



**THE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF  
THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED  
ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2015**

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**SESSION 2019—2020**

**VOLUME**

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**SENATE**

*Friday, January 24, 2020*

**10.30 A.M.**

The Senate having assembled, and it being the thirteenth meeting of the Fifth Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the Senate read the following Proclamation:

**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

No. 1 of 2020.

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

[L.S.]

PAULA MAE-WEEKS

*President*

**A PROCLAMATION**

WHEREAS it is provided by subsection (1) of section 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, that each session of

Parliament shall be held at such place within Trinidad and Tobago and shall commence at such time as the President may by Proclamation appoint:

Now, therefore, I, PAULA-MAE WEEKS, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint the Red House, Port of Spain, Trinidad, as the place at which the Fifth Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall continue.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of  
the President of the Republic of  
Trinidad and Tobago at the Office  
of the President, St. Ann's, this  
10<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2020.

### **PRAYERS**

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

### **LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted Leave of Absence to Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan who is ill, and Sen. Dr. Lester Henry who is out of the country.

### **SENATORS' APPOINTMENT**

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

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND  
TOBAGO

By Her Excellency PAULA-MAE  
WEEKES, O.R.T.T., President of the  
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed  
Forces.

/s/ Paula-Mae Weekes

President.

TO: MR. AUGUSTUS THOMAS

WHEREAS Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of illness:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, PAULA-MAE WEEKES, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by sections 44(1)(b) and 44(4)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, AUGUSTUS THOMAS to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 and continuing during the absence of Senator the Honourable Franklin Khan by reason of illness.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the  
President of the Republic of Trinidad  
and Tobago at the Office of the  
President, St. Ann's, this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of  
January, 2020.”

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND  
TOBAGO

By Her Excellency PAULA-MAE  
WEEKES, O.R.T.T., President of the  
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed  
Forces.

/s/ Paula-Mae Weekes

President.

TO: MR. NDALE YOUNG

WHEREAS Senator Dr. Lester Henry is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, PAULA-MAE WEEKES, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, NDALE YOUNG to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Senator Dr. Lester Henry.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the  
President of the Republic of Trinidad  
and Tobago at the Office of the  
President, St. Ann's, this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of  
January, 2020."

### **OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Senator Augustus Thomas took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

### **AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Senator Ndale Young took and subscribed the Affirmation of Allegiance as required by law.*

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, Her Excellency the President of the

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago wishes to address both Houses assembled together. As Senators join Members of the House of Representatives for Her Excellency's address, guests in the public gallery of this Chamber are required to remain seated as you will be joining the proceedings outside the Red House and in the House Chamber via a live stream.

Hon. Senators, this sitting is now suspended and will be resumed following Her Excellency's departure.

**10.40 a.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

### **PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

*Her Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ms. Paula-Mae Weekes, ORTT, addressed both Houses of Parliament as follows:*

*Madam President of the Senate, Madam Speaker of the House, hon. Members of Parliament.*

*Our Constitution provides that there shall be a Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago which shall consist of the President, the Senate, and the House of Representatives, and further, that Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and good governance of Trinidad and Tobago. I am pleased to see that the interpreters of these laws are among our number this morning.*

*As President, my parliamentary role, though essential, is perhaps the least significant. My power and authority is, by law and convention, limited ultimately to acting on the advice of Cabinet once necessary legal requirements have been satisfied.*

*Another indication of how circumscribed my role is, is that I am here only by invitation as issued by the Speaker of the House. I thank her for allowing me the honour of addressing you at the re-opening of the Red*

*House and return to Parliament to the Red House, a long-awaited return, as this is the first time that Parliament is sitting here since 2011.*

*I was tempted to speak this morning about national pride but there will be sufficient other occasions for that. In determining the subject of today's address I thought it a good idea to look at addresses delivered by my predecessors in office on similar occasions. I also reviewed addresses by my counterparts in other jurisdictions with a similar colonial heritage where the head of state is not the head of government. By and large, in those countries, the head of state's address to Parliament follows the practice employed by Her Majesty the Queen who uses the occasion to outline government's legislative agenda for the parliamentary year.*

*Our republican model has not followed suit, at least not with the last four presidents, and themes selected by our heads of state have been as different as were the presidents themselves. I discerned no common thread and therefore concluded that subject only to propriety and relevance I am afforded licence to speak as I see fit.*

*This morning I assumed the role of emissary, bringing to Parliament a message from the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who have entrusted to us the solemn responsibility to make such laws that would enable them to live secure, productive, gratifying and peaceful lives.*

*I receive correspondence from members of the public on a daily basis complaining bitterly in essence that existing laws do not address their serious concerns and that some laws appear to benefit narrow sectarian interests rather than the interest of all. I suspect that citizens write me because they harbour the mistaken belief that I have the jurisdiction to take action directly and/or to issue orders to the powers that be; we assembled*

*know better. And so I deliver their message, a message which they feel that neither Government nor Opposition is hearing, or if hearing, ignoring, and the message is as simple as it is poignant; they are hurting.*

*While Parliament and other leaders of the country are dabbling in semantics about whether we are a failed state or in a crime crisis, our citizens are being murdered at an alarming rate. They lack opportunities for employment or are losing their jobs. Food prices are spirally beyond the reach of many, and more and more of our children are falling into the "at-risk" category. Citizens are entitled to look to you for and demand of you solutions to alleviate their pain. They want you to work together for their good.*

*Even the most desperate understand the nature of politics and that some degree of toeing the party line, posturing, old talk and picong come with the territory, but at the end of the day fidelity to the people, our vulnerable women, our defenceless children, our angry young men must be the primary and paramount concern of parliamentarians.*

*I suspect that the grand and august ambiance of parliamentary Chambers, and this one is no exception, is meant to reflect the sacredness and solemn duty which all but a few of you actively sought. Citizens cannot be faulted if they expect their business to be handled with complementary dignity and decorum and with a degree of urgency.*

*Allow me to digress briefly. The Independent Bench, the nine impartial representatives of the people, without political agenda, are essential and valuable Members of Parliament. By their probing, testing and questioning of proposed legislation, they, devoid of partisan interests, bring to the table a necessary, even-handed approach. I take this*

*opportunity to thank them for their service to country. The important and increasing demands on them dictate that if they are to function effectively, they be appropriately accommodated and equipped to perform their roles.*

*In 22 months in office I have assented to 46 Acts of Parliament, issued 23 proclamations, but the “man in de street”, the executive in the office, and the public servant in the Ministry, would be hard-pressed to find, far less measure, any improvement in their day-to-day circumstances. Of course, not every Act can yield immediate or short-term results but there needs to be legislation that addresses and ameliorates promptly critical and pressing issues confronting our population.*

*The job of a parliamentarian can be a thankless one. It is not for the faint-hearted or thin-skinned. Even when legislation has been brought to the floor and thoroughly debated, citizens may still question its relevance, effect and impact on their daily lives and welfare. Legislation then is ineffective and unfruitful if it does not redound to the benefit of the citizens.*

*I have repeated ad nauseam that citizens have an onus on them which they can neither deny nor shirk to contribute to their overall well-being. They have their role to play in making this country one of which they can be proud, but they are dependent on those of us assembled here to lead the way, to provide avenues and opportunities for improvement and to model desirable conduct.*

*Parliament sets the tone for the average “man in de street”. If you are seen to treat each other with respect, courtesy and good humour, there can be a trickle-down effect and eventual cascade, but when acrimony, contempt and divisiveness is the example you set, you cannot be surprised when those attitudes and behaviours are replicated on the nation's roads, in*



*our schools and homes and on social media.*

*Awesome power resides in these Chambers and citizens are entitled to expect us to work together to give them, not only their constitutional due but also the blueprint for national conduct. Law and order, truth and justice, morality and decency; these are the values which should be associated with our Parliament.*

*A well-established columnist, in an article shortly after my inauguration, commented that I reminded him of a stern long-time creole auntie/“tantie”. I accept that as a badge of honour since in my experience auntie/“tannies” are usually proponents of sober thinking, discipline, good behaviour and deep reflection. They often tell us what we already know and use opportune moments such as these to give us timely reminders just in case we forgot.*

*I hope and pray that as I address this Parliament, holding myself out as a voice for citizens, it is not a voice crying in the wilderness.*

**11.39 a.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

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

### **PAPER LAID**

Address by Her Excellency the President on the occasion of the Re-Opening of the Red House. [*The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat)*]

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, before I move the Motion for the adjournment, I think on a historic day like today it is important, with your permission, that I express

the gratitude of the country, not only the MPs who will serve in this Parliament but the entire country and the families of those who serve now and those who have served in the past. First to you, Madam President, the hon. Speaker of the House, the Clerk of the House and the Clerk of the Senate and the staff of this Parliament for the tremendous work that has gone in to ensuring that we have met our promise of being here in January 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, work continues on the outside, and I want to thank UDeCOTT, all the contractors, the tradesmen, the skilled people, the suppliers, and those who have ensured that this House returns to the dignity it once enjoyed.

Above all, Madam President, I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for taking on the leadership for the restoration of not only the Red House, but other significant—[*Desk thumping*—]other buildings in Port of Spain and outside of Port of Spain of great historical significance.

Madam President, I want to thank my colleagues in this House, towards the end of last year, recognizing that we were likely to lose some time at the beginning of this year, we were able to deal with five Bills in 14 days and get the business of the country done, recognizing that we will lose some time.

And as I close, Madam President, I must say on a personal note, 1987 in the first National Youth Parliamentary debate I was here in the House of Representatives as the Member of Parliament for Naparima, and 33 years after I have looked forward to this day when I will return to the House [*Desk thumping*] as a Member of this House, maybe not the House that I had originally intended. And my colleague Saddam Hosein, I am sure

it is an honour for him to also return as a former youth parliamentarian to the Red House as an adult in his own right. I thank you very much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, January 28, 2020, at 1.30 p.m.

**Madam President:** Before I move the question of the adjournment, I will invite Sen. Mark and Sen. Richards to make very brief comments. [*Desk thumping*]

### **Re-Opening of the Red House**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you very much, Madam President. We would like to also indicate our somewhat—we are somewhat happy to be here but a little sad. [*Desk thumping*] This is coming back to old stomping grounds as you would know, you were here with me back in those days, but there will be a time and a place when we will have further discussions on the experience, but one thing I would say, Madam President, is that it is a bit unfortunate that as a stakeholder, as an owner of this beautiful Parliament, I feel somewhat as a stranger in my own home. But as I said, I would not want to down any amount of negativity on the occasion, but to say, Madam President, like you I am a defender of the autonomy and the independence of this institution called the Parliament, and I will continue to advocate for its independence, and therefore I have a lot to say, but this is not the occasion for what I have to say.

All I would record, Madam President, is that I recall in 2007, 2010, 2015, and now 2015 to the present time, different scenarios, but at the end of the day what we have to work towards is ensuring that the Parliament remains firmly and completely in charge of its affairs. Thank you very

much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Sen. Richards.

**Sen. Paul Richards:** Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] It is on?—but the red light is on, I will project. You know, growing up as a little boy and looking at the likes of the “Father of the Nation”, Eric Williams, Dr. Eric Williams, Kamaluddin Mohammed, Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, and being in the same space where they debated Bills and Bills that contributed to building this country, it is such an honour and a humbling experience to be able to stand here on the shoulders of so many who have built Trinidad and Tobago to be— [*Alarm sounds*] Is that my time up?—to be able to make a contribution myself. And very often we lament or we look at other nationalities and look at them and say, “Why can we not be as patriotic as them?” Well, these buildings, these edifices: the Red House, President’s House, Knowsley, Stollmeyer’s Castle, Temple in the Sea, are symbols of our heritage [*Desk thumping*] and it is extremely important for young people to feel proud about these symbols because they instill a sense of national pride and patriotism. [*Desk thumping*]

So, on behalf of the nine Independent Benches—because we are not one bench—and people of Trinidad and Tobago by extension, those who may not have a voice, I would like to thank the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] the workers who worked around the clock, I understand 24 hours in the last couple of weeks, the Parliament staff who I do not know how they did this, [*Desk thumping*] and last because I am breaking protocol, Her Excellency for her advice to us to use the inspiration of these amazing surroundings to uplift our contribution in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I will not detain you or our guests any longer. There is a reception that is to be held in the Rotunda, and I hope to see everyone there where we can have more discussions. All right.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 11.49 a.m.*