programme is in place, is the country's ability to repay its debt. But having said that, I looked at some of the legislation and my take on it is that a lot of what is legislated in that document or in those documents reflects in effect what we do here. There are things that may be worthy of consideration and worthy of merit, but what I would say to you is that it is difficult to predetermine what issues may arise that may force you to declare a deficit budget.

So if you have legislation that says you are only allowed to declare a deficit budget in these circumstances, then what happens if something like the 2014/2015 issue arises and the legislation does not prescribe for that? Another—as I was thinking about this issue, another thought that came to mind is that legislation—and 2010 to 2015 taught me this. Legislation works for people who are concerned about following the rules. It does not work well when you are dealing with people who are not following the rules and if you look at our criminal legislation, when you pass legislation to make something a crime, it does not mean that people will not commit the crime. It just means that there are consequences for committing that crime.

So, I am positive that the people who drafted the legislation for the



establishment of the Green Fund Levy fund, were comfortable that the fund could only be used for environmental projects. I am positive that they were happy that their drafting was sound enough to protect that fund. But during 2012 to 2015, although the then Government accepted that they could not take money out of the fund, what they did they was they mortgaged the fund away, in effectively taking the money out of the fund and using it for purposes other than what it was intended. So when you are intent on doing a particular thing or getting involved in particular mischief, you will find a way to do it. And what legislation like that does is that it stymies the ability of people who are prepared to follow the rules to do what needs to be done in circumstances. So, yes, calling for legislation to review the process may be something that is worthy of consideration. But we have to bear in mind the fact that we cannot stymie the people who follow the rules while people who do not follow the rules are left to do what they will.

So, we are looking at the issue of balancing the budget. And as I said, you know what our circumstances were, income dropping from \$58 billion in 2014 to \$37 billion in 2018. So, if we are in those circumstances to balance the budget, what do we do? Do we not build new hospitals; do we not increase the minimum wage; do we not pay CEPEP workers more so that they can afford the rising cost of living; do we not provide pensions to the retirees? What do we do? So we are saying that is not the answer. We need to continue to bring health care closer to the people who need it; we need to ensure that the lowest paid among us can be able to afford to live a decent lifestyle; we need to provide supplies in the schools and medicine in the hospitals; we need to continue to do that. So there are basic costs that we would have to continue to bear. So it is not about cutting expenditure further. It is about ensuring that we increase the revenue that will allow us to meet these basic needs, because we are talking about basic needs. And how are we

seeking to do that, and we have had this plan on the table since 2015 and if we had been allowed to move forward quicker we would be more advanced in terms of balancing the budget.

So, the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. What is the Opposition's resistance to the Revenue Authority? We have met with the staff of the Revenue Authority; we have met with members of the public; we have met with the Chambers; we have met with businessmen and although in each group you will have some concerns, there is a general acceptance of the concept of a revenue authority. The Opposition is not prepared to accept it. Why? If we get—what the recent amnesty told me when we collected—instead of collecting \$500 million as the Minister of Finance predicted when it was introduced, we collected \$2.38 billion. What does that say to me? It says to me that there is a lot of uncollected revenue out there. Because it certainly does not represent all of the people who have not been paying their taxes; that is just a percentage. There is more to be collected. We need to improve the efficiency of collection. The Revenue Authority will do that. Why are we not getting the support? [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. A. West:** Gaming, the gaming—

**Sen. Deonarine:** Hon. Minister, would you give way? Assuming that the legislation does not get passed, the revenue authority legislation does not get passed, what are some alternative measures that we can adopt to ensure we increase the efficiency of the revenue collection?

**Sen. The Hon. A. West:** I am happy to deal with that, but I do not want to preempt the debate that will start soon in this place on the very issue, so I will address that in my presentation at the time. Okay, another area in respect of which we should be collecting more money is from the gambling sector. The gambling sector is making millions and millions of dollars every year; billions of dollars

every year. We are collecting nothing. Why? All we need is the legislation to regulate them and tax them. What is the resistance to that? The Opposition cannot explain that to me either. Property tax was supposed to be the backbone on which local government reform was anchored. The Opposition is resisting that. Up to last week Friday the Leader of the Opposition said, “We are going to abandon property tax when we get back into government and return land and building taxes”.

As I have said before, the difference between property tax and land and building tax is that the rate of property tax is lower and the rate of property tax is lower because we have come to the point where we need to revalue buildings. Because they have not been valued since the 1950s. There has not been a broadband revaluation of property since 1950. So if we had left the land and building taxes as is and done a valuation, 6½ per cent rather than 1 per cent to 5 per cent. Property tax and land and building taxes are essentially the same thing. So mamaguying people and telling them we are getting rid of the property tax just because it was the anchor on which you based your last campaign, where does it take us?

I had said to Sen. Deyalsingh when he raised, I think last year, the suggestion of providing tax relief in respect of flood prevention apparatus. I said to him that it is something that we are happy to consider but we are doing a VAT gap analysis now, so let us determine how much these measures cost us before we look at increasing the list of incentives. We have received the draft report on VAT alone, the VAT gap. And based on that report we are losing \$3 billion of revenue because of improper compliance by the Board of Inland Revenue and we are losing close to \$5 billion because of policy decisions in respect to VAT. So where we zero-rate or exempt items, that is a policy decision that produces a loss. So the

combined loss between policy and compliance is \$8billion. That alone would get rid of the gap.

And remember this study was done after we had fixed the zero-rating list to take off the chocolates and the maraschino cherries and the rum. After we had fixed it, the people came in and did the review and said because of the policy decisions we had made to provide relief under VAT, we were losing close to \$5 billion and this is only VAT. We have corporation tax, we have petroleum tax, all of these taxes provide huge incentives. So the policy gap and the compliance gap in Trinidad and Tobago, although the budget refers to a gap of \$5 billion, in my humble view that is grossly conservative. The gap is huge and we need to close it. If we are to take Trinidad and Tobago forward and properly support all our citizens and do all the things that we need to do in terms of prisons, in terms of police, in terms of the physically and mentally challenged and all the issues you have raised which are all excellent issues, we have to collect money from taxpayers. It cannot be that some taxpayers bear a burden and some of them do not. So how do we change that?

We have dealt with the issue of forex overvaluation, so I would not mention that. One issue that Sen. Seepersad raised was the stock exchange, that we need to do something to incentivize. And why are we not doing as well as Jamaica does. But Jamaica and Trinidad are two different countries. Now, there are two factors in Trinidad of which the Government has control that are not as advantageous as they are in Jamaica, and that would be the tax rate. Because in Jamaica they have exempted the tax on SMEs for the first five years after they list, in Trinidad we brought it down from the standard rate to 10 per cent. And the other thing is that the process of registration and reporting is a bit more onerous in Trinidad than it is in Jamaica. Those two things we can, if we decide, we can fix. But those are not

the only and in my view those are not really the important factors that create the difference between Trinidad and Jamaica in terms of the success of their secondary market. What is more important and more impactful in my view is that the Jamaican private sector in terms of investment is more active and more aggressive.

Trinidad and Tobago citizens by and large, even when they choose to invest on the stock exchange, want safe investments. SMEs, secondary market companies tend to be more risky investments and we do not want to put off on such risk. In Jamaica the rate of interest is very high and therefore, if companies want to get capital to grow and develop, they have to find a cheaper source of funding and therefore they are forced to go to the capital market. In Trinidad we do not have that problem, the rate of interest is relatively low. We have high liquidity in Trinidad, we have low liquidity in Jamaica, easy access to lending funds. We have conservative lending policies in Jamaica; successful businesses in Trinidad much more easily get loan financing. We have tight liquidity in Jamaica, not so much in Trinidad.

More importantly in my view, and I am talking now as somebody who advised businesses in the past. And one of the things I tried to get some of my clients to do, because I was a tax advisor, was to give more consideration to joining the stock market. And they were interested until they started—so they were not put off by the difficulty, the relative difficulty of registering, they were not put off by the fact that they would still have to pay 10 per cent corporation tax. In fact, they were quite excited by the thought of reducing their taxes from 25 per cent as it then was to 10 per cent. What put them off was the fact that they want to maintain control of their companies and they want to maintain the privacy of their information. Until we change that mode of thinking, it is going to be near impossible to stimulate the stock exchange the way we want to stimulate it, the

way Jamaica has been stimulating it. So it is more than just what the Government can do. We have to change the psyche of Trinidad and Tobago. That is not so easy.

VAT refund has been raised by a couple of people, Sen. Teemal, Sen. Seepersad. I will start by saying, do not forget that we met a \$4.5 billion VAT refund liability when we came into office. [*Crosstalk*] When we came into office it was \$4.5 billion. And it was \$4.5 billion in a period where oil prices were over US \$90 a barrel [*Crosstalk*] and revenue of the country got up to \$57 billion. The revenue of this Government in its first full year came down by \$20 billion. So we have been trying to pay off the VAT refunds because we know the impact it has on companies, we know that. And we do not want to stymie their progress but we have had challenges. So the Minister of Finance has come up with an option, a plan to settle some of it with a commitment to move towards making the VAT refunds current. I remember the last Minister of Finance under the People's Partnership promised to make VAT refunds current and he had the money to do it but it was not done. This Government is trying to get it done. We came up with a solution, it is not ideal, we would like to be able to pay more interest, we would like to be able to pay cash now, but we are doing the best we can in the circumstances.

Sen. Drayton, I am sorry he is not here, talked about youngsters not being able to afford housing because the housing sector is unregulated and the prices are unregulated. I would like to ask Sen. Drayton if he wants Trinidad and Tobago to go back to a system of regulating prices. We were there, it did not work, businesses complained, so we moved to a free economy but people are still saying to the Government, control the price of houses, control the price of food, we cannot do that in a free economy. So, if you are an attorney or an engineer and you are

saying this to me, if I ask you, well, should I control your fees as well, your response may be different. We cannot reprobate and condemn and promote in the same breath. We have a free economy, demand and supply is what controls prices.

Prices in Trinidad and Tobago in respect of houses, in particular, are amazingly inelastic. When anything happens in the States, when the Fannie Mae and whatever happened—the financial crisis happened some decades ago or if there is a significant change in property taxes in the States, the prices of houses drop like hot potato. In Trinidad and Tobago somebody will hold on to property until they get the price. There is nothing the Government could do about that. So what we are doing is trying to provide housing for the most vulnerable. And it is a slow process because there is a long list as we said, but we are doing what we can. But what I can say to Sen. Drayton is if the people of Trinidad and Tobago lose their key to their brain and put the UNC back in power and they implement the national transformation plan, which includes raising the repo rate, the prices of housing will become even more unaffordable because the rate of interest on mortgages will go up.

Sen. Hosein made the most amazing—I mean, there was very little to note from these contributions today. But he made the most amazing comment about putting competent people to work in Ministry of National Security. Now tell me. I have two words for him, “Resmi Ramnarine”. I say no more on that. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

I am so sorry that Sen. Chote left, because there is a response to the main issue that she raised which is, why are we allocating \$10 million but the Revised Estimate shows \$100,000? And that is because the Revised Estimate is a picture taken at a point in time which is before the year end. Now, I know this personally because when I was looking at the budget of the public administration, there was a

figure for ICT costs. And the budget that was approved last year, the allocation was \$67 million and the Revised Estimate said \$66,000. And I said, but how could this be, I was not there so I did not know. How could this be? And it was explained to me that this is just the figure that existed in Treasury at the time. We had actually spent the \$67-odd billion. But the Treasury, when they were preparing the document before the end of the financial year, used the figure that they would have had on their records. So there are all kinds of reasons why so late in the year, the expenditure would not be close to the allocation. It could be that because of the transparency that we all demand in government, people had to go out to tender, the tender could have failed, they came back three months later, the contract was just awarded, the release was requested, the Minister did not have cash on hand; there are all kinds of reasons. But what you need to remember is that we have to come back to this House to vary allocations.

So if we are going to move away from what was agreed in the original budget, we have to come back and explain to you why; we do that every April or May. And although in a couple of the budgets we have had from 2015 to now, there have been slight reductions between what we had projected to spend and what we actually spend, it was just slight. So it was just like \$1 billion off or something like that spread throughout the public service. And therefore, what it means is that by and large what we allocate and where we allocate it to, we spend. The real picture will come when we have the final figures that are presented around December or January. So do not be put off by what you see under the Revised Estimates, they are misleading. And that is one of the reasons why as part of the budget process we have the Standing Finance Committee. Unfortunately, it is in the House. That is where they do a line by line of each Item, what is this, why did you not spend that, you know. And so it is explained to the nation.

**UNREVISED**



Sen. Thompson-Ahye and Sen. Richards in particular—I would like to thank Sen. Dillon-Remy. I would like to thank you in particular for recognizing some of the good things which we are doing. Because although—contrary to what my friends on the other side say, we are doing a lot and we are achieving a lot, we are doing good work, we do not tell our story. And that is the one failing I would ascribe to this Government. We do not tell our stories. So thank you for helping to tell our story. Sen. Ameen talked about the 106 secondary schools and the 30-something primary schools that they built. If they built these schools, why are they not done? Would it not have been better to build 10 schools at a time and [Crosstalk] finish them rather than starting 150 schools and finishing none? [Crosstalk]

Now, the main reason as you know, why we were not able to finish the schools before now, is because you started building schools with no financing. [Crosstalk] You gave out contracts the week before election for all of these schools [Crosstalk] we had to come in and try to find financing to finish these schools. So next time do not try to fool the population, you are building all over the place, get projects done. [Crosstalk]

So, Mr. Vice-President, what I would say in closing is that this Government has been consistent in trying to steady the economy from what we found. We have done an excellent job in doing that, all credit to the Minister of Finance.

**4.55 p.m.**

This Government has identified the projects on which it is proposed to work. Some of them, our progress has been slower than before because we did not expect to find the mess that we found, but we are moving ahead and we are getting things done, and I would like to thank the Minister of Planning and Development for that because, as Sen. Khan said, she is the one responsible for the major projects. But,

Mr. Vice-President, how I would like to end is by thanking somebody who is the most unappreciated individual in our country today, and the most vilified citizen in this country today by the other side, our leader and Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley. [*Desk thumping*] This is a man of resolve. This is a man of principle. This is a man of integrity. When he came in, he promised that the Petrotrin issue was a huge problem; we had to deal with it. We have dealt with it. He came to the country again and said the energy sector is it not giving us the return that we need; we have to deal with it. He has dealt with it.

Under his leadership we have achieved those two significant milestones [*Desk thumping*] which are significantly contributing to our progressing our budgeting process forward because we have removed a huge debt on the one hand and we have significantly improved our revenue prospect on the other hand. To paraphrase a very popular expression: A prophet is never appreciated in his own country and in his own time. One of these days the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will get up and appreciate the mettle of the man who leads us. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

## ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that this

Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, before I put the question, I now invite Senators to bring greetings on the occasion of Divali to be commemorated on Sunday, October 27, 2019. Parliamentary Secretary? [Desk thumping]

### **Divali Greetings**

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. Avinash Singh):** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I rise this afternoon to bring greetings of behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as we celebrate Divali, the Hindu festival of lights. It gives me great joy to witness the coming together, as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, to celebrate such an integral part of our culture. I am proud to join in our country's display of rich cultural diversity and the unity which it fosters. Such tolerance continues to manifest the words of our National Anthem which characterizes this land as one:

“Here every creed and race find an equal place”

On Sunday we will join our Hindu brothers and sisters as thousands of deyas will be lit to signify the victory of light over darkness and the triumph of good over evil. Divali or Deepavali, translates to a row or a series of lights and celebrates wealth and prosperity, a theme which continues to stand strong as our nation strives to increase in its overall productivity and stimulates innovation and sustainable development for the benefit of all. During this auspicious time we recognize the power and noble qualities of the goddess Lakshmi who is regarded as the embodiment of success. Divali is much more than lighting a deya. It is the representation of that inner light which dwells in each of us, where ignorance is pushed aside by the understanding and enlightenment, kindness replaces selflessness, where love triumphs over hate, envy and ill will.

Divali encourages purity, not just the cleaning of our homes, but in the purification of our hearts, our minds and our soul. Such purity extends to the way in which we interact with our national and natural, and physical environment, the strategies we implore to conserve our most vital resources and the life changes we embark on towards achieving personal health goals. As we prepare to bask in the glow of deyas, it is a good time to make a resolution to remove all darkness and negativities in our lives. As with any developing nation, Mr. Vice-President, we treat with the darkness, the reality of lawlessness, substance abuse and social inequity. Let us then resolve to do whatever we can to let our positive lights shine to improve the lives of those our paths cross with along our journey.

Mr. Vice-President, the great Mahatma Gandhi gave us an important message when he said, and I quote:

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it... always.”

Too often we forget our own power to make a positive difference. Divali teaches us one of the most valuable lessons and that is our ability to be a light in our community, our country or the world. Let us be reminded to maintain hope in the promise of a better, brighter day and to stay true to the belief that “Together we aspire, together we achieve.”

Mr. Vice-President, just like the names of Indian delicacies such as kurma, laddoo, barfi, peera or gulab jamun is associated with sweetness, so if you are angry with your loved ones, simply call them any of the names I have mentioned and life will be so much sweeter. As we celebrate Divali this year, let us look forward to the promise of a new beginning and renewed enthusiasm to illuminate our way and

may Almighty God continue to endow us all with the richest of blessings. Sita Ram, Namaste, Assalaamu Alaikum, Shubh Diwali, 2019. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Khadijah Ameen:** [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for this opportunity to bring Diwali greetings on behalf of the Opposition Bench in the Senate. Mr. Vice-President, Diwali is a Hindu festival of lights. It celebrates the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. Deepavali, literally translates into “deep light” meaning light, and “avali” meaning “a row of lights. Deepavali is marked by four days of celebration— not only one—which literally illuminates the country with its brilliance and dazzles the people with joy. Each of the four days of the festival of Deepavali is marked with a different tradition, but what remains constant in the celebration of life, its enjoyment and a sense of goodness.

Historically, Diwali can be tracked back to ancient India. It most likely began as an important harvest festival. However, there are various legends pointing to the origin of Diwali. Some believe it is a celebration of the marriage of Lakshmi, the goddess of Wealth with Lord Vishnu. Others see it as a celebration of her birthday, as Lakshmi is said to have been born on the new day of Kaartik. In Bengal, the festival is dedicated to the worship of Mother Kali, a dark goddess of strength. Lord Ganesha, an elephant-headed God and symbol of auspiciousness and wisdom, is also worshiped in most Hindu homes on this day. In Jainism, Deepavali has the added significance of marking great events of Lord Mahavira attaining the eternal bliss of nirvana.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the story of Diwali relates the return of Lord Rama, along with Ma Sita and Lutchman from his 14-year exile and vanquishing the demon King Ravana. In a joyous celebration of the return of their king, the people of Ayodhya, the capital of Rama, illuminated that kingdom with earthen deyas or

oil lamps and set-off fire crackers, hence the traditions we have in Trinidad today.

The Ramayan describes Ayodhya almost like a ghost city when Lord Rama was exiled. All its citizens were plunged into an ocean of sorrow and depression for those 14 agonizing long years. When Lord Rama returned, their hearts' innermost longing was fulfilled and there was joyous celebration with the illumination of thousands of deyas. These events, and the exile and return is re-lived in many communities and schools in Trinidad and Tobago by the portrayal of the Ramleela play and the burning of the effigy of Ravana.

Mr. Vice-President, I am not Hindu. I am not Indian. I am a Trinidadian of mixed heritage. In this country we are privileged to live in a cosmopolitan society that not only tolerates the belief of others, we respect and revere that freedom we each have to choose to practice our religious and cultural traditions. But even further, we also have the opportunity to participate in the cultures of others. The significance for Divali for everyone in Trinidad and Tobago, and even this Chamber, may be different. For some, it is religious, for some it is cultural, for some, we join our Hindu friends and light deyas, and judging from the long lines at certain food establishments, for some it is simply an opportunity to eat roti.

But just like the people of Ayodhya, Mr. Vice-President, who were in grief and depression during the exile of Lord Rama, our nation is at present in a state of despair. But I say to the people of the nation, even though we are facing uncertain times in our nation, this Divali, the light of the deya, is a symbol of hope. It is our fervent hope on these Benches that Divali 2019 will continue to foster a spirit of inclusiveness and promote cultural and religious tolerance and understanding among all citizens of this great Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in spite of the darkness enveloping us. Unprecedented violence and criminality; exponential increase in unemployment; food insecurity; deteriorating health care; lowering

education standards and rising poverty, Trinidad and Tobago continues to stake its hope in a better and brighter tomorrow.

The deya continues to communicate to all of us the purpose of our existence, which is to create that flame of brilliance in our hearts and ignite that in the hearts of our fellow human beings. It is through the celebration of festivals like Divali that we, as citizens of this nation, can increase our consciousness of the way in which light can triumph over darkness and good can triumph over evil. On the auspicious occasion of Divali 2019, let us hope that Mother Lakshmi showers all her choicest blessings, peace, prosperity, good health, harmony and a peaceful existence. Hope exists in this nation.

On behalf of the United National Congress, to every Member in this House and to all our citizens, I say to you, Sita Ram, which is a greeting used at Divali time and basically says: “I bow to the divine light within you”, which acknowledges the fact that there is a divine light within each and every one of us. Shubh Divali. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Deeroop Teemal:** [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, it is indeed a privilege to be able to bring Divali greetings on behalf of the Independent Senators in this august House. Divali came to this country mainly through our Indian forefathers when they journeyed to this land, starting in 1845. And from the barracks where they persisted with the celebration of Divali into the villages, and then communities, we have seen over the years Divali truly expand and become a national festival in this beloved country of ours.

We hear a lot about light for Divali, and of course, being the festival of lights, and we hear a lot of comparisons about the light and its relation to the human being and the potential to inspire us on a yearly basis, and being cyclic, the occasion for renewal of our human spirit, our aspirations and what we would like

to see, not only for ourselves but our families and for our beloved nation. Divali, as we have heard, is also centred around the worship of the divine Mother Lakshmi. Lakshmi comes from the Sanskrit word verb “Laksh” and “Laksh” literally means wealth. And thus, other than the focus totally on light, Divali offers us the opportunity to reflect on wealth, and in that reflection we would realize that wealth is just not only necessarily that material wealth, money, but wealth is very diverse, and wealth is intellectual integrity; wealth is health; wealth is compassion; wealth is all forms of values that nurtures us as human beings and brings out the best that we can be. And in how we look at wealth and in keeping with what we would like to see ourselves and our country in terms of the sustainable goals that we are setting for ourselves, we should reflect very deeply on these forms of wealth. Because how do we acquire wealth? In itself, in the occasion of a spiritual experience and a spiritual festival based on spirituality, how we acquire wealth, and the means through which we get that wealth, Divali also reminds us, very, very strongly that there is value in how we come about wealth and acquiring wealth.

It also reminds us of the responsibility of wealth, because the responsibility of wealth, we would want to think, is for our own self and for the benefit and progress of our individual self. But it also tells us of the responsibility for that wealth for those of us who are fortunate enough to be born into it or born into good circumstances that allow us to generate that wealth so that we have a responsibility to others. We have a responsibility to those in our community by the giving and the sharing of what we are fortunate to acquire in terms of wealth, and as a country, that we have a responsibility, as leaders and legislators, and all of us, to ensure that the wealth that we acquire is distributed equitably and that the wealth should benefit all of us in our country and, by extension, should we be so fortunate, that it should benefit all throughout the world.



So this Divali, as we all celebrate light, may we also appreciate that the wealth that comes, we put in honest, dedicated efforts, but, of course, it comes to us through divine grace and coming to us through divine grace, it places on us that responsibility so that it works for the betterment of our citizens and it works for the betterment of the whole of mankind.

Mr. Vice-President, to you and your family, and to the hard-working and dedicated staff of this Parliament, to all the Senators of this august House and to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Shubh Divali. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** Take a page from that book.

**Sen. Ameen:** He is Independent. I am not.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Members, it is my privilege to extend greetings and best wishes for Divali 2019. Divali is the Hindu festival of lights which is celebrated to mark the triumph of not only good over evil, but also light over darkness. Light, in this context, is the symbol of enlightenment. This year millions of persons around the world will light deyas, but all the lights of the world cannot be compared to the inner light, one which should infinitely be shining within us. As we observe Divali, let us not only celebrate, but also concentrate on our inner light as we experience peace, joy and unity. Let us remember all the values which we strive to imbibe as Members of Parliament and as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

These values which are manifested through prayer and fasting is a reminder that our good thoughts and deeds are interminable. I join all Senators in extending greetings and best wishes to all citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the auspicious occasion of Divali 2019. May the light illuminate not only our homes, but our hearts. Shubh Divali to all. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

Divali Greetings  
Sen. Teemal (cont'd)

2019.10.25

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 5.18 p.m.*