

**THE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON  
AUGUST 28, 2020**

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**SESSION 2020—2021**

**VOLUME 1**

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**SENATE**

*Friday, August 28, 2020*



**10.30 A.M.**

The Senate having assembled, and it being the first meeting of the First Session of the Twelfth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the Senate read the following Proclamation:

**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

No. 26 of 2020.

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

[L.S]

PAULA-MAE WEEKES

*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 WEEKES, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint the Red House, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, as the place at which the First Session of the Twelfth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 10.30 a.m. on Friday the 28th day of August, 2020, as the time at which the said Session shall commence.

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 25<sup>th</sup> day of  
August, 2020.

### **ELECTION OF PRESIDENT**

**The Clerk:** Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order No. 4(1) of the Senate, I now invite proposals for the Office of President of the Senate.

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Mr. Clerk. Mr. Clerk, I propose that Ms. Christine Kangaloo do take the Chair of this Senate as President.

**The Clerk:** Do I have a seconder?

*Seconded by Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat.*

**The Clerk:** Are there any other proposals?

*There being no other proposal, the Clerk of the Senate declared Ms. Christine Kangaloo duly elected President of the Senate. [Desk thumping]*

**The Clerk:** I now invite the Assistant Marshal to have the President of the Senate robed and return to Parliament. Hon. Senators, we will have a brief pause in the proceedings to allow the President of the Senate to be robed.

**10.35 a.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**10.39 a.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

### **OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Sen. Christine Kangaloo took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

### **ELECTION OF VICE-PRESIDENT**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, in accordance with Standing Order 5(1) of the Senate, I now invite proposals for the Office of Vice-President of the Senate.

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I propose that Mr. Nigel De Freitas do take the Chair of the Senate as Vice-President.

*Seconded by Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat.*

**Madam President:** Are there any other proposals?

*There being no other proposal, the Clerk of the Senate declared Mr. Nigel De Freitas duly elected Vice-President of the Senate.*

**Madam President:** Please stand while the Vice-President takes the Oath.

### **OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Sen. Nigel De Freitas took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

**Madam President:** Hon. Members, the Clerk will now administer the Oath or Affirmation to each of the other Members of this honourable Senate. I now invite everyone else to be seated.

### **OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE**

*The following Senators took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law:*

Sen. Franklin Khan  
Sen. Paula Gopee-Scoon  
Sen. Clarence Rambharat  
Sen. Rohan Sinanan  
Sen. Kazim Hosein  
Sen. Allyson West  
Sen. Dr. Amery Browne  
Sen. Randall Mitchell  
Sen. Avinash Singh  
Sen. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal  
Sen. Hassel Bacchus  
Sen. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing  
Sen. Yokymma Bethelmy  
Sen. Wade Stephen Mark  
Sen. Jearlean John  
Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial  
Sen. David Nakhid  
Sen. Damian Lyder  
Sen. Anil Roberts  
Sen. Paul Gerard Richards  
Sen. Anthony Vieira  
Sen. Amrita Deonarine  
Sen. Charrise Seepersad  
Sen. Deeroop Teemal  
Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye  
Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy

Sen. Evans Welch

*Senators Donna Cox and Dr. Varma Deyalsingh took and subscribed the Affirmation of Allegiance as required by law.*

### **PRAYERS**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, Her Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago desires to address all Members of Parliament. In this regard, Senators are requested to proceed to the House of Representatives Chamber, where Her Excellency will deliver her address.

During the procession to the House Chamber, Hon. Senators, I just wish to request that you observe the physical distancing requirements and I thank you in advance for honouring that request. This sitting is now suspended.

**11.10 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. I thank Madam Speaker for her kind invitation to address both Houses at this First Session of the Twelfth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. As the only Member of Parliament whose tenure ran unbroken in the transition from the last Parliament to this one, I make bold to welcome you to this afternoon's proceedings whether you are here for the first time or the umpteenth.*

*You all took your respective Oath this morning to conscientiously and impartially discharge your responsibilities to the people of this nation. The essence of the relationship between Members of Parliament and the public is one of trust, confidence and fidelity. Notwithstanding some significant milestones over the*

*years, the strength of that bond has been eroded by the failure of successive Parliaments to deliver consistently on the reasonable expectations of the populace, and to make matters worse, citizens have come to feel that they have been repeatedly forsaken, betrayed, and mamaguyed by those they have put in a position to make laws for their peace, order and good governance.*

*Members of the Twelfth Parliament, I need to ask you a personal question. Can we trust you? I am asking for a friend. Or more precisely, firstly, for the roughly 658,000 citizens who on August the 10<sup>th</sup> did their civic duty, hoping that you prove ready, willing and able to ensure their security, prosperity and future, as well as for the rest of the population. Hon. Members, can we trust you to discharge your functions in accordance with your Oath? Your core function is lawmaking, an essential service in our democracy, one which gives you the power to transform the lives of our citizens and our nation. Each of you seated in these Chambers has the primary purpose of conducting the people's business. Your being here today suggests your willingness to discharge your duties in a thorough and responsible manner, and to treat all persons equally.*

*Whether you arrived via the ballot box or by virtue of selection it is vital at this time that you have a full grasp of your remit and your limitations and are totally committed to the task at hand. That is the only way you will be able to keep the promises inherent in your Oath. In the words of author Roy T. Bennett:*

*“Consistency is the true foundation of trust. Either keep your promises or do not make them.”*

*You might think this advice is a little too late since you already made your promises to the nation this morning in your Oath, but now is the right time to begin keeping those promises.*

*Can we trust you to measure up to the standards required of high office?*

*You have heard no doubt that with great power comes great responsibility. Apart from your legislative function there are other requirements and expectations of you. I see many new parliamentarians among our number. You will have to mature into your role very quickly. Make no mistake, your grace period, if indeed there was one, was between the election or your appointment and the convening of Parliament today. And from today you are expected to get down to managing the affairs of the public. The novelty of being a parliamentarian is not an acceptable excuse for any shortcomings. In this form of service there is no such thing as beyond the call of duty. Be prepared to work selflessly and tirelessly for the duration of your term. It will be a long haul. The Prime Minister's recent reference to 60 months perhaps puts it in its right perspective, drawn out days, sleepless nights, and lengthy debates into the wee hours of the morning will be par for the course. But they are just some of the sacrifices you must be prepared to make.*

*Parliament requires persons of high caliber. Respect, self-control and patience must be your guiding principles both within and without these hauls. It is said that a person's character is indivisible. You are required to conduct yourself in your private affairs in the same exemplary manner as you conduct the affairs of Parliament. You are automatically role models for many of our youngest citizens and must uphold the highest standards of behaviour for the benefit of both the business of these Chambers, as well as for those who will take pattern. Many of your offices fall among the top tiers in our Table of Precedence, and as responsible office holders you are expected to acquit yourself accordingly.*

*Can we trust you to listen to what we are saying, empathize and show compassion for our hardship? The general complaint is that after an election, constituents only see their Members of Parliament in the lead up to the next election. When canvassing for votes you are omnipresent, all ears and full of*

*concern for their plight, but once you win your seat you become remote, busy and unavailable to your constituents. The people who exercise their franchise in your favour want to be assured that they will get value for their vote. They want you to listen to, not just hear what they are saying, understand their hopes and fears and bring their concerns to this august body. You are now their power source as they were yours 18 days ago. They want you to use your time in these Chambers to represent their interest, not engage in frivolous and irrelevant crosstalk, although I do admit that a little well placed picong can ease the tension.*

*On another level, when Parliament's Committees interact with government officials, interested parties, legal and other professional associations and the general public, there must be a genuine attempt to solicit valuable input that is considered seriously in the eventual lawmaking process.*

*Members of Parliament, can we trust you to put aside narrow partisan interests and work together for the good of us all? And can we trust the non-partisan Independent Bench to remain above the fray and serve the interest of the whole? The difference between a politician and a statesman according to American writer James Freeman Clarke is that a politician thinks about the next election, while the statesman thinks about the next generation. As you make your contributions and finally vote on proposed legislation, what is your true focus? Of course, voting along party lines has its place but at the end of the day what is the desired outcome? It can only be the welfare of Trinidad and Tobago as a whole. The man on the street is not concerned about the political gamesmanship that often unfolds in these Chambers. He wants timely legislation that improves his quality of life and uplifts the nation, and that requires that parties, without sacrificing their principles, work together to achieve the common good, and that the Independent Bench serves to bridge any gaps by its objective approach and loyalty to only the*



*people. If there was ever a time for Government, Opposition and Independent Benches to work together, that time is now given the COVID-19 pandemic and its exacerbation of pre-existing problems.*

*Can we trust you to bring your A-game to these Chambers, taking night to make day if necessary, so that you can make a meaningful contribution? Parliamentary debates can sometimes be long and tedious, but that does not give carte blanche to Members to become disengaged from the process. How many times has the public been witness to Members who were nodding off, engrossed in their phones, or otherwise showing no interest in the ongoing debate? However challenging the process, members of the public expect you to remain alert in order to actively defend their interests. Whether or not the Bill under debate requires your input or is within your area of expertise, it is almost certain to affect some, if not all, of your constituents. Even when you are not on your feet, citizens expect your full participation in the process. And when you do make a contribution to the debate let it be well informed, coherent and digestible by the average person. There are many sayings about trust, but the one I favour and find apposite for this gathering, is by former British politician Chris Butler:*

*“Trust is earned when actions meet words.”*

*By putting yourself forward for election and or by agreeing to be appointed to the Senate, you have spoken. Now is the time for you to act. This morning I have asked all the questions, but I invite you to engage in some timely introspection and ask these same questions and others of yourselves and each other. What is my track record in Parliament and elsewhere? What sacrifices am I willing to make? What are my intentions, aspirations and motivations? Are they aligned with my true purpose of serving the people of our twin island republic? The correct answers to these questions will reassure us that we can trust you, and that, hon.*

*Members, is all that we really ask. Thank you. [Desk thumping]*

**12.32 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

### **PAPER LAID**

Address by Her Excellency the President on the occasion of the opening of the First Session of the Twelfth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan)*]

*To be printed as a Senate Paper.*

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, before I move the adjournment of the Senate, please permit me to first of all congratulate your good self on your elevation to the post of Chair of the Senate as President in this the Twelfth Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

During the Eleventh Parliament you distinguished yourself. You were stern, sometimes gentle, but always fair and balanced. [*Desk thumping*] I trust this will continue. I also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Senate Vice-President, Sen. Nigel De Freitas. [*Desk thumping*]

To all returning Senators on all sides of this Chamber, I welcome you back. To our new Senators, I offer a special welcome, a special word of welcome to this august Chamber; six on the Government side, five on the Opposition side, one on the Independent Bench. I trust that the debate in this Twelfth Parliament would be robust, filled with content, deal with issues and delivered with decorum, because, as you will be aware, Madam President, there is good reason why this place is called the Upper House.

So with these few words, Madam President, I now beg to move that this

Senate do now adjourn to Saturday August 29, that is tomorrow, 2020, at 10.30a.m. in the morning. There we would be debating the Public Health (Amdt.) Bill, 2020, hoping to take it through all its stages, and, of course, subject to its passing in the House this afternoon. I am informed by the Clerk that the Bill has been circulated in soft copy online.

### **Congratulations**

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Madam President, I would like to join my colleague in extending congratulations to yourself on your new assignment. I believe that we are in a new Parliament. We look forward to playing our role, contributing in a very constructive, at times critical, manner, because at the end of the day, Madam President, we want to engage and pass good laws for Trinidad and Tobago and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, I would also like to welcome all my new colleagues on this Bench, and all the new colleagues in our Chamber on both sides of this honourable Senate.

I would also want at this time, Madam President, to indicate to you that I hope that the Leader of Government Business, along with the coordinator of the Independent Bench and myself will be able to deal with matters that may be controversial before decisions are taken. I think it is incumbent that we seek to ensure that the rights of the minority, particularly the right of our side and all Members to speak and to speak in the context of our Standing Orders is not compromised nor subverted. And this is why I am saying from the very outset, we need to have cooperation, discussions before any decisions are taken.

And Madam President, with these words, I want to welcome you. We look forward, as I said to robust debate. And this is a time where our country is

experiencing some level of darkness because of the COVID-19 and we all have to realistically work together to make things happen and to transform our society.

And in closing, may I indicate to the hon. Leader of Government Business that we are going to be debating a matter tomorrow at 10.30. The Bill has been circulated, as has been indicated. But Madam President, we start off this very important exercise without the necessary research material at our disposal and therefore it all now would be left up to us on this side to make night into day in order to make, as you know, Madam President, a positive contribution to this very important matter that we are scheduled to debate at 10.30 a.m. tomorrow.

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this limited contribution and we look forward to us as a Senate making good laws, promoting good governance, promoting good order for the peace, prosperity, unity, harmony, of all the people of T&T and our great Republic. Thank you, Madam President.

**Madam President:** Sen. Richards.

**Sen. Paul Richards:** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President. First of all, let me join Senators Khan and Mark in congratulating you on your appointment to the Chair and also Sen. De Freitas as Vice-Chair and to welcome all returning Senators and also welcome the newcomers, including Sen. Welch to the Independent Bench.

I would also like to take time to thank those Senators who would have not returned, who would have served in the Eleventh Parliament in a particular—excuse me for thanking Sen. Sophia Chote Senior Counsel for the exemplary service to Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago is facing some significantly challenging times and it is incumbent upon us, as Her Excellency indicated in her presentation a short while ago, that we find ways to come together in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. We

can disagree on a lot of things in this honourable House, and in the other place, but we can all agree that our country needs us now more than ever and it is time that we sometimes put aside what may be insular differences and look and work towards commonality in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So I thank Her Excellency for the confidence she posed in myself and the others on the Independent Bench and we look forward to working in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, permit me to register my profound appreciation for your having elected me as President of the Senate. Rest assured that I fully appreciate the tremendous responsibility has been placed upon me and please accept my assurance that I will do everything in my power to repay the confidence that you have placed in me to preside fairly and impartially over proceedings in this honourable Chamber. I too wish to welcome all of the new Members of this Senate and to also welcome those who are returning to us.

Hon. Senators, the responsibilities of our Senatorial office are heightened in these challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic and all of the social and economic displacement it has caused, is causing, and threatens to go on causing. As we go about the people's business in this honourable Chamber, we will find ourselves called upon to find new and different ways of doing so. Mask wearing and social distancing are already new features of the way we must do business here and elsewhere. As the pandemic continues, we will no doubt be called upon to innovate even further and to make additional adjustments in the way we operate, both within and without this honourable Chamber in order to play our part in the country's collective fight against the virus.

I am confident that with maturity and sacrifice, we can and will make the best of the difficult challenges that lie ahead. My hope is that at the end of our term

Congratulations  
Madam President (cont'd)

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in this honourable Chamber, we would be able to look back with pride at the time we spent here. My hope is that when we look back we would be satisfied with the way in which we pulled together to rise above all of our challenges and difficulties, and with the way in which, by the example of our conduct in this honourable Chamber we led and inspired a nation and one another to be the best versions of ourselves.

I look forward to working with each and every one of you. I especially look forward, as I know you do too, to working again with the staff of our Parliament, all of whom have been working tirelessly to bring about this Sitting and upon whom all hon. Senators will be depending in no small way to assist us in better discharging our duties. I know that you would want me to and I take the greatest pleasure in saying thanks to the staff of this Parliament in advance. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 12.44 p.m.*