

SENATE*Tuesday, October 27, 2020*

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Water and Sewerage Authority for the period 2015/2016. [*The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat)*]
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Water and Sewerage Authority for the period 2016/2017. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 26, 2020]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam President: Some 25 persons have contributed in the debate thus far, including the mover of the Motion. Sen. De Freitas. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Nigel De Freitas: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute to the first budget debate in this Senate in this Twelfth Republican Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. This is to say the least, an unprecedented year that requires a complete reimagining of how we do things. We are accustomed to events like this being specific to either us, to a particular other island in the Caribbean or to some other location in the world, whether it be through a hurricane or an earthquake, but we have never had an event that affects the entire planet at once and for such an extended period of time. I do not think there is anyone alive

today that has lived through a similar event. There may be people alive who were born right after the last pandemic over 100 years ago but there is no one alive today who was a young adult at the point in time, who was alive before the pandemic, during the pandemic and after the pandemic to guide us and let us know exactly what to expect. And if I were to try and grasp the gravity of it all, it is like the earth is shifting below our feet with the ensuing damage taking place. In such a situation, there is no choice but to weather, hold on, survive and then rebuild, hopefully better than before.

We are between a rock and a hard place. We are, as a global community, being forced to choose between staying alive and maintaining quality of life. It is for that reason that you cannot look at this budget the same way you would last year or the previous years. You have to look at it in the context of balancing being alive versus preserving, to some extent, your quality of life. When we think about quality of life, we tend to think of it as a progression because it is something that is relatively under our control. So, you understand that you want a particular quality of life as you progress through life, and you build and you work towards that on the strength of your own efforts. But we never see it as a spectrum whereby it could go in the other direction, which is in the negative direction, and that is exactly what is taking place now because it is based on external forces. And when it goes in that direction, it is never because of something that you have done, it is usually because of things that are out of your control.

In previous budget debates before, where we have had cause to respond to an economic downturn, I indicated there were usually three responses depending on what stage of life you were in. And I am only going to focus on the last one at that point in time, and that is to the young people who are now finishing school and

trying to enter the workforce or those who have just entered the workforce. Because these types of economic downturns tend to affect them, and the only option that they have at that particular point in time is usually to start a business or to get into entrepreneurship until things recover and that they could either re-enter the workforce, or they may continue and develop their business so that they could maintain some semblance of control over their quality of life. One of the ways of doing that is through diversification and that is a term that we tend to hear usually when there is an economic downturn. I listened to Sen. Deonarine's contribution when she spoke about diversification, and I too, like the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries did like her contribution, and she asked two pertinent questions which I may, from a personal level, would try to respond to Sen. Deonarine. The first question was, why has diversification failed in the past? What I have come up with is that in the first instance—or what I would say actually, before I go to that, is that from my experience in life, I have understood that what usually holds true for the individual tends to hold true for the collective as well.

So, in my explanation as to why diversification may have failed in the past, I will break it down to the individual sense. One of the reasons I came up with, Sen. Deonarine, is that when we think of diversification from an individual standpoint, we tend to want to diversify into investments that would give you the same quantum of money as your primary source of investment. So take for example, an individual who is making \$100,000 a month and is looking diversify, what is the first thing that he is looking for to invest in? A secondary source of income that would give him or her the exact same \$100,000 a month or more. When you put that up to the nationalistic level, and you heard the Minister of Finance talk about the oil and gas sector, which we have relied on for so many years, and the \$9

billion that we are expected to get this year, when you think of it in terms of diversification, immediately you start to think of what can we invest in that would give us the same quantum of money?

The problem that usually occurs at the individual level and at the nationalistic level is that in order to get something that is similar to the primary source of income, it requires a large amount of discipline. It took us a long period of time to be able to get to that quantum of money, which is the billions of dollars for oil and gas because we had to develop that industry over the years. In the same way, if you are making \$100,000 a month, you did not just wake up one morning, leave school and start making \$100,000. You had to put in the experience and work your way up in the company. So, that brings me to my second point, which is when we get more money, and when you are talking about diversification it tends to work best when you have the most amount of money coming in, but it usually becomes very urgent when you have a depletion in your revenue. So, when it is you have the most amount of money coming in, you have the disposable income to be able to invest in secondary sources of income.

So, let us put that up to a nationalistic level, because the first thing that happens when you get more money is that you want to spend more money on your needs, your wants, and then with whatever is left over, you look to diversify. So, what happens at the nationalistic level? You deal with your needs and your wants. You increase your subsidies and your transfers. You build your roads. You build your buildings. You build what the country needs, and if you have money left over, you try to develop the industry that would give you the quantum of money in the primary source that you are looking for, but you may find that you may never have enough. If you look at what has been taking place for a decade or more now,

we have deficit budgets, but you still need to deal with the needs and wants. To make that really profound to understand, think of the individual who is making 100,000. If he gets promoted to \$200,000, what is he doing? Put his child in a better school. He might build a pool. He might add an extra house onto his house—an extra room, sorry. He might upgrade his car and whatever is left over, then he is going to try to invest that in terms of getting to a secondary source of income.

That brings me to your second question, Sen. Deonarine, which is, if a vaccine is found, are we going to continue with this diversification? So, let me point this out. In my lifespan, in the last 11 to 13 years, we have had three massive economic downturns that I have witnessed in two separate countries. The first one was in North America in the 2007 to 2009 period when the housing market crashed. Then you had 2015 to 2018 period, when the oil and gas sector went topsy-turvy and now, you have the COVID-19 in 2020. To me, that sounds like an anomaly. That is quite frequent, 13 years, three massive economic downturns. What that tells me, that if that turns into a new normal, then we have no choice now, Sen. Deonarine, but to diversify because it is extremely urgent, because there is going to come a time in the future that if these economic downturns continue to uptick in frequency, we are not going to be as lucky as we have been in 2020. And if we do not diversify now, we are going to find ourselves in a very precarious position going forward in the future, and that is why it is important to create the right environment that creates opportunities for people to be able to pivot from one career to another or maybe start a business and be able to improve their quality of life on the strength of their own efforts.

So, in the diversification process that we have put forward in this budget

presentation, we focused on digitization and digitalization, and if you are thinking about what I said and you are thinking to yourself, “Well, that is not going to give us the \$9 billion like oil and gas,” I ask you to think, what if Facebook or Instagram or Twitter was invented in Trinidad and Tobago? Do you know what was required for that to happen? A couple of thousand US dollars, an Internet connection, a computer and a dorm room. Those companies are worth billions of US dollars right now. What if they were invented in Trinidad and Tobago? And that is why when I looked at what the Minister of Finance was talking about from grants for start-ups, reduction in time for registering companies, tax breaks for tech companies, tech promotions and development companies to help out that sector, free public Wi-Fi and nationwide 4G and 5G, I understood what was taking place. And that is why I did not understand what Sen. Lutchmedial was talking about when she indicated that there is no connectivity in the initiatives that he was putting forward. They do work together and you have to think about it from in the context of that young individual who now wants to start a business. Everything can be done online.

You think of the idea today and ideally, if everything goes well, you register your company tomorrow, and I know that is really fast, and as long as the ease of business is doing well, you should be able to achieve that. You have to be able to work with the banking sector because the private sector has a role to play. I remember a few years ago, when I was much younger, outside of this country there was a development taking place, especially for small businesses and you were able to use a small square device to be able to plug into your phone, and that became your point-of-sale device, not that bulky thing that we have now that you need to be doing business for a while in order to even be able to qualify for one of those.

What that simply did was allow you to widen your customer base, because you did not have to collect cash right through, which is not really secure if you are doing that from a small business perspective. But you could have some young enterprising individual setting up the app that usually goes with that, because the incentives and the packages now in this budget with the tech companies allow you to be able to do that and get into that more; work with the banking association, because those apps need to connect with your bank accounts.

Once you do that, that young enterprising individual can now deliver their product and collect cash through a credit card or a debit card on spot, utilizing the nationwide 4G or 5G. If for some reason, with the 86 per cent penetration that the Minister of Finance spoke about in terms of smartphones and Internet, that you do not have Internet on your phone, then you have the free public Wi-Fi to help you out in that regard. Moving on from that, those apps tend to generate the kind of reports that you can then go to the bank with after and work with the bank in terms of growing that small business sustainably.

So, Madam President, as I move on, I want to respond to Sen. Vieira who indicated that as bad as COVID-19 is, there is some positivity that comes out of it. And I say positive because COVID-19, outside of the obvious threat and mandatory response to that threat, has the effect of catalyzing the kind of change that forces societies to change mindsets and behaviours in what is hoped will be for the better. It is in that context that I say, we as a nation have been lucky, a word that would not have been used five years ago to describe that 2015 to 2018 period and much less now in 2020. But I repeat, luckily for us, the process of changing mindsets and behaviours started in 2015 and never stopped. My confidence in the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Planning and Development and the Prime

Minister is not simply because we happen to be in the same party or on the same team, but in fact, had he not done what he did in terms of managing the economy between 2015 and 2018, I shudder to think where Trinidad and Tobago would be right now.

What if this virus had hit in 2015 when we had only three days of money left in the Treasury to run this country? What if this Minister of Finance was not able to turn around the economy to some degree by 2018 allowing us to even have the capability to mount a response through a series of relief grants in 2020 to the tune of billions of dollars? Even worse than all of that, what if the virus had hit when the Opposition was in power? With the spender's mentality that they had at the time, with no value for money and no care for future shocks to the economy, I shudder to think what would have happened. And this is why I am grateful, and thank God for the right-thinking people of Trinidad and Tobago and the right decisions that they have made in the last six years. This is why I say that the 2015 to 2017 period of adjustment that we had to go through, and the requisite change in mindset and change in behaviour was only practice for what was to come in 2020 and still is to come going forward.

So, Madam President, as I move to the major part of my contribution, I intend to focus on the theme, changing mindsets and changing behaviours, and as I do so I intend to look at agriculture and the liberalization of the fuel market, and then lastly, Tobago. I thought it best to start my contribution in agriculture with a quote I came across as a young person that I think sums up the plight of the agriculture sector over the years. And it goes:

“Only when the last tree has died and the last river...poisoned and the last fish been caught will we realize we cannot eat money.”

And that is a Cree Indian proverb. You can replace money with oil and gas, and that proverb does not lose its meaning.

Madam President, agriculture, from a national perspective, has lost the perception that it is a large earner of revenue long before you and I were born, and globally, it has given way to the Industrial Revolution and the digital revolution to come, but its value has never diminished. As I make this contribution, I remember a conversation I had with my brother when I was choosing a sector to get into in my Master's level and I chose the fisheries sector eventually. When I was choosing that sector and I told him what I wanted to do, he looked at me and he said, as most people would, I guess, "What are you going to do with that?" And whereas my younger counterparts and those a little older than me were going into the legal profession, the medical profession and the engineering profession, you know, the money fields, I sat there and I told him—and as I think about it now, it was pretty insightful at the time and it is most relevant right now in 2020 with what we are experiencing. I told him, "If you are looking for a secure industry, when no matter what happens in the future, you will be secure in your field, then you either choose to be a mortician or a farmer because as long as there are people on this earth, they are going to need to eat and they are going to eventually die."

So, this is why I am pleased to hear of the extra \$500 million being proposed in this year's budget for agriculture because it is a step in the right direction to building the sector and returning the value on the agriculture sector again. And do not get me wrong, because the other revolutions are important and the quantum of money they collect are pretty big. But the fact is and the message I am trying to put across is that agriculture should never get to a point of neglect or be undervalued, lest from a societal standpoint, it gets to a point of regret.

So, Madam President, I sat on the Joint Select Committee of Land and Physical Infrastructure that did investigations into the agriculture sector and the state of the sector, and the Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would have spoken to that, and I am sure the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries will speak to that some more so I would not get into that. But what I would talk about is what we found out in that Joint Select Committee, and one of the things was that the age with the farmers in the traditional farming sector were getting older and there was not replenishment in a large way by young people, and the Minister of Finance would have spoken to one of the reasons that that probably happened and there may have been land availability, but that was not the only reason. Young people tend to not want to get into the large acreage of lands to produce, to be in the hot sun and to grow crops. What they actually like is the non-traditional farming sector, the aquaponics, the hydroponics, the vertical farming, the urban farming, the ones that are inclusive of technology which they like to use. And if you look at the packages that have been given in terms of technology and in terms of incentives, that is what will help out these young farmers in that sector.

Madam President, given that that is the case, I can now say that some of the 500 million can go into bridging the gap between the young and the old in the traditional farming sense, as well as investment can now go into supporting those that engage in non-traditional farming to ensure that that sector grows from both sides. The biggest benefit of this approach is in the ability to maintain a small aspect, as small as it may be in terms of quality of life. And we all heard what is happening with the luxury food items, and Sen. Deonarine spoke to this and said, because of the frequency in which we eat, it is now normal. And what I would say,

in that non-traditional farming sector with those young people, we now have the technology in Trinidad and Tobago to be able to grow grapes and strawberries. So instead of spending the foreign exchange importing, we can now take some of that \$500 million, invest in those young people and replace those imports with the local varieties to the benefit, and that way you do not have to change your taste too much, you can maintain some semblance of a quality of life in doing that, and that is what we intend to do.

The other aspect of a non-traditional farming, which I will speak to because this is my sector, so I would just indicate in case there is a conflict of interest there that I am promoting it, but that is aquaculture. I heard when Sen. Lyder spoke to the fisheries sector and I understand the fishing depots issue, and that is being dealt with and has been dealt with, or trying to be dealt with over the years, but that is not the only thing in the fisheries sector that needs to be developed. I like the fact that you now have \$500 million extra because you can now invest in that aquaculture sector. Just to give you an idea of what you can get from that sector, that sector globally right now is worth US \$250 billion, and if we can take some of that \$500 million and invest in that sector and get .01 per cent of the market share—not .1, not 1 per cent, just .01, that equates to US \$25 million of foreign exchange that I am sure we can use. All that is required is 8,200 tonnes of fish to be produced, and if you are thinking that that is a stretch, Jamaica was able to produce 8,000 tonnes of fish in 2006, and although it declined subsequently after, they are now moving to get back to that level to their benefit.

Madam President, I want to talk a little bit about the liberalization of the fuel market and a lot has been said in terms of commentary and the fact that fuel prices are going to be fluctuating. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries dealt

with that, and I was glad to hear that he dealt with that in that manner. Like I said, we have to change our mindsets, we have to change our behaviours. We are going to have to change the way we use our cars. That has been said in the public domain so I am not going to repeat that. What I am going to talk about is something that was not said, and I heard what was happening with the foreign used car industry, and obviously, the new dealers in terms of the increase in the price of the cars that they sell mostly, for example. And I would just ask everybody in here and who is listening to the sound of my voice to take a quick look or a quick search for the following words:

UK plans to bring forward ban on fossil fuels by 2030.

I can go further:

Gasoline vehicle phase out advances around the world, Austria, British Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany.

Let us talk about the US because they are doing it by state: New Jersey, New York, California, Washington State, Colorado, Hawaii.

So, while we sitting in Trinidad and Tobago and argue about who may or may not own a gas station or about the prices of gasoline vehicles going up, I say to those associations now, start to pivot because in less than 10 years, those vehicles will be obsolete. And whilst the Minister of Finance has increased taxes on the electric vehicles, it is still in the lowest bracket. So, right now, you are supposed to be thinking, "Let me pivot from those vehicles that fetch the highest price and start to import the electric vehicles that have the lowest price, because in 10 years' time it will go in the blink on an eye, you will not even be able to import it." And if you are thinking, "But what is going to happen to the infrastructure if we have to move to electric vehicles?" and you want to rebut with that, let me just

make this argument. You were not listening to the Minister of Finance when he indicated that there is 112 megawatt renewable energy project to come to Trinidad and Tobago which would be the biggest in the Caribbean.

I can go further, if you were listening to the Minister of Public Utilities, you would have heard when he said, there is a 740 kilowatt project to be started in the Queen's Park Savannah in which there will be car charging ports. What I will say is that there is connectivity in what is being done here in this budget presentation in this 2020, because as much as we know that those cars are being phased out, that infrastructure needs to go in. And so, with the incentives and packages in the tech industry, some young enterprising individual can now start to think. As a matter of fact, let me put it on the foreign used car dealers association to start to think about setting up electric charging stations up and down this country. You will get the incentives and they are right here in the budget. And when you do that, you see where the connectivity is coming around, and that is why I did not understand Sen. Lutchmedial and I did not understand Sen. Mark when he spoke about no consultation, because all of these things and the kind of connectivity that you are seeing is coming from the Roadmap to Recovery, a theme to which the Opposition was invited.

If you remember correctly, MP Bhoë Tewarie was also invited but there were some politics at play. And that is why when you speak, you do not understand what is taking place because you were not part of that vision. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam President, I want to move on to Tobago and let me just say this, for as long as I have been in this Senate and contributing to budget presentations, it is the same thing year after year after year. Based on the questions that are usually asked in the other place, anybody who is outside of this country

listening would think that Tobago is a burden on the national Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago. And if I have to come here, in the good year of our Lord 2020, as bad as it may be, and put this phrase back on the *Hansard* record, because APT James no longer has the bones to roll in his grave and His Excellency ANR Robinson is probably in heaven, having to hang his head in shame, and I have to come here and say this again in a more cryptic fashion so that it reverberates through the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. And that is, Tobago is not a “side chick”; Tobago is not an outside woman; Tobago is part of a union and a partner with Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And until we understand that in this country, I can say to you now that the development of Trinidad and Tobago will always be limited by the development of Tobago. This is why I have to commend the Minister of Finance every single time I come to the Senate Chamber to contribute in a budget presentation because he understands that.

As much as the allocation that is given is legally done under the Dispute Resolution Commission, you have to understand that that is part of a formula, and if it is that the expenditure drops, guess what? The allocation to Tobago will also drop. But it is not about that allocation and that Dispute Resolution Commission, it is about what is done extra, and the Minister of Finance fully understands this phrase, that the poor man that gives you his last dollar cares more about you than the rich man that gives you \$100. So, I do not need to talk about the fire station and the police stations and the Roxborough hospital that is almost done. I do not need to talk about the \$300 million extra that Tobago could borrow based on Cabinet approval to help with their development. I do not need to talk about the airport.

What I will talk about is that in the COVID-19 period, when all of us were reeling from it, that the Minister of Finance is able to, outside of the allocation

given for 2019 to 2020, give \$50 million for the TRHA, give \$50 million for the tourism sector and \$5 million for the small business sector. And that the Minister of Health, in the height of pandemic, while buying PCR machines so they could ramp up testing, knew fully well that he had to buy one and send it to Tobago. On that point, let me make something clear, the number of cases in Tobago is much lower than the number of cases in Trinidad and that basically means that if Tobago was separate, Tobago would be able to take part in that bubble that is being set up for the tourist industry in the Caribbean to the benefit of Tobagonians so that the tourism industry would succeed. But the fact is, is that Tobago is part of a union and if you are dealing with this virus, you are dealing with it together as a nation.

As I am on tourism let me talk about that Sandals project because that Sandals project and the loss of it has me more mad and disappointed, because that is an opportunity lost and a massive one at that. Why? Because any tourism island worth its salt knows that as sure as God is good, this virus will end and the eight billion people on this planet who have suffered under some sort of a lockdown for some extended period of time will want to travel, and we will experience the biggest uptick in movement or human movement that this planet will ever see in the last 100 hundred years. And those tourism designations are investing right now in tourism plant and machinery. So they have Sandals in Grenada, Sandals in Barbados, Sandals in Saint Vincent, so that they could capitalize on that uptick, but no Sandals for Tobago. But, Madam President, all is not lost.

10.30 a.m.

The Chief Secretary announced recently that there is a 1,000-room hotel to come in the next two to three years. Sunwing Limited has invested in Turtle Beach Hotel, and Comfort Inn is building a hotel in Scarborough, Tobago which will be finished

by 2021. So it is not to say that Tobago will not be able to capitalize somewhat on that uptick that is to come.

Madam President, let me move on to the other issue that deals with Tobago, and that is internal self-governance. I have heard the brewing skepticism at the utterance of the Minister of Finance indicating that this is the highest priority in this Twelfth Parliament. Let me just say this, because he would not have been able to say it, he was not on that committee; I would say it. To me, this Bill is as important as the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and carries the same weight, because whatever happens in that Bill has the potential to affect 70,000 people on the island of Tobago, not for one day, not for one year, but forever. Therefore, you cannot rush it through a joint select committee, bring it to the Parliament floor and say, "Here, take dat". It has to be given its just due and it must be given its just deliberation. That is why for the last two years we were working with international experts in this type of constitutional set-up, so that what comes out of that committee can withstand the test of time.

So when you are dealing with that Bill you have to make sure all your T's are crossed, all your I's are dotted and what is theory can seamlessly transition to execution, to the benefit of all Tobagonians. Because it took a hundred and twenty-plus years to get from union to joint select committee, and if there is an error inside there in terms of the ability to execute, you are looking at another hundred and twenty-plus years just to correct that, to the detriment of every single body in Tobago.

If you cannot believe me in what I just said and the importance that we have put on that Bill, believe this: the former Chairman of that committee is married to a Tobagonian, and as soon as she signed "de papers in de church", as far as I am

concerned she became a full-fledged Tobagonian. The interim Chairman of that committee in my good self is a born Tobagonian. The MP for Tobago West on that committee is a born Tobagonian. Independent Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy is a born Tobagonian, and as Tobagonians there is no way that we are not going to make sure what comes out of that committee is in the best interest of Tobago, and in keeping with what Tobago has asked for.

So what I would say speaking specifically to Tobagonians right now, if you want to help, in the meantime talk to the Opposition in Tobago. Tell them, talk to the Opposition friends in Trinidad, of which Sen. Jearlean John, by her own admittance, is a born Tobagonian and a deputy political leader in the United National Congress. Madam President, that means “she have some weight, that means she have some clout, that means she have some say so”. So when that Bill comes from a bipartisan committee, of which we all sit as equals, and it hits this Parliament floor, tell them “doh argue, just pass it”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam President, in conclusion, what I would say is this, we do not know how long this particular obstacle is going to last. We hope it ends soon. But what remains true is that we must change the way we think going forward. We must change the way we behave, and not just simply in terms of mask-wearing and washing hands more regularly but in general, things that we could have taken our time to do now need to be done in a shorter time frame, because our survival depends on it.

Our acceptance of the digital world is one of those changes that will occur sooner rather than later. Growth and innovation are the new watchwords which will lead to a reimagining of our future. Quality of life may now take on a different meaning. Productivity over procrastination, work from home over home

from work, and quality time with loved ones over quality lime. Whatever the future looks like and whatever pathway we take to get there, one thing is for certain, we will do so together. Madam President, with those few words, I thank you.

Sen. David Nakhid: Madam President, in the name of God most gracious, most merciful, I would like to thank the country's Opposition Leader, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Lower House and in this august House, for allowing me to make my contribution to this budget debate. I would like to thank you also, Madam President, for your kind words when I was sworn in. You were not here when I made my contribution. I would like to express those sentiments to you again. You are the epitome of grace under pressure.

Madam President, the underlying theme of my response to the 2020/2021 budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance and his colleagues on the other side, both in this august House and the other place, is the PNM by their historical grounding and subsequent legacy has never delivered for Trinidad and Tobago anything other than shell governance.

This budget certainly was not what the late Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning, had in mind when he touted *Vision 2020*. When I take my seat I am certain that government bloggers will come to life to justify the failure of this Government to meet its own *Vision 2020*. Sure enough, they will blame the People's Partnership of 2010 to 2015, but will stop short of mentioning that the PP Government left more money in the Treasury than they met, and more money in the HSF than they met. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I too was tempted by their gayelle, the jabs, the little insults, until it dawned on me that the ultimate indictment of this Government has

already been delivered by their own supporters. It is widely known that some of the supporters of this Government proudly exclaim that they prefer to suffer under this Government than prosper under the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] The sheer irony and lunacy of this sentiment is lost upon this Government, as they wear this denigration with a badge of honour.

Madam President, permit me to contextualize my submission. I quote from a leader that would be very much appreciated by this Government. I quote:

“United wishes and good will cannot overcome brute facts. Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it. Ignorance may deride it. Malice may distort it. But there it is.”

These beautiful words, impactful message, from no other than Winston Churchill, who vehemently stated—that. Such a commendable effort in words can come even from a devil in human form.

The fact of the matter, and I quote Mr. Franklin Khan, our Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, that historical antecedent is important and it is, because this Government, this PNM has been in governance for 48 years, with direct representation of our most under-resourced, underserved and deprived communities for 64 years. Just in case you went out to play a quick “Drug Sou Sou hand”, let me repeat it: The fact of matter is this Government has held power and the keys of the Treasury, with direct representation for 48 years, of our most under-resourced, underserved and deprived communities.

Every single Government official on that side who talk talk like if this is their first time in government. Madam President, those on the opposite side show strong commonalities with the psychological state of mind, trend of thought and behaviour of people like Winston Churchill. Although the words resonate with

anyone, all flowery and beautiful, historical facts will show that Winston Churchill was an oppressor of black people, both African and Indian. They serve not the people, not the grassroots, not the Indo- segment, not the mixed, nor the African. They serve masters whose interests are anything but aligned with the national interest of this country. They are neocolonialists.

What depresses me most about this budget is not its lack of vision, not the lack of a plan to kick-start the economy, that does not involve squeezing every penny out of the middle class and working poor. What depresses me most about this budget is how callous and uncaring it is. How little it does to develop our most important asset, our human resource. It does nothing meaningful by way of human resource development in the short-term or in the long-term. It offers no hope to the youth by way of elevation in the next 10, 15 or 20 years. All we have been fed are the same platitudes and perfunctory lip service that has been ritually regurgitated budget after budget, with no proof as to the efficacy of programmes promised over the last five years. I can choose any portfolio at random and show that this Government has promised much, delivered little. I can say without fear of contradiction that the taxpayers did not get value for their money.

I have read every budget presentation of the Minister of Labour from 2015 to the end of the last term, not one promise delivered, not even promised legislation delivered. What is sad is that I can say the same for health, sport, education and a few others.

I remember years ago when the Opposition was saying that CEPEP should be used for agriculture. What was the mantra of the PNM Government then? They said that would be taking us back into slavery. Now all of a sudden, CEPEP has to be used in agriculture. What are they thinking now?

This Government closed down Caroni, which happened to be a virtual food basket, arguing that it was a drain on the Treasury, as though other make-work programmes were not. In doing so we became a net importer of food, and now during this budget we have a government telling us that we are eating too much apples, too much grapes, too much cereal. What next?

The budget is largely geared to keep the financiers of the Government extremely comfortable. Their plan to implement the property tax on homeowners first, engage in public/private partnerships to build houses, sell the port and National Petroleum fuel stations. The sale of state assets is not only myopic in its conception, but exposes writ large the intellectual incapacity of this Government.

The Minister of Finance on one hand gives to the poor a so-called reprieve on taxes up to an income of \$7,100, and then quickly takes it away with proposed increases in the cost of living, utility rates, water and electricity, property taxes, removal of subsidies on fuel. A classic example of deception, giving with one hand and taking more from the other. [*Desk thumping*]

In trademark fashion, the Minister of Finance wants to raise the retirement age to 65 years, to avoid payment of pensions in the near term, thus easing the financial commitment of the National Insurance Board and the State, to those well-deserving pensioners. This shows that they have run the NIB like a Ponzi scheme. “So why yuh complaining about DSS?” This will affect a large number of public officers, middle and lower-income earners. No wonder only certain groups of the society applauded this budget, but that is before Peter George, as it is against labour, the working class. Already the Minister of Finance had to beat a hasty retreat on two critical points: taxes on foreign-used cars and the retirement age ceiling.

He gets pulled up by Visham Babwah, president of the Used Car Dealers Association and the vice-president, Rondell Feeles. Obviously there was no consultation, no discussions with these gentlemen. There was an existing agreement up to December 2020; he wanted to impose taxes before. After the rug was pulled from under their feet, they called him out and he beat a hasty retreat. It shows a lack of planning, a lack of vision. The Minister of Finance, he back-peddled so quickly, I made a quick call to Brian Lewis, President of the T&T Olympic Committee, to see if he could get back-peddalling in on the Olympic agenda. [*Desk thumping*] Gold medal for sure.

This, Madam President, is what I mean by “shell governance”, no serious consultation with key stakeholders, only with their operatives. It is an appearance of development, through the listing of fully-fledged Ministries, but they are frail, flimsy, deceptive as a spider’s web. Entities with big names, but essentially nonfunctional. Big buildings rented at inflated prices with fancy fittings in affluent areas, but they do not render effective governance. These Ministries, Madam President, are in truth and in fact like a shell of a house. A shell of house, as we both know, does not provide anyone with a home.

For example, the newly open Diego Martin Health Centre that I visited a couple of weeks ago. I noted over 100 elderly, infirmed and differently-abled Trinbagonians seeking access to the so-called free health care, sitting and standing in the blazing hot sun, some of them unable to access health care services on that day. The Ministries and many state agencies of this Government cannot deliver on policy initiatives and decisions. They cannot properly monitor policy implementation and expenditure, because they lack key functioning systems to ensure that their mandate is executed. Furthermore, they are staffed most times

with their own operatives who are required to tow the party line, as we see with WASA, MTS, URP and TTPost.

This budget, Madam President, it is not a budget. It is not a budget, a platform for transformation. It is in fact a platform for the People's National Movement to buy their ineffective Government a little more time, by just kicking the can down the road towards future generations. "In reality, a kick de can down de road kinda budget."

The independent international economic monitoring agencies and our Central Bank did not paint a good picture of our economy pre-2020, pre-COVID-19. Economic growth in negative territory, 2016, '17, '18 and '19. Energy sector, non-energy sector the same, negative territory. Unemployment rate up. And let me tell you, Madam President, in places like the East-West Corridor where I am familiar with, and I put my foot on the ground, as much as 50 per cent in the black communities, public debt, percentage of GDP, up to 63 per cent in 2019, forecasted for 80 per cent this year. Exchange rate rising to almost \$7 to US \$1, in 2019. Gross official reserves down. Import cover only at 7.7 months in 2019.

Madam President, with these figures the hon. Minister of Finance should not pat himself on the back for presenting a budget like this. Purely political in essence with a policy plan that is myopic. They failed to diversify the economy for 48 years, and you expect us to believe that now in a time with less resources you will do so?

They want to squeeze water from stones to enrich their financiers on the backs of poor people. They failed to secure the maritime borders and created a humanitarian crisis, while allowing narco traffickers, some who are of that 1 per cent that finance their party, to run roughshod over our country and operate with

impunity.

Madam President: Sen. Nakhid, I have to caution you now. What you just said is completely out of order. So I would ask you please to withdraw your last statement and move on. I need you to withdraw.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Which one?

Madam President: Your very last statement. So just withdraw.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Withdrawn.

They failed to secure the assets of Petrotrin for the benefit of our country. They hastily closed it, even when as late as 2018 it posted a profit. According to the *Guardian* report dated April 23, 2019, and I quote:

“State-owned Petrotrin made an operating profit of US \$250.28 million...during its last year in existence.

As at the year ended September 30, 2018, the revenues for Petrotrin, stood at US \$1,045.20 billion...

The company's Cost of Sales stood at US \$195.45 million...Gross Profit US \$849.75 million...”

By these numbers, the company was seemingly viable. Madam President, I am quoting the *Guardian*. What was the haste and the reason for closing the company? And then the PNM, despite these figures I just told you, came up with figures from KPMG claiming that Petrotrin lost 8 billion over five years and was facing a debt of 12 billion. Which are the correct figures? Who are we to believe? Certainly I will err, not on the side of this Government.

The Minister of Finance likes to talk about economics as if he understands it. I would like to let him know that there is nowhere recorded in the history of any economy that people take themselves out of a recession with supply side

economics. Nowhere is that recorded, and we are in a recession heading fast towards a depression.

There is nothing in this budget that inspires hope and a positive outlook for the majority of this country's citizens. To compound the misery, you want to impose a draconian and hated property tax. Unwarranted taxes on fruits, employment freeze in the Government sector, with possible exceptions, of course, for friends and members of the ruling party; of course the absence of any dynamic or inspiring policy measures for agriculture, trade, industry, education, sport and the youth.

Madam President, this budget as presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, leads any right-thinking citizen and policymaker to wonder: What are the intentions of this Government as we navigate through truly perilous waters? Then again, this is always the overarching plot of any neocolonial establishment, and the PNM is a primary exponent: keep the masses in a state of poverty and political ignorance, so they can maintain them as a voting bloc.

As to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I would like to congratulate him, because judging by all metrics this is his first stint in office, as he was virtually absent between '15 and '20. The veracity of a budget always lies with the connection of that budget to the people on the ground. By the reaction of most of the farmers and citizens under his auspices, the most frequent and prominent criticism of this Minister describes him as a serial non-performer. His most impressive accomplishment is that he has been obviously selected—

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing: Madam President, Standing Order 46(4), on a point of order. He using offensive and insulting language about the Minister.

Madam President: Sen. Nakhid, you can continue but just watch the language

that you are using; but continue.

Sen. D Nakhid: I am guided, Madam President. Thank you.

His most impressive accomplishment is that he has obviously been selected as the new political hatchet man of the PNM. I point to—

Madam President: Sen. Nakhid, I just cautioned you. You are speaking about a Member of Parliament and therefore I would ask you to refine your language, please.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Guided again, Madam President. But I was alluding to the self-righteous—I understand, withdrawn, withdrawn.

We witness on the other side self-righteous finger-pointing accompanied by the practice and feigned stern demeanor, as the Leader of the Opposition was belittled. In true mamaguy fashion, the hon. Minister of Finance boldly announced that agriculture would receive an allocation of \$1.198 billion, a boost of 500million. Not even 1 per cent of our GDP.

Bold-facedly the Minister acknowledged the historical, almost vindictive approach to this sector by all previous PNM regimes, and of course the continuation of same by this one. However, in a brazen move he seeks to paint a picture of good tidings by endorsing a paltry increase of 500 million. It has never been made clear how this 500 million will create revenue streams in these straitened economic times. The Minister of Finance said the 500 million would be placed in the Ministry of Finance, and it was up to this Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to develop plans and projects in order to access the funds. The question needs to be asked: Has the 500 million already been allocated, maybe to some projects already in operation?

Madam President, I do not only want to criticize, as I only have 40 minutes.

A possible solution I would like to suggest to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, to solve the poor road infrastructure and access points that affect farmers, maybe there should be a twinning with his Ministry and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, to cut down on inefficiency, bureaucracy and corruption, while simultaneously improving the ability of farmers to deliver their produce and reduce wear and maintenance costs on equipment. Madam President, with the non-innovative mind, you can rest assured that these funds of 500 million may not be touched, at least not by this hon. Minister.

By the way, after perusing the allocations to the Ministry of Finance, both the recurrent and development parts, the sum of 500 million seems to be well hidden. Our Government pretends to have a renewed enlightenment about agriculture; however, the number simply does not add up in the support of their vague, ambiguous, uninspiring and empty rhetoric. Madam President, the Minister has little to say for the development of the sector. Every policy must have a purpose, and in the 48 years of PNM Governments, they did not bring consolidated legislation to depict a focused approach to agriculture and food production, addressing the needs of the society and the citizenry.

Kenya has an Agriculture Act of 1954, revised in 2012. This has enabled them to improve its human development index value in 2018, to 0.579, putting Kenya in the medium human development category of countries, according to the United Nations. Agriculture dominates their economy, accounting for 70 per cent of the work force and about 25 per cent of the annual GDP, not 1 per cent. The country's major agricultural exports, tea, coffee, cut flowers and vegetables; it has become the leading exporter of black tea and cut flowers. Imagine, Madam

President, somebody said—I was not here for 39 years, but somebody said that somebody—can you imagine, can make the claim that we do not have enough land in Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know who that is, I was not here, but he must be “duncee”. Is that not amazing—

Madam President: Sen. Nakhid, listen, I need to caution you on your language. You are in the Senate, and I would ask for your language to reflect where you are. Okay?

Sen. David Nakhid: Guided. Is that not amazing that we are here struggling to put locally grown food on the tables of people in PNM heartlands: East-West Corridor, industrial areas of the south, some of which are poverty-stricken, PNM enclaves nevertheless, and the PNM cannot fashion a proactive policy towards agriculture?

What is the clear legacy of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, apart from incompleteness of tasks and projects mentioned before? Lands in the St. Augustine Nursery were destroyed for a housing project. From 1960 to present, prime agriculture land in St. Augustine, leaving just 60 acres from in excess of 100. In 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries sat silently and accepted the destruction of a further 20 acres for housing.

Madam President, have the PNM Ministers in their history stepped up to truly help the sector? Madam President, let us take an honest look. A country that has gone through boom from our oil and gas, and our agricultural Ministry accounting for 1 per cent of our GDP. Shame, shame on us.

11.00 a.m.

But I would suggest to the hon. Minister, consult with your people. There are people on the ground, smart people. Agricultural economists like Omardath

Maharaj argue that any national plan must have as its imperatives, focus on feeding our people, focus on securing lives and livelihoods, and a more mature social dialogue towards inclusive agriculture and rural development planning. Hon. Minister, the paltry sum allocated in the budget is totally inadequate to put the sector on a sound footing. Then again, what does one know of agriculture, when he simply does not know.

Madam President, I would like to switch to a Ministry that I have some previous knowledge and experience of. Madam, here again, we have another serial non-performer, a Member of Parliament who holds a portfolio which she exclaimed when appointed—

Madam President: Sen. Nakhid, may I caution you, again. You are speaking about Members of Parliament. You can express whatever you have to say but it has to be in a courteous manner to Members of Parliament. Okay?

Sen. D. Nakhid: Thank you, Madam President. A Member of Parliament who holds a portfolio when she herself exclaimed, when appointed in April 2018, that she knew absolutely nothing about it; not my words, Madam President.

The Ministry of Sport and Community Development is allocated TT 284 million, approximately, for recurrent expenditure and TT 12.5 million for its development programme, a total of TT 296 million for 2021; 2019/2020, its predecessor, Sport and Youth Affairs received TT 258 million and TT 234 million for recurrent expenditure and TT 3.1 million and TT 9.23 million for the development programme, down from the initial estimate of TT 20 million for development works in 2020. An explanation for the movement of the sums was not seen in the draft estimates. It is assumed that the allocations were transferred to another Ministry, possibly the Ministry of Finance.

Madam President, had the Minister understood what falls within her purview, within her Ministerial portfolio—Madam President, with some 10 to 15 minutes gone of her allotted time, the Minister did not address the issue of sports. After attacking the Opposition she went onto praise her followers, her leader, spoke on COVID-19, pointed to the lack of planning and a stillborn road map, went back to the UNC, touched on Tobago, went to agriculture, bad-mouthed some UNC Members, went to Tobago again, travelled to Trinidad and went from Trinidad to Tobago numerous times. In all of that, we heard one little piece on sports, the Dwight Yorke Stadium upgrade and a diatribe of sporting activities.

Madam President, the Dwight Yorke Stadium upgrade cost between 12 and TT 20 million was completed in 2020. The accurate cost has not yet been disclosed. Five stadia were to be refurbished at a cost of some TT 77 million starting in 2018. We have only heard about one, the Dwight Yorke Stadium in Tobago.

And I do not want to impugn anything, Madam President, so I will go on to possibly offering some solutions to someone who admitted that she does not know. One of the solutions could be that she could address: there has been a constant decline sport participation throughout the country.

Madam President: So, Sen. Nakhid, when you are referring to Ministers, fellow parliamentarians, I do not think it is proper to be referring to someone as “she” and “she” and “she”. Could you refer to the Minister with the proper—

Sen. D. Nakhid: Guided.

Madam President:—portfolio.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Guided. Here is what the hon. sports Minister should have addressed in her contribution. There has a constant decline in sport participation

throughout the country in all sporting disciplines. Madam President, a plural society like ours cannot achieve sporting excellence when communities are excluded. It is the job of the sports Minister to be proactive in finding the solution. For example, there are virtually no football players anymore in Trinidad and Tobago from the white, Syrian, Chinese or Indo communities thereby depleting our player pool. Other Caribbean countries have forged ahead of the once invincible T&T by making optimal use of all their diversity. We used to have players, Tyrone de La Bastide, Joey Gonzales, the Aleong brothers, Bobby Sookram, Raj Lalchan, players from all communities. What has the Minister done to include all members of the society? I do not know.

I would like to offer, as a word of advice, to the hon. Minister of Sport and Community Development to perhaps adopt the Belgian model with which I am familiar, provide incentives for schools, communities, village teams who produce national players at the regional and national levels. What that does is incentivize everyone to take an approach that helps the community in all aspects, it helps production, it helps move commodities, encourage health and fitness. She can network for sport tourism while this pandemic rages. No need to sit and wait, Grenada is an example. Grenada, they are making network connections with Europe, Africa and the Caribbean as they push their national teams forward.

Madam President, let me change gears a bit and go to the hon. Minister of Caricom and Foreign Affairs. Within the last five years, we have moved from being looked upon as a regional leader to being virtually annex to Venezuela and being largely ignored by our regional partners and our allies further afield. We are at the point where our messaging mimics the Venezuelan Government on almost every international issue. I get the impression that we dare not say anything

different to the Venezuelan authorities on the Nabarima issue, an issue which has the potential to harm our tourism prospects, our fisherfolk, our ecology and our health. We have seen the leadership of Caricom move to Barbados and now Guyana. We have been a constant embarrassment in some quarters. Most recently, our nationals abroad had to rely on an MP, Member of the British Parliament, to advocate the cause of affected citizens. We did not vote for him and after his appeal to our Government, instead of a diplomatic response, we attacked him for the embarrassment that was well deserved, we literally begged for that. I hope we have a clearly defined policy and how we can chart the way forward because I have not heard one, Madam President.

Madam President, the hon. Minister of Health told the world on 9th of October, 2020, that every independent person has come out in support of the budget. I am deeply sorry to say, Madam President, that we were misled. He did not provide any evidence of any poll or survey conducted between 5th and 9th of October to substantiate this wild claim.

The Minister proceeded—the hon. Minister of Health proceeded to highlight the achievements of his Government and himself, of course, listed a number of hospitals and health centres that were opened in the last five years. While he boasted about their perceived accomplishments, he failed to report that many of the facilities are in fact incomplete for the purposes which they were intended, to meet the needs of Trinbagonians.

I draw reference, again, to the Diego Martin Health Centre newly opened. It lacked basic hygiene facilities for visitors, simple measures of placing markings on the walkway to maintain physical distancing was not put in place. Once again, this highlights the lack of the proper allocation of human resources which leads to

having a shell Ministry which is the Ministry of Health, and this is not an anomaly, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Nakhid, you have five more minutes.

Sen. D. Nakhid: This is not an anomaly, Madam President. Out of the 96 health centres around the country, I personally had the displeasure to visit 23 of them. While most of the staff are doing their utmost best, those health centres are simply not fit for purpose.

But I would like to touch on something, Madam President, where the devil is in the details. Madam President, there is a big issue of the cost of medication and services to the public which allows out-of-pocket expenses by our people to be astronomical in a so-called free universal health care system. And again, I emphasize, Madam President, that this has been a ruse perpetrated on the people of Trinidad and Tobago for 48 years. The Oxford Business Group, in a country study, reported in terms of health care's recurrent expenditure, that Trinidad and Tobago's out-of-pocket cost was 40 per cent or 426 million in 2016, well above the global average of 18.5 per cent. Our poor citizens, Madam President, are the ones accessing public health care and bearing the brunt of this Government's inefficiency by having to spend from their pockets sums of almost two and half times greater than what most countries in the world carry. We can see it. Everyday in the papers, there is a GoFundMe, a barbecue, a garage sale or just plain, outright begging fellow citizens in order to cover the neglect of the health care of this Government, while Ministers' families and their colleagues get state contracts to power-wash stadia and obtain preference for the rental of properties. We have an Attorney General who has recused himself 30 times, Madam President. It seems that there is an internal policy in the PNM. Every 10 times you refuse yourself,

Appropriation (Financial Year
2021) Bill, 2020 (cont'd)
Sen. Nakhid (cont'd)

you get a free Porsche. It shows—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order.

Sen. Mitchell: 46(4).

Madam President: Continue.

Sen. D. Nakhid: It shows how much—

Madam President: No. The point of order. Yes.

Sen. Mitchell: 46(4), please, and 46(6).

Madam President: Sen. Nakhid, what you just said is—I uphold the point of order and I would ask you to withdraw what you just said, please.

Sen. D. Nakhid: With honour, Madam President. It shows how much the alleged free health care is a facade, a shell. Two medical doctors have told me that this out of pocket leads to a three-tiered health system, public health care, private health care and citizens who are forced to find finance to address health issues when unable to access either public because—in a timely manner or private institutions, so they end up going between the two, Madam President, leading to unnecessary burdens on the lower and middle-income groups. Sounds nice, a three-tiered system but it renders our poor working class in serious trouble.

Madam President, I would just like to end, because I do not have much time, by talking about the philosophical implications of the budget, Madam President. I would like to point to something that can be a solution. We have had five years of taxation and nothing to jump-start the economy. With respect to private properties, why not provide an incentive to homeowners who keep their property in mint condition instead of a property tax, employ valuers in each local government district to assess property value based on the condition of the property, give incentives such as an annual tax break to those homeowners who keep their

properties well painted and landscaped? In so doing, we provide employment in the various localities for painting and other odd jobs that are integral to the proper upkeep and maintenance of the household. No need, Madam President, to have a property tax burdening the citizens of this country already burdened.

And, Madam President, I apologize if I have offended anyone, but I see no one on that side, Madam President, who has set their foot on the grounds in Laventille, on the East-West Corridor, in the places where I have lived, except to talk about it, front, stunt and hunt for votes. And enough is enough, and while I have the opportunity with a united Trinidad and Tobago, we will expose what I see as the incompetency of this Government. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] **Madam President:** Sen. Deyalsingh.

Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam President, for recognizing me to partake in this debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2021) Bill, 2020. But I must say today I feel sad, hurt, angry. Yes, I feel sad because our dear friend and co-worker Sheranne Samuel is no longer amongst us. I feel hurt that she did not reach out to me, as a medical practitioner to try and see if I could have assisted her in any way, and I feel angry that we all allowed our health system to deteriorate, to reach that level, that this young individual would succumb in such a way. The esteemed journalist, Ria Taitt's account of the events still plays on my mind and I pray Ms. Samuel's relatives are coming to terms with this tragedy.

You see, I am a provider of health and for years, I have heard the complaints. For years, I have seen the deficiencies in the system. As far as back as Sunday September 28, 2014, Melissa Doughty of the *Guardian* had an interview with me and quoted me as actually pleading to the then Minister of Health in another administration, that facing all these ills, we needed to set up a patient

complaints authority, because we have gotten complaints from patients and we have found that, you know, it falls on deaf ears sometimes. There are mechanisms in place but too far. We have had people knock on our doors to get that; so a patient complaints authority.

So, while I speak on health issues where we could improve the system, I will also touch on some other issues. Some humble suggestions to which I am thinking that, you know, if time permits, I could elaborate. So, first of all, health. So, I see the need for the establishment of such an authority and I am hoping with the expenditure in our budget for health, we may see now that there is a need to work towards this. Besides that in health, there are also regulations that came about that caused controversy in terms of wearing masks, but before I had also called for regulations with social distancing. You see, Trinidadians have some persons who have a party mentality, they are “harden”. So, they may have laws and the Prime Minister at times before had to caution persons and even to reprimand them for not wearing masks, for not following the guidelines. And I am thinking, laws for social distancing, again—regulations, I am thinking, may have to come on board if we are to protect our country further, because if we are opening up more, we see that the dangers that are occurring right now in Spain, in other countries that have opened up are getting a great fallout from this opening.

You see, I look at also crime, Madam President, and say, I think with crime, we have heard the Attorney General and the Minister of National Security come here and actually explain about the cost it takes to keep prisoners in Remand Yard and in our prison system, the cost to our taxpayers. I am suggesting in our economic times, the law is such that it allows for hanging. Why does the Government not implement the laws? Why does the Government not—you know,

look at what is happening, look at the cost savings, and it is on our law books. If we do not like it, simply remove it.

So, again, I am appealing for the implementation of the death penalty for those on death row. I am also looking at the issue of crime and I am seeing that with the recent issue with the Ponzi scheme and whatnot, there was a need to call for help from outside sources to come to help our police service solve this issue, way back. We had it when we had—I remember there was a police commissioner who said he was a toothless bulldog when the then Prime Minister Patrick Manning brought in Scotland Yard.

We also had foreign experts coming in, the Canadian Commissioner of Police, those persons came to try to help the improvement of crime but yet still, you know, some of their efforts were stymied, they were not allowed to go further. And we have been seeing that crime is on a runaway scheme right now where people are locked in doors, we are seeing home invasions, and I am worried, and we have to do something about crime. So what I am saying, since we had beautiful plans in terms of when Patrick Manning was the Prime Minister where he, you know—when there was a failure of the operation Baghdad from the then Minister of National Security, Howard Chin Lee, there was the failure of the operation Anaconda. It sounded nice.

But then, Martin George came and in his own quiet way—Martin Joseph, sorry, in his own quiet way, he planned to lock down the skies, lock down the borders, have that total lock down of Trinidad where you have internal mechanisms with the police officers intelligence gathering, you have the blimp overhead, and you also have the OPVs surrounding Trinidad; beautiful plan, it sounded good but yet still, we are still in this position. Why? Probably successive

administrations did not follow up on good plans that we had. And I think this is a failure of most budgets where we have to go back and reinvent the wheel. We have to go back and start all over. It comes like a Minister may look at another predecessor and say, “Well it is a good plan but let it be my plan, so let us shelve that and let us repackage it and, put it in my plan.” And this, I think, is a failure in our system and that cannot be allowed to continue if we are looking at the economics of the situation. A good plan should be allowed to continue regardless of which administration comes in.

So, I am thinking, since we have failed in locking down the borders, since we have seen guns coming in. We have seen guns, grenades, human trafficking, it is time that we ask the DEA to come in, set up base. We have already asked other authorities to come and help us with—to help the situation with the Ponzi scheme or pyramid scheme. So, I am thinking, if the DEA sets up base, it may put a dent here.

I look, again, in helping crime procurement legislation. This has to come about because, you see, it has been there and with white-collar crime, with all the good work the Attorney General did in terms of trying to convince us— hey, we have FATCA legislation, we are going after those persons, we are going after persons who are hiding taxes, I am thinking, procurement legislation is something which would somehow give a level of comfort to citizens out there who may think that successive governments are putting their hands in the Treasury— who may think that. That perception may be there. And I am thinking, if we have the correct legislation, we would not get that animosity or that pointing fingers of one party pointing to the other party, and that leads to a lot of dismay in society.

I look at energy and I say that solar panels, we have to get on board with

solar panels in terms of our new thrust, tax exemptions. I think that was on the board before in some other budget, I heard it, I do not know if it had continued. Again, we looked at property tax that is coming on board, and I mentioned, if you are going to have property tax, give the property tax exemption for those places where you have greenery, green spaces. Because when you are having a planning development, you are supposed to provide that green space, a lawn, a tree and whatnot, have that tied in. In some other countries, that is something where I can get a discount if I have some trees or acreage that you can measure to give me that. If we want to look at the global warming, if we want to encourage persons to have that green area, if we want to tackle flooding as president Teemal—sorry, as Sen. Teemal you know, gave us a very good demonstration of flooding and the effects on the environment.

I look at tourism and arts. You know, I had mentioned sometime before, when I heard the discourse from the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, I have seen certain things there that I looked at and certain things that I liked. And, you know, I had recommended, you know, that I am seeing the grants given out to artistes which is excellent. I am seeing grants given out to, you know, encourage the art forms, online shows. But, Madam President, sometimes people miss seeing that artiste and artistes performing live. And I had recommended in a writing I had given that we could have drive-in concerts just as how Kay Donna used to be there, you park in your car and you can enjoy your show.

And I am saying, the mall, Price Plaza, as they are saying—the people in that area are saying, hey, they no longer have MovieTowne, we can build a big stage, we can have people tested, the artistes tested before they go and perform, we could have the bands to the back, we could have screens like this, we can have the

artistes to the front, social distancing, we could have people parked their cars tuning in, listening. We could have the MovieTowne restaurants going to the cars and delivering food. All could be done in a COVID, you know, a COVID-friendly way in the sense we know, we are aware of COVID-awareness, that way we can do it. So therefore, this is a suggestion that I think we should explore. The artistes want to perform. Sparrow has made appeals that during the lockdown, he wanted to come here for his birthday. We should send a plane, bring him down, the birdie's wings are clipped, let him come, let him perform for us.

Another aspect I looked at, Madam President, is we have the Spanish influx, we have the Venezuelans. Just as how when I went Venezuela years ago and I used to go Sabana Grande, there was a German village. Why not set up a Spanish village here, a Venezuelan village, where we give them a piece of land, have their own food, their own art forms, their own pottery? I saw tattoo artists from Venezuela here doing remarkable jobs. Let there be a Spanish village either here or even in Tobago where when the tourists come in, just as we have Chinatown, we now could engage those individuals that they will have jobs. We can go in there. We cannot travel abroad, so I will go into the Spanish village to eat the food that they offer.

I remember in Venezuela, there were hot dogs with one set of different layers of different, I mean, ingredients in it, I would love to taste that again, they can provide that here, they can provide that Spanish village but let them pay NIS also. And this is a recommendation I make, because we know, if they are working for whatever short term, give them, let them pay, let them contribute. Some of them are accessing our services and some of them are in dire need to have the services offered more because presently, there is a young Venezuelan child, 15

years old, with leukaemia, and he is not getting access to help. And this, I think, even though I know the Ministry of Health has its policies, humanitarian aspects, we have to look at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We may have to come on board, as the Government to discuss this issue and offer this help to this child. So, setting up Spanish village I am seeing.

I saw Barbados actually had long-term visas—work visas, where they allowed a foreigner to come in there and spent a whole year with his family, gave him a cottage and he can work from there. We need to look at that.

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts can actually bring in this work areas where they can come in. And Sen. Nigel De Freitas mentioned in his speech that Tobago, if it was like a—if it is a bubble, they would have been doing better in tourism. So I say, why not give them that bubble? Why not sell Tobago's tourism separate from Trinidad? Because, you see, if a foreigner looks at our whole national statistics on crime, they would hardly come here. But if that foreigner sees Tobago marketed as Tobago with less crime, with less COVID, they can easily decide to come in there and it will benefit both countries. So, market Tobago separate I am thinking. And I think we are on that trail anyhow because the tourism industry, I think, they had split up the tourism sector into one in Tobago and one in Trinidad, so the thoughts may be along that line.

I am saying now, when we are looking at youth affairs, I am thinking crime is such an aspect, we have to get a dent in crime to get the economy going, so therefore what do we do with our hardened criminals? We go after them with the full brunt of law. What do we do with the young persons who are growing up not attending school? We have youth camps where you can go and get them and engage them in something. Make it mandatory. If you are on the block “liming”

with a gang leader, you have the law is such that we take you away and carry you into a youth camp and train you, we give you whatever training. Because remember, some of those youths may not have had a home where they had proper parenting techniques, so they go to the block, they go to the gangs. We have to make the delinquent youths—legislate against delinquent youths. You are less than 18, you are on the block you are not in school, very well, come and we will engage you. Because if we do not engage you, you will be the future criminal down the line where it will have to engage the judicial service, it will have to engage the medical service if they get shot. It will put a strain.

11.30 a.m.

We also need, Madam President, places of sanctuary for depressed youths. You see, there is a whole global problem with depression in youths, 15 to 29-year-olds are killing themselves. The second highest cause of death. Thankfully, St. Ann's Hospital recently instituted a children's ward, to deal with children with schizophrenia. We are seeing younger children now having the disorder of schizophrenia. Children who the courts may have to order them. And it was really a court decision that told us that we were not allowed to put a child in an adult ward that stimulated us to have a separate child ward. But what I am saying, we need places of sanctuary scattered at different parts of the country where children who are suicidal, children who are depressed can go there and stay, get away from the world, step out of the education system, find themselves, get yoga, get training, get the love that they need, get mentorship, and then we could put them back on into the world.

So we need those places. I do not know if it is the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, but the collaboration has to be there.

We need also for the youth, the expansion of the OJT. I had objected when the Government said that they wanted to pay more money for the OJT personnel who they hire. I say, no, do not pay more, but just hire more. We need the young persons who are out there and who are feeling frustrated to come on board, to come in a plan, just to get into a work environment sometimes would do them great justification. And you see, if you have a home and there is an OJT person working there, and I think our goal should be to have a person in every home that is working, be it a young person, be it a father. One person in every home should be working, and we should try to see if the Minister of Social Development and Family Services should look at that scenario. How could we engage somebody in that home?

Again, education. Right now we are in challenging times, but I am saying even before I was asking for depression testing, online testing in school. Depression testing in schools. We have to develop online testing. We have to have the Student Support Services reach out. And in the Student Support Services there are online addresses. They have given email addresses where if children are depressed they can reach out for them. This has to be out there in the public where children and parents would know they can reach out to them. I think we also need to increase the retirement age. I noticed when the Minister of Finance mentioned that, he was somewhat hesitant to come out outright and say if he is going to do it. But you see, Madam President, as far back as, I think it was 2010, I had recommended in an article that—in an interview that I did, that, you know, it is ageism, it is age discrimination where we tell somebody because you reach a certain age you cannot work. And in that article I elaborated that we are dealing with more and more persons who are older than 60, we cannot just put them out in

the pasture. Look, our Prime Minister he is in his—vim and vigour, he was 71, I think. So, examples like that are examples that you can manage at that age.

So, I am thinking, even then, in that interview I had mentioned that the NIS contributions we are running into some difficulties, and I had suggested then that we actually consider that as other countries had done. It is to empower the older person to give them that power; the retired person. And I am suggesting that if somebody is there, you do not keep them in a position, you could move them parallel so the younger persons could still move up. The judges recently had their retirement age increased. My father was a retired judge who was called out at the age of 75 to serve for a stint on the bench, and he did that before this age was introduced. So he was one of the oldest serving judges. So, he had retired at 65 and 10 years after they had called him back as a stint there. So what I am saying, even the last administration where they had Major General Kenrick Maharaj, the Chief of Defence Force, when his retirement age at 55, they increased it to one year, and then at the time the Minister of National Security, Capt. Gary Griffith, said he would look into raising the retirement ages of all those army personnel at 60. So I think this is something we have to seriously look at.

Madam President, I would like to say that when you look at the health issue, I started working as an intern in Port of Spain Hospital 35 years ago, and some of the same problems still exist, files are being lost. So, you see a patient in clinic and 20 feet away there is a record room but the files are somehow lost. This problem still occurs. You have certain private institutions where if that happens heads will roll. And you see also, it seems that the civil service has its own work ethic, which I think we should look at. You see, long appointment times, it is still there. Now we have persons, you know, calling out and saying there is a mentally ill person

running amok, we cannot get an ambulance on a weekend, we cannot get an ambulance to come, the police are saying it is mental health officers. All these are things we have to look at. Thankfully, the Minister of Health has appointed a director of Mental Services, and I am thinking we should hopefully get an improvement for that.

You see, not getting an MRI report, not getting CAT scan reports. You know, you go, you do a test, but the reports are not coming. You come clinic and there is no report there. Years ago we met the Ambassador from India and he told us, if we send those same things online to India they will be read by experts at a fraction of the cost if our local persons do not have time to read it, and we would get those reports to our persons. You get a CAT scan and you are waiting for reports sometimes for two years. I had a patient with cancer and she got a CAT scan and no report and she died before it came. Those things are not acceptable. So therefore, we have to work. We have to honestly work at this. But, you see, these problems are not new. In 1965 at the Conference of Ministers of Health of the Commonwealth, Minister of Health at the time, Ursula Teshea, Trinity Cross holder, and my wife always tries to say she was the first female who served as a Minister in our government. So this is a “big up” for her. But since then, there was a shortage of 30 doctors. And in that conference, she appealed and she got 20 doctors from Philippines. So the staff problems we have since 1965, we did not solve it. If I quote *Hansard* from July 28, 2009, Minister of Health then, Jerry Narace, said, you know, we need increased access and availability of persons in the primary care. We need more beds, we need better services, a reduction in the waiting time. Then there was the leadership forum there where I think it was my friend Sen. Wesley George in—300 of us used to meet to try to give a plan, and all

that was in 2009, and all that came to naught.

In 2000, Dr. Hamza Rafique had the reform of health, the health sector reform. But all those plans, what happened? We spent 134 million of an IDB loan hiring consultants to come to advise us how to get the plans going, but it did not come to fruition. We looked at the regional health authority, it came in 1994, John Eckstein at the time had a brilliant plan, if we split up these institutions they would do better, because you would now put it closer to the people. But, has it worked? Has it worked? I mean, we have seen recently the Attorney General brought in the idea that there were three Ministries before in the PP's Government, Ministry of Legal Affairs, Registrar and AG's office, and he all put it into one where he saved cost and he is getting a more efficient way. Couple of weeks' time to look at the RHAs and say, should we just have a RHA for Tobago and just one for Trinidad. You see the cost of putting persons in different boards, four different boards, is expensive. The cost of having to split up those facilities, if you just have one, we are a small country we could do it.

Even when we look at the fact that the Mount Hope Hospital when it came on board there were a lot of allegations of corruption there. There were cases where equipment was there, put down, nothing was done to it. But you see, out of Mount Hope, I always looked at it that, why can we not develop certain hospitals in Trinidad as having specialized service? So I have a stroke and all the good stroke specialists would be at Mount Hope. I have a heart attack, all the heart attack specialists and the equipment is there. So we do not have to have staff scattered at Mount Hope, Port of Spain and, you know, different hospitals. You have a unit there. Trinidad is a small place. We take people from Tobago with a helicopter. We can have a fast ambulance service bringing persons to a specialized

unit with the specialist there, paediatric specialists there. And so when you have children, learning disabilities, you have to have programmes in place for them. You have all the specialists in one area. You do not scatter them. The other hospitals will perform the general surgery.

So all these are things we have to look at. But, you see, Madam President, this month is breast cancer month. I wear this pink ribbon. This pink ribbon was given to me by someone. She was a child at the time, seven years old and her mother died with breast cancer, 38 years old. The only child. The mother came to me for counselling, and she said, “Listen, I doh mind dying, I lived a good life but I am leaving my chile behind”. You see, one in eight women will get this disease in their life, and as a physician I had an aunt who I lost from this condition. I know the suffering. And you see, when the national oncology centre was promised in 2002 and 2003 by the then Minister Patrick Manning, I applauded it. This was such a wonderful move. This was such a needed move to have—giving women a fighting chance or persons a fighting chance with prostate cancer and whatnot. For all our citizens, you know, in a way to transform the way cancer is treated. You have one assembling of specialists, facilities, technology.

And the cost of construction initially was estimated around 150 million, but then in 2012 it never materialized. 2012, under a different administration, Dr. Fuad Khan had promised that the opening would be in November 2014, and this did not come to pass. Yet still another administration after now came in, and in 2018, the chairman of UDeCOTT, Noel Garcia gave November 2018 as the new date. But then we heard our Minister of Health say this is no more. Things going back to St. James. Any sort of joy we had of having the centre, no more. And you see, what I am saying, Madam President, it is persons on that side and persons on this side

who have failed the people of Trinidad and Tobago with their cancer management, and I make no apologies for saying that. Because you see, I do not know if any of them had any relative stricken by cancer, but it is not acceptable for plans that were made, good plans, to just go by the wayside. Moneys were spent. Millions of dollars were spent and there was no accountability why this was allowed, and this is what we need to know. We had other projects like the Brian Lara stadium, Red House, President's House, Prime Minister's residence in Tobago, White Hall, all worthy ventures. But this means nothing to a patient and their family who have the emotional trauma of depending on proper oncology care.

But I have a sense of hope, because last week Mrs. Sharon Rowley who was the patron of the Caribbean Association of Oncology and Haematology, along with my wife, Dr. Sherene Kalloo, they were involved in a cancer awareness. So we may not have money to get a big unit again, but the drive I think and the message they gave there, is we have to look at community outreach oncology where we can go into all communities and screen women, pick them up, look for the cancers in the communities. Because, women there may not know, rural women may not know about the dangers of cancers, and you may find they may not even have money or the energy to travel to clinics now. So that gave me some hope; we can still do things with a limited amount of money. So, we are indeed privileged in this country to be having free health care. We see the debate in the United States about "Obamacare" where some people are left out. Good things have happened in health. We have maternal mortality rates which make us the envy of the world. We have a vaccination programme which has protected many. Our previous Minister of Health, Emmanuel Hosein had polio, David Rudder had polio, one of my mentors Morris Marshall had polio. But we have the vaccine there that would

prevent people from getting it.

So those are good things that happen. The EPI, the expanded vaccine, and, more than that, our Minister of Health recently informed us that we have 9 million US allocated to the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines. Once it is safe, we have that, and it is a collaboration with WHO. And we also have a collaboration with a Chinese pharmaceutical company to acquire different amounts to service two-thirds of the population. So therefore, I congratulate that proactive approach. We have a reduction in chronic infections. We have seen new modalities in south. I think there is there is a Dr. Ramsubag in the hospital, new urological technique. So, there are pockets of wonders being put. But we still see a nation riddled with obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and the Minister of Health has put in programmes, and the previous Minister of Health, Dr. Fuad Khan have put in programmes where they were appealing to the nation, eat healthy, exercise. And you know, mental illness is on the rise, one in four of us will succumb to it. But as I am saying, we have hope with our new director of mental health.

Now, Sen. Dillon-Remy did mention about the non-functioning Cath lab in Tobago and also no staff to run it, the analogue rather than digital radiology service equipment, without proper planning. You have to get the planning with us. We saw the same Mount Hope scenario, you know, playing out again, where equipment lay idle, dumped, money wasted. Therefore, the same issues keep repeating themselves. So therefore, I have heard the—I have seen the wastage, the lack of accountability. I have heard the Opposition say that we all saw it before, the ole talk, the broken promises. Manning's *Vision 2020* now becomes 2030. Our nation's eyesight got worse. But we need legislation and systems for us to peer at all government transactions, no matter which government occupies the corridors of

power. Regardless if it is old PNM, new PNM, or UNC, or PP, whoever. You know, this thing did not start in 2015. It started even before, when we were told “massa day done”, money is no problem. That is the mentality we got.

So, we need to change this together, and under the NAR government, I was appointed in a committee to tackle the homeless. It is still in a horrible state. These homeless persons could spread COVID if it comes among them. And I have seen the grandiose plans of one regime discarded by another regime. So what I am saying, there is no continuity, no respect for all the hard work, no long term tie-in, and this is what I think we have to develop for our country. I see new energetic persons on both sides, and I know the new blood, they may have a reason to try to energise this thing. So, what I think we need really in our country right now is really like executive accountability. We could pass good legislation, but why do we not have the delivery aspect and the implementation? Why do we have implementation failure? The project planning is not adequate. We do not have the long-term means to hold them accountable.

So, we have that executive stagnation, non-performance. And I think, just as how we have the weekly interviews with the Minister of Health, allow the councillors in each area to take complaints from persons, be it drain, pothole, whatever, a lack of infrastructure, anything that is failing the constituency burgesses. Allow 10 of those or less than 10 of those councillors to have an open forum with the Minister, for all to see, and once a week. Do it. That is accountability. You lay the problem to the Ministers and say, look, there is a big pothole there, there is a leak, there is this there, and give them a timeline to fix it. You see that is the only way we could get the executive to deliver, by putting them on an open scrutiny to get efficiency. So this is something we have to see.

You see, the Prime Minister must not only admonish our civil servants for not coming out to work, but ensure his own Ministers must perform. We have to see the performance. We have to judge them by that yardstick. We need it to work. We cannot wait for five years to pass and all we remember of some Members of Parliament were their sexual misconduct allegations. Yes, we got a sexual harassment policy. But, you see, the reports that taxpayers paid for never materialized. And speaking about reports, what became of the Clico Colman Report? Taxpayers paid out a lot of money to rescue Clico, to pay out debts and whatnot, yet still there was a report, paid by taxpayers, that is not there. I remember when the Tesoro scandal erupted, and the then AG, Selwyn Richardson made a deal where they were destroying the file. Our present Minister of Finance had an article in the newspaper where he objected to that. He said why are you— are you trying to hide something? Why are you keeping that evidence from that Tesoro report, destroy it? And the AG was at lengths to try to say, well, it was a deal we had made and whatnot. But, you see, the public needs to know where we failed. The public needs to know what went on. The public needs to know who are the players who keep getting away, because the reports are kept hidden.

I admire the publication of the Scott Drug Report. We saw some figures there that opened eyes. So besides that accountability, I think we also need a forum on race relations, because we still have allegations of ethnic political nepotism. We have people saying that the OJT, it is only if you belong to certain parties you are going to get it. We have that. So, how could we counter that as a society? Because you see, all of us will have to go together as one. We cannot have things like that. So what I am saying, we also should have a public forum where—

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

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam. We cannot have a public forum where—I think we should have a public forum that if people have these allegations or have these concerns they could raise it, so it will put a sort of damper on any sort of nepotistic activity that persons in power, whoever is in power, may want to do.

Remember the civil rights movement in the United States. They ensured that persons of, you know, the Afro-Americans are represented in boards, in the Judiciary. They are now fighting for the police service. We have been hearing bass and, you know, talk. So give us an open forum there where people will say now that there is no sort of victimization and discrimination. You see, this has to be dealt with frontally. And why? Because there is a deep perception in emotion, by emotional feelings attached to that claim and it has to be dealt properly by the authorities, so it would not linger. You remember Eric Williams in his book *Inward Hunger*, page 265. I quote:

“I call upon all party members to stop once and for all this infuriating nonsense that every Indian is anti-PNM. Every Indian is not anti-PNM, nor is every white. Some of the worse enemies of PNM are as black as the ace of spades.”

I want to quote also President Barrack Obama, when he was inaugurated. He said:

We have to find a place and we have to find a time to understand that not everyone who opposes us is against us.

So when you hear the leaders making inflammatory statements, I think I saw—I heard the discourse of Sen. Lezama where she spoke about the Amerindians. She probably needs to bring a peace pipe and let both leaders smoke it and get a level of peace amongst us. You see, that is an Amerindian heritage that occurred in

America.

So therefore corruption, corruption is something that would affect our nation. We find that there was a—in the *Journal of Economics and Management*, Olayiwola actually looked at “Corruption and economic growth in India and Nigeria”, and it was stated corruption would in fact stymie economic growth and development. So therefore, we have to put things in place to put a dent on corruption or alleged corruption. And what I am saying is, besides the procurement legislation, in Canada, there are Guidelines on the Proactive Disclosure of Contracts. And this is good reading where I am thinking, it is really the Government of Canada gave that. So proactive disclosure of contracts. So all contracts, you need to break it up, be it big contacts, should be out for the public to say, who are the players, who are the owners of the company, who are the persons who are coming in and going to utilize our taxpayers’ money.

So, therefore, we need procurement plus this legislation that Canada has. Why do we have state enterprise failure? This is another question. We had technocrats that Eric Williams brought in, we had private individuals that came in, Arthur Lok Jack and different ones came to help CAL and all these organizations. Yet still these organizations run through. What did we do wrong? And this is what we have to know if we are going to do anything: where did we go wrong? Was it political influence in the state boards? Eric Williams must be turning over in the Gulf. His ashes may be turning over in the Gulf of Paria. Because he actually wanted our state to run our things, our country to run things, a socialist sort of system. So from *Capitalism to Slavery*, his book, we have now gone back to capitalism if we are going to privatize the port, as we have privatized ISCOTT, as we had privatized Petrotrin. So, again, we have to say all the money wasted, where

Appropriation (Financial Year
2021) Bill, 2020 (cont'd)
Sen. Dr. V. Deyalaysingh (cont'd)

2020.10.27

did it go wrong? Because the young ones coming up will have to see that they do not make that same mistake, because we have a way of repeating the same mistake.

And as I close I must say, Madam, that, you know, I congratulate the Minister of Finance for giving us a soft budget. I am happy about this budget. We have things to be thankful for, and I am thinking that also we have to realize that not just them giving us this budget, but the impact that it was not much on the people. I have to also end by just quoting one thing, Madam. I want to quote that, you know, some time ago our last Prime Minister actually said that this country has been good to us. He said even though in his illness—

Madam President: Sen. Deyalsingh, your time has expired. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. [*Desk thumping*]

Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, I thank you very much for the opportunity to join this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2020/2021. Madam President, in the realm of calypso, one of my all-time favourites is a rather recent one. It came in the wake of the award of Nobel Prize for Literature to our famous and beloved son Sir Vidia Naipaul. And as great as Sir Vidia was in his prose, and in his 36 books, it was Dr. Hollis Liverpool who managed to place Naipaul in a particular context. And the most famous line of that calypso referred to Sir Vidia as the Count of Birmingham. And while I listened to Sen. Nakhid, I felt I was in the court of the Count of Bahrain being lectured to. He lacking coattails today and top hat. But I felt that he did not have it too far away from him.

Madam President, I am not prepared to listen to any instructions, teaching or anything from the Count of Bahrain. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, 46—

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat (cont'd)

Madam President: Minister. Sen. Mark, it is okay. Minister, please!

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President—I would just say, Madam President, in another calypso, while the Senator spoke, especially towards the end, because people have a way of thinking that they are the only ones on the ground and the only ones doing things in the country, and this thing called the corridor, and while Sen. Nakhid was talking about that, about we are not on the ground, we went to 32 health centres and 23 this. It reminds me of another person, the Tobagonians will know this well. John Howell Walcott, Tobago calypso monarch 1982, passed away in 2013. His funeral was not too far from the place where they are looking for Sen. Nakhid. Not too far from Tunapuna. They are looking for you. I will remind you about that constituency. But John Howell went by the name of “Jus Come”. That was his calypso name.

And I want to tell you Sen, Nakhid, you reminded me about somebody who “jus come”. And you did not have a problem, you know. When you referred to the person who said there is no land to plant, when you referred to that person, unnamed, you did not have a problem saying you were not here for 39 years, you know. And you look like a 40-year-old to me. I mean, if you were missing for 39 years and you look like 40, “you just come”! In fact, “you eh to long walk out maternity hospital”. I do not know if it is St. Clair, Port of Spain, Mount Hope “you just come from”. But if you could say that you were not here for 39 years, then you need to be schooled. And with all the virtual school, I will help you. I will help you. Because let me tell you something. You contributed—

12.00 noon

Madam President: Minister, when you are referring to—when you are talking to another Member, you talk through me, okay?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: When you contributed for your 40 minutes, I waited patiently for you to talk about Tunapuna, because in the campaign you just ran, you had a manifesto for Tunapuna and you referred to Caura, land tenure, honey, cocoa, a lot of things that I am about to refer to. And I thought you would talk about the people of Tunapuna who you tried to represent and having failed, you have an opportunity like me, a second bite of the cherry to talk on their behalf. And I thought you would say something about that constituency of Tunapuna.

I expected you to talk about Cachipal and the farmers up there. Tumbasson, and the people who have waited there a long time for land tenure. I expected you to talk about your proposal for a farmers market in Honeymoon Ground. I expected you to talk about Ernest Jack, the fella in Tumbasson who is waiting 40 years for a lease; Shanmati Satnarine, I do not know if you met Shanmati on your hustings. I expected you to talk about Rudolph Roberts and Bhagmania Gangadeen, all Tunapuna constituents, all people you may have encountered. I thought you would use the opportunity to represent them.

Orange Grove is not far away, not a lease has ever been given out in Orange Grove. I thought you would come and say something about Orange Grove, because you put out a manifesto with the intention of representing the people of Tunapuna and not many failed candidates get a second bite. I am having my second, second bite [*Laughter*] and every opportunity I get, every opportunity I get, I represent those people who I have encountered. But if you cannot speak about Tunapuna, Sen. Nakhid, you cannot tell me anything about the rest of the country. [*Desk thumping*] Because if I ask you about Mr. Stewart's shop in Matelot and when you reach to the end of the road in Matelot and you look up, you look up past the river, the school that is up there, you "cyah" tell me, you cannot

tell me about Marac and La Lune and the Robinson land down there. You cannot talk about this country because by your own admission you have just arrived, you have just arrived.

In fact, you cannot even talk about the 500 million, no matter how many times I have said, the 500 million is under Head 18, Sub-Head 04; 009, Item 42: Fiscal Incentive Programme for Farmers. [*Desk thumping*] And you could have asked your colleague Sen. Lyder, because he referred to it yesterday and he said it is placed in the Ministry of Finance because maybe my colleagues do not trust me with it. But I will explain it, but it is there, it is there and I expected you, I expected you to talk about the 500million and how it might have helped those farmers you met and those people in Caura and those people in Tumbasound.

But I want to tell you this. I do not want to waste too much time on talking about your party and your party in government and your party and its policies. But I want to say this to you, there are 10 ways in which I could tell you the United National Congress has failed agriculture just in the 2010/2015 period. On the first thing, the number one contributor to agriculture in this country is chicken. This country is self-sufficient in poultry and under the UNC in 2010/2015, 20 per cent of the market share went to imported leg and thigh. And I want to tell you this, a lot of it comes from a company called Tyson; Tyson Chicken in the United States, highly subsidized chicken, benefiting from successful bailouts by the US Government including the current bailout, supported by government guarantees and everything like that. Tyson is a machine funded by US subsidies that will eat jobs on the East-West Corridor and leave local chicken in a quandary if we do not defend our turf. And your government almost allowed leg and thigh to eat all those jobs and all those farming communities that contribute to the self-sufficiency

in chicken in this country.

It is your government who went so far as to create draft legislation to permit the importation of honey into this country, the same honey you listed in your manifesto, Sen. Nakhid. It is your administration that if we had not arrived in September 2015, this country would have permitted via law the importation of honey. And what is that honey? And what is that honey? Let me school you. That is lab-produced honey from China trading as Caribbean honey, and you know what that honey will do? Imported honey, imported lab honey that competes with our world class honey produced by hard-working farmers; there is a young farmer called Adrian Edwards. When he was doing the beekeeping course offered by this Ministry two years ago, I was there in El Reposo and I spoke at the training and Adrian Edwards today, through government policy and through the farmers market sells honey under the brand, Honey “On the Rocks”. And imported honey, unless we do not protect our farmers and our honey, lab created honey will eat our local market.

There is a young lady, mechanical engineer, Nikita Legall a former national swimmer, her brand is called Tropical Hives. If we do not defend local honey in the manner I have done and this Government has done, there will be no Adrian Edwards and no Nikita Legall operating in this country. I can tell you, between 2010 and 2015, a Minister of Agriculture did not visit Nestlé. Nestlé that has been operating in this country, a major manufacturer, a major employer, a significant distributor, but most importantly, the company that has supported what remains of local dairy in this country. And you go and check from 2010 to 2015, a Minister of Agriculture did not go and visit that company and talk to that company about how we could revitalize, how we could keep local cow’s milk in packages on the shelf.

What did you do? Attempt to open a pasteurization plant in Sugar Cane Feed Centre and one in Aripo. And it is this Government through the much maligned Aripo, that PPP, that privatization of Aripo that has given our local dairy the best opportunities to survive. And two Fridays ago, Madam President, I was in Aripo, now called Aripo Livestock Limited, a venture that will see \$80 million in private sector capital going in. No loss of jobs in the public sector and I was there to witness the signing of an MOU between Nestlé and Aripo Livestock Limited that would see that farm, that single farm reach 2.5 million litres of production, tripling this country's current production. And when you go on the supermarket shelf, if you go on my Facebook page this morning, you will see it.

This morning when I was making my cocoa to come here, I was so proud to reach in my refrigerator and pull out a Nestlé full cream 100 per cent milk pack with a national flag on it. [*Desk thumping*] Because I know, Madam President, I know as a Minister I have to go to Nestlé and I have to go to Matelot and Marac and La Lune, I have to go around this country to find a way for my farmers and my agriculture sector to survive, because, Madam President, "I ain't just come". I came from there and I am from there; 90 per cent of my family are on the east coast, right down from the east coast to Rousillac. Today, long after we first arrived in this country we still earn a living from agriculture. It is not by accident I am in this job and it was not by accident that Avinash Singh, a farmer from a farming family is the Minister in the Ministry, in this Ministry. [*Desk thumping*]

The same Aripo, the same Aripo Livestock, all the talk you hear about all those farmers and sheep and goats and goats and sheep, and 1,176 acre farm declared by the Ministry to be a research facility, unproductive, not much happening, and it is that PPP and that \$80 million investment that will give the

biggest boost to Trinidad and Tobago to be able to produce more and more meat to compete against the import. And we saw in COVID, the farmers themselves were surprised, because we know when supplies tighten around the world, COVID has taught us that, when supplies tighten around the world, when shipping becomes uncertain, when prices become uncertain, our food supply is threatened but we cannot deal with it by just talking, we have to deal with it by changing the structure. And that PPP, the invitation to the private sector in a fair and transparent manner that I have explained in this Senate over and over, on one occasion in detail, represents the best opportunity to produce local meat for consumption to compete against imports and to sustain a livestock sector in this country. Your government did absolutely nothing for it.

Sen. Lyder talks about seafood and fish and this and that. Let me tell you something. If it is one thing I am proud of, of doing—I am a serial non-performer? I think “you get tie up with the talk” about cereal and the food import bill, “dais what”. But let me tell you something, it took 27 years, your government made many attempts to bring modern fisheries legislation to this Parliament. You could talk how much you want about this and that and that in fisheries. If you do not have the legislation—as it is now, we cannot compel a fishing vessel in this country to have a tracking device on the vessel. You know in Tobago, they do it voluntarily? But we do not have the ability to do that, to track, to separate those who are bona fide fishermen from those who are criminals operating with pirogues on the seas. We need the legislation and it was laid by the hon. Prime Minister in the House in the last Parliament, it lapsed as we expected it to, and it was laid again yesterday and placed before a joint select committee and while you allowed the European Union to give us a yellow card and impair our ability to export,

because the EU is not an important market for us, but about US \$45 million in sea food goes through Trinidad into the US market and when the United States mirrored the EU import requirements, Trinidad was constrained and given five years to bring in modern fisheries management legislation. And if it is one thing the Prime Minister is proud about as a legislator, because that was commissioned under him, a former fisheries officer, commissioned by him 27 years ago, we have brought that legislation to this Parliament again.

You talked about cocoa, you talked about cocoa in your manifesto, you did not talk about cocoa today, because you do not know about cocoa and honey, maybe you do not even use it. It is your government, one line in a finance Act, one line in a finance legislation that repealed the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, that is the thing that guaranteed Trinidad and Tobago protection of its fine-flavour status. It is the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, up until that one line removed the board, no cocoa farmer in this country had to look for an international market. And you were not paying attention. And by repealing that, the overnight moneys owed to cocoa farmers, markets which were accessible and available, the cocoa farmers did not know what to do. You created a limited liability company called the Coco Development Company, but there was no link between them and the international market and the farmers, and you left a big gap. And it has taken a lot of work and I credit the Cocoa Research Centre, Winston Rudder when he was chairman, Prof. Uma from UWI, Daren Sookoo our judge at the international competitions and the hard working farmers in this country for Trinidad and Tobago, very recently retaining yet again our fine-flavour status as the international market continues to put pressure on small producers like us to eliminate that status that gives us a competitive advantage in premium cocoa

around world.

A simple thing as coconut water; coconut water. I listened to Ralph Maraj talking all the time about estates and estates and east coast and so on, but let me tell you something that you allowed. You allowed a company—the irony of it—TTABA, Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association, TTABA. But you allowed TTABA for years under your watch to bring into Trinidad from the Dominican Republic coconut water and put it in the supermarkets with a Trinidad and Tobago flag on it, depriving people around this country, farmers who were in coconut business, of having that type of market, and that is coconut water, coconut water. Imported vegetables, you made the school feeding programme 100 per cent import. You went to a single provider, a provider who provided vegetables, fruits, toilet paper, napkins, forks, containers, everything. And what have we done? Immediately, immediately instructed the school feeding programme to ensure that those contractors who provide meals for the programme use local suppliers and local farmers for their produce. [*Desk thumping*] And we have gone a step further. COVID created an opportunity for us to do what this PNM Government wanted to do a long time ago, because we recognized that we were part of the problem, we were part of the problem.

When the State purchases for its hospitals, for its military, law enforcement, everybody, every part of the State that buys, even this Parliament, they purchased foreign, imported and we recognized that the way the food service industry is structured, the imports come in, it is easy to handle, it is vacuum-packed, it is frozen and it is easy to handle. And in the budget and in the use of 500million we have said that we want to take the next step of allowing the farmers to do value added to compete with the imported products to the extent that we cannot limit

through tariff or other means the importation. But that school feeding, we moved part of the food card programme into the veggie box programme. All of you, your Members of Parliament in the other place benefited from it and the constituents, a 90-pound package of locally produced fruits and vegetables, 90 pounds with two locally produced chickens on the table of the persons in this country who are most vulnerable. And we have gone further now, in the absence of the food available in the schools, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services alongside the Ministry of Education, they are working to take that same veggie package and put it at the homes of those persons who would normally access the food.

Even the imported vehicles, even the vehicles under our incentive programme, the incentive programme became so one-sided, poorly managed, became so one-sided that more than 60 per cent of the incentives went for vehicles reimbursements and in many cases those vehicles were not tied to actual food production. And we have cleaned that up. We have also introduced the agri-incentive, and I say Sen. Nakhid, you would not know, but two persons from Tunapuna just recently in the last 10 days, two persons from Tunapuna came and collected their incentives, the agri-incentive, which allows us to reward persons with good projects, persons who want a specific intervention and persons who are performing to reward them through a grant to continue to boost their production, improve their farms, improve their food safety, improve their branding, their packaging, improve the quality of their product and allow them to compete.

And finally, this thing about import permits, several things. That Plant Quarantine, you paid no attention to that as a government. You had the opportunity because you saw the abuse taking place with Plant Quarantine Officers running up overtime and making—when I came in as Minister, September 2015, I

met \$3 million in overtime expenses to be paid out. And that caused me to commission an audit into Plant Quarantine. And among the many things that audit found, it was found that from since 2013, under your administration there was a change in the administration of this container examination that Plant Quarantine Officers do. And the change was that the persons importing the container were supposed to pay the overtime of the Plant Quarantine Officers, and having changed that in 2013, you did absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing, so it continued to be an expense of the State and the audit led to significant changes. And I will tell you the significant changes in the context of digital transformation.

We fought hard to get those Plant Quarantine Officers to use a tablet. When they were first given the tablet they refused to use it, because a tablet will cause them to enter the information in real time. Being GPS enabled we will know where they went, not that we want to know their business, we will know that they went to an examination of a container; and they refused. And I congratulate the public servants in the Ministry who fought that battle because they understood the importance. And Sen. John you would be happy to know, in January this year we had no import permit application that was being processed by a mobile app and COVID forced us to accelerate that, and by the time we got to August, 98 per cent of import permit applications are processed using the technology. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, we went paperless in June, we made the changes, the Plant Quarantine Officers who are there are those who are willing to use the tablet and the ones who are not willing have been moved out to other parts of the Ministry. And I could list for you all the changes, the waiting time, the time it takes to process being halved, all those things. And one area that digital transformation has already made an impact, it is not something new, has made an impact, it is in that

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat (cont'd)

area of import permits, plant quarantine, processing containers and dealing with people. The waiting time when I came in, people could apply, Sen. Singh will tell you about the many, many, complaints he got from La Vega, Bert Manhin. La Vega, you applied to bring—you want to bring in some exotic fruit or exotic plant, you want to introduce it to Trinidad and you wait years, and you wait years and you hear nothing. And we have been able now to reduce the time for processing of a plant import permit to five days, five days from years. If you want to bring in seeds or planting material and it is from a country with which we are familiar, a country that we understand and we have dealings in relation to pest risks and so on, it could be as short as five days.

But, Madam President, it is important that I say that that 500million is housed in the Ministry of Finance for a simple reason. When you are in government you would understand that it is very bureaucratic for the Government to—it is not easy to give away money in the public system, you know. It is easy to—anyway, let me not say that, but it is not easy to give away money, it is not easy to administer things like grants and incentives and so on, and we have found that we could remove a significant part of the bureaucracy if the funding is housed at the Ministry of Finance from which the ultimate payment must come.

So that, Madam President, I want to say very quickly, these are the 32 projects that we intend to use some of that 500 million for. The first is in the area of state land, and I have talked about land and land tenure and so on. This is not new. From 2015 to 2020, we spent more than \$15 million and that money was spent on first, building a new IT infrastructure in the Ministry and secondly, moving to this thing called electronic files and digital files and digitized records, because I have spoken so many times about the manual—this file, this file that I

myself have to be toting around for every land transaction. We started work on the 30,000 agriculture files of which we have reached 10,000 and we believe that the 500 million will allow us to fund the acceleration of that project.

Madam President, something that has not been addressed is in the transition from Caroni, because I would not go into Sen. Nakhid's spurious allegation relating to Caroni because as I said, he was not here, I was there. You cannot tell me that in 2003, when we closed Caroni, Caroni was self-sufficient or Caroni was a major food producer. Caroni was past being on a life line. In 1992, when the current Prime Minister was Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, he gave Caroni yet another boost. It is called the Tripartite Report and somebody in the other place stood up and said that the Tripartite Report was never implemented. Well, that person was not around, was not around. The most important thing in the Tripartite Report, it was the first billion-dollar write-off of a state enterprise debt in this country and it allowed Caroni's balance sheet to be reset, removing that liability and allowing Caroni to be able to raise its own money. Caroni—from raising its own money through bonds, Caroni went into the process, an annual process of preselling the crop and funding its needs in order to raise the crop in the first place.

But when Caroni was closed down, Caroni was not a food basket. Caroni was barely producing sugar and all the diversification projects in Caroni had failed. And a relic of that is those farmers, those former cane farmers who worked on behalf of Caroni (1975) Limited, all those lands are out there, all those lands are out there still unsurveyed, without lease, I do not know the conditions of all of them, I know some of them, and you know the funny thing about it is that those lands are not on the corridor. Those lands are in Opposition held constituencies.

And I am not going to go through that, particularly, Tabaquite, Gasparillo, Pointe-a-Pierre, right down through south Trinidad and part of that \$500 million is going to be used to commence the regularization of those persons who were former Caroni farmers. Because I am confident that those persons who formerly planted cane and were in agriculture like that, have remained in some form of agriculture and their families are farming families, and given a lease they would be able to make the investment and more importantly, the family will be able to make the long-term commitment to remain in agriculture.

But there is second part of the land tenure that I have been talking about, Madam President, and this relates to, this call for more land and this call for land to be allocated to new persons. Well, I could tell you, from 2015 to 2020, apart from some specific agricultural projects that the Government wishes to support, we have been unable to grant a new agricultural lease to a new applicant. And that is simply because we have been trying to deal with all those 60 years of applications, of approvals, of Cabinet approvals in the thousands that had never been implemented. But in order to distribute new land, what we have to do is deal with what is allocated already. And the starting point for me was to ask the EMBD to look at those 3,124 or 34 parcels which they developed for the Caroni VSEP for distribution, the two-acre parcels. And I was not surprised, by the time EMBD came back to me after an extensive audit, of that 3,100-and-something plots, only 16 per cent could be said to be in any form of agriculture. It means that 2,622 plots developed by the taxpayers, the cost of development and the value of the 2,622 two-acre plots is about \$4 billion. That is money that we have spent as taxpayers, that is money when we moved to the closure of the sugar industry, we contemplated that as part of the transition those workers who worked in Caroni

will use these two-acre parcels and they would be able to contribute to the food supply in this country. And if 2,622—and I have not gone to the full amount yet, you know, this is just one section, the ones developed by EMBD. And if the failure to grow food in the manner contemplated by that public policy decision, if that is what is happening out there, I have said as Minister that EMBD will move to terminate those leases, retake those lands and distribute it to persons in this country who are serious and desirous of growing food to feed this population and setting off the imports that we have. And that is important.

But I know that—certainly, in 2010 to 2015, that would not have been contemplated. What you did in that period is that you made it easier for those lands to move out of the hands of the Caroni workers into the hands of persons who are nothing more than investors, land holders and land grabbers, waiting for the day that some government or Minister of convenience comes along and you are able to change that agricultural limitation and allow for industrial, commercial and housing. And eventually, when we are complete with that EMBD exercise and the second part of it, another 3,000-and-something two-acre parcels were developed for the Commissioner of State Lands to do the distribution to the Caroni workers, when they finish that, I am going to come back to this same House and tell you that there are people in this country who own 100 of those two-acre parcels and there are people in this country who owned 50 of those two-acre parcels with nothing on it and I will also tell you that the opposition to property tax in this country is linked to the true ownership of state land, particularly Caroni two-acre parcels and Caroni residential land. Wait for me to come back with that. [*Desk thumping*]

12.30 p.m.

You want to know what the \$500 million is for? Part of that 500 million is

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat (cont'd)

going towards that exercise to protect that 4 billion that these taxpayers in this country, on the East-West Corridor, in Caura, in Tumbasson, in Cachipal, they forked out to give those lands to those Caroni workers. That is what the money is for. We have critical places like Plum Mitan. A real food basket in this country, Plum Mitan, with infrastructure issues. Many of them being addressed. But, for example, the pumps in Plum Mitan—because Plum Mitan has a complex water management system linked to the proximity of the Nariva Swamp, and also, linked to the east coast, and the interaction within the water on the land and the water that goes out to the sea. Sen. Nakhid, you took note? And all we need is another \$9 million to complete that project. That will be funded out of the 500 million.

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: The road repair. Access road repair, it has been a while and we do not need no MOU or anything with Rural Development and Local Government Ministry, or Rural Development Company. This Government knows what it has to do. We have been around long and we know what we have to do, and the access roads are going to be repaired on a phase basis. So for this financial year, we intend to do 100 kilometres of road in the areas of Toco/Sangre Grande, Tunapuna, St. Joseph, Talparo, Las Lomas, Tabaquite, Paramin, on the north coast, Oropouche, Barrackpore.

Madam President, I want to close by saying this, COVID allowed us a wake up call. On the very first debate on any COVID issue, I said the only thing we know about COVID is the uncertainty about COVID. That is all that we know. But the farmers of this country, the people who talk about the farmers—because I always say, every time you say nothing going on, nothing going on, “dey ain’t doing nothing”, you are demotivating them, the farmers of this country. Because

we were able to keep those markets open and the citizens of this country who went out and supported local farmers and made sure that they filled their fridges with local produce. They demonstrated that we have enough food in this country to feed ourselves and we have the capacity, the farming capacity and the land availability, and the Government in place, to increase our production so that Trinidad and Tobago, once more, take its place as an exporter to the diaspora that has always been demanding our produce.

And what COVID taught us is that those persons who got very keen on farming, those persons who developed their home gardens, the growth in Trinbago, the seeds were distributed here, and we had Senators and Members of Parliament showing the way of what we could do around our homes. That is what this country needs. Just as I opened my fridge this morning, Madam President, and took a package of milk produced in Valsayn by Trinidad and Tobago workers—milk—a package filled with milk from a farm somewhere in this country, getting money from Nestlé and the Government to feed themselves and send their children to school. Just as I reached in the fridge this morning and I picked one item from it, if we all do that, it is not the 4 billion, 5 billion food import bill. Watch your cupboard and watch your fridge and think about all those farmers and food producers, all those young persons, go in the farmers market and watch how many of them are drawn to local food production. If you look at your fridge and your cupboard and you make the decision to put in there things produced here by hands that live here, to support families that live here, we will get that food import down. Madam President, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Richards.

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you, Madam President, for recognizing me and

allowing me the opportunity to make a contribution to what would be my sixth budget contribution. It seems like just yesterday I was nervously fumbling through my first contribution in 2015. My contribution on this year's national budget is titled, and I am quoting liberally from Dr. Martin Luther King's famous speech, the title of my contribution is: "I have a dream"; subtitle: "Building sustainable bridges for the future in Trinidad and Tobago". And I have to, before I start my substantive contribution, commend my colleagues including Senators Deonarine, Seepersad, Welch and others on the Independent Bench for what I considered very thought-provoking contributions.

I have to admit, I asked myself in the last couple weeks looking at the debate in the other place, what is the point of this process and what are we hoping to accomplish during these debates, and are we working on behalf and in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? But let us ask ourselves honestly, are we? Are we really serving the people, all the people? I mean every creed and every race, every sector equitably, all the people of Trinidad and Tobago to the best of our individual and collective abilities. Have we really championed the needs of the vulnerable, the poor, the homeless, the elderly, those being abused, the sick and indigent, socially displaced, the differently abled, children with special needs and children with learning disabilities, even those who are incarcerated and are in remand for up to 15 years awaiting trials, languishing in the nation's prisons, in many cases in squalid conditions, or do these groups matter less than other groups in Trinidad and Tobago? I ask myself this question or these questions. Does every creed and race really find an equal place in Trinidad and Tobago?

So what is a budget? Several of my colleagues before have asked the question. Most of us come to think of it in Trinidad and Tobago as that annual

three-hour presentation by the Minister of Finance. We outline the state of the country's economy, our revenue positions, our expenditure profiles, our debt profiles, projects, and I agree with my colleague, Sen. Seepersad and others, that in its most humanistic incarnation, it should be about people, people in Trinidad and Tobago and how these measures will impact them for the next year.

And I noticed something this year quite interesting that most contributors, unlike in the past, did not really focus too much on numbers because we have come to realize that the numbers are just projections. In many cases, it depends on the cash flows the Minister has at his disposal and the ability to disperse funds, if and when those cash flows become available. We also get a sense from the budget on where the Government's focus will be in terms of development, the mechanisms and the public sector outlining how Government intends to generate revenues and continue to reign in expenditure, and this particular administration has done quite a good job in the Eleventh Parliament, and certainly from what I can see in this one, in terms of reigning in expenditure because we are obviously in quite difficult economic times.

While I acknowledge and commend the work done by the Government in managing, like every other country around the world, the challenges in relation to COVID-19, this pandemic has certainly presented challenges to every country, every Government, to try to protect lives, provide healthcare for those infected with COVID-19 and those who have other health challenges, in our case, in a parallel healthcare system. Additionally, to provide financial support to vulnerable groups, persons and businesses. Also equally important, keeping the country in as much as possible an economically stable condition and provide, to me, very importantly, hopefully, rays of hope for a population that in many ways is very,

very concerned about the future, is frightened, anxious, looking for guidance and the way forward.

In the age COVID-19, I admit, I expected in addition to stabilization and support mechanisms, more of a clearer outline of a road map to the future document, to me, while providing clear measures for support which are really commendable, lacks a certain level of transformative ingenuity. It is guilty, to a certain degree, of some level of improvidence, and creativity and imagination, and innovation. So what is innovation? That is a question many people have tried to define in many ways. I thought because of the pandemic, we would seize the opportunity to even re-engineer our vision for the country because the world has and continues to change drastically every single day at a very rapid rate, but it is not too late. Many countries around the world are, in addition to thinking outside the proverbial box, remodelling the box itself.

So, innovation. We have heard from hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries that we have been able to do many, many things that COVID has allowed us to do, but I asked myself: Why did we have to wait for COVID to do so many of these things? We knew that the country was facing difficult times and to have to wait for the catalyst of a global pandemic confuses me. So, we had to be innovative. What is innovation? Well, there are several types of innovation: disruptive, which the pandemic has caused; incremental, architectural and radical; innovation to product services what we produce, what we sell as a country; the services we provide exceeding customer expectations; the process by which we make the products and services; the management including business strategies, systems and structures; working beyond boundaries and actually identifying new markets and elements of innovation including collaboration—very important—in

our structured society where the private sector is very important; ideation; the formation of ideas; implementation, that you have a serious deficit within Trinidad and Tobago; and value creation.

There are many measures that are commendable in the 2021 fiscal package. One of the recent announcements include two commendable, but to me, two reactionary announcements including, the liberalization of the local fuel sector and the proposed sale of NP gas stations, and its impact on the fuel subsidy. And I think it is commendable and I understand there is a committee in place looking at the various options available in that regard, because we could not have continued that fuel subsidy situation indefinitely, particularly in terms of what we face with decreased revenues.

Also, very commendable and extremely timely, I had the pleasure of interviewing the CEO of the Energy Chamber, Dr. “Dax” Driver recently, who indicated—and also, the Minister of Finance in his presentation earlier on last week, the announcement of this country finally and definitely moving in the direction and in a large scale of renewable energies and solar energy. And BP and Shell, in a joint bid for a renewable energy project in Trinidad and Tobago. Speaking at the opening of BP Statistical Review of World Energy, Claire Fitzpatrick, Regional President of BPTT, announced BP had submitted a bid to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for commercial scale solar power project with Lightsource BP and Shell. And the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation, in the other place, indicated there will be a 10 per cent renewable energy quotient in Trinidad and Tobago by 2021; a 130-megawatt roughly equates to 10 per cent of the demand for electricity in Trinidad and Tobago.

I think that is extremely commendable because we have all heard the

comments and the references to the Paris accord and it did not seem like Trinidad and Tobago, unlike other Caribbean counterparts, was moving in that direction fast enough. So that, to me, is extremely commendable and I think that is one of the measures announced in the budget that I was really happy about because it speaks to us understanding where the world is going, where renewable energy is concerned, and understanding we have to put our house in order because there will be less and less dependence on hydrocarbon energy sources in the future. So, when you see huge hydrocarbon companies like BP and Shell getting into joint ventures for renewable energy in Trinidad and Tobago, it signals their global stamp on renewable energies.

It is also commendable the announcement to establish Internet cafes around the country. A great idea. Innovative maybe 10 years ago. Today, not so much. Quite reactionary. In the modern society, forward-thinking countries have established nationwide Wi-Fi at different levels and I know there has been some announcement for 5G nationwide Wi-Fi in this budget. But in the age of pandemics, and most of the global expert have predicted that we should expect this to be the first of the many global pandemics, what happens to those Internet cafes? We would not be able to visit them. Interestingly enough, the announcement of nationwide Wi-Fi at different levels has been quite pronounced in the 2015 contribution and 2016 contribution by then Minister of Communications, Maxie Cuffie. It has never materialized.

We have to ask ourselves, why this deficit of implementation in Trinidad and Tobago? And think for a moment, if we had actually accomplished that, those announcements in the 2015 and 2016 budget of having national accessible Wi-Fi, particularly in the rural communities, what a fillip that would have been in terms of

providing goods and services and education when the pandemic finally struck. Again, a significant cost to the country of a lack of implementation of important policy announcements by a particular government or several governments in the past. We have to move past that. We have to become much more accountable to the people of Trinidad and Tobago when successive governments make announcements of these types and do not follow through on them.

Wi-Fi needs to be considered in this day and age as basic as electricity— as basic as electricity if we are to consider ourselves able to compete on a global level, and there are several iterations—and I know Sen. Bacchus made the announcement of what the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation will be doing in terms of trying to put a system in place. There are several tiers that exist in several different countries, free on the first hand, which is a basic service where you can send text messages, you can receive a basic service. There is a second and third tier of commercial Internet areas, when it happens, so that people are connected as a matter of national security and safety if and when global disruptions like a pandemic hit, and also, for the provision of Government goods and services and private sector goods and services across the country.

Another important announcement, I think, is the measure—and for different reasons—to curtail the importation of new and used motor cars because for many reasons, including the drain on the forex, and what the hon. Minister of Finance described as the over-preponderance of cars in Trinidad and Tobago. But let us do a little critical thinking here. Why is there such a big demand for new and used cars in Trinidad and Tobago? It is because of our abysmal public transportation system. If we had an efficient, dependable, reliable public transportation system, there will have be no need for everyone to want to buy a car. There are some jurisdictions,

New York, London, where people have so become, for decades, accustomed to efficient modes of public transportation that they do not even think of buying their private vehicle because it is always there and dependable and reliable. The reason that we flock to the new car dealerships and the used car dealerships is because people need to get around, and they simply cannot depend on what has become endemic in our country in terms of a really weak public transportation network. And PTSC, in this iteration, is the state entity that in other countries has gone to thinking beyond the box.

So, I mentioned at the start in my contribution that its title “I have a dream”, well, I have a dream for PTSC and several other state entities. I am have a dream that in the age of big data use, apps, Uber, we are looking at the huge potential of state entities like PTSC, and if we are visionary, we can think of PTSC as offering many services, basic, efficient, punctual, regular, national public transportation. It is not a bus service. It is a public transportation entity, including the basic service, higher luxury transportation services, including maybe limousines, vehicle rentals, taxis for smaller numbers of people like Uber has done. Imagine for a second, PTSC has an app that can tell users where the bus is, what time it is coming, how regular the service is, if there are interruptions. In this day and age, that is possible. Why has PTSC not provided that kind of information to its client base so that they know about the service?

In addition to that, the terminal business, in most metropolises, have become big business for transportation entities like PTSC. I know they have tried in some cases with City Gate in terms of the old edifice, the original edifice being this wonderful colonial edifice and they have added stuff to it. But if anyone has any pride in their country will know that City Gate, in its entirety, is substandard and

no one is going to dive into public transportation to pass through those kinds of substandard edifices and use a public transportation system. And we do not need a rapid rail as has been projected. We need an efficient transportation system with several central hubs around the country inclusive of parking for persons who want to leave their villages and towns and homes and park there and access to public service, and I will go a step further and this may be considered sacrilege and blasphemy in some private sector circles.

Imagine PTSC as a public transportation entity offering diversified services, being the service provider of choice for the nation's prisons, working with the prison service to provide the expertise in inmate management and providing the service at the cost, and I think to the State, depending who you listen to, of 25 million to 90 million a year to a private sector company. And I am not against private sector companies, you know. But I am talking about the possible diversification of services offered by PTSC or for the courts, or for several other state entities, including the Parliament, to move us around, to move parliamentarians around. And I am using PTSC as an example of what is a state enterprise can become if we are visionary and we are willing to do the work. It is not a bus service. It has become that, but it is a public transportation entity with limitless possibilities.

Transportation hubs around the world, you go—many of us have travelled, rental places, entertainment, restaurants segments. Imagine if City Gate was what it could and should be, we would go to City Gate for lunch. We would use PTSC as a public transportation mechanism and stop off, they have lunch or dinner, or whatever, and go on to a next destination. Because the service is quite frankly substandard— and I know I am sounding like I am beating up on PTSC, but I am

really not. I am just trying to show the potential of state enterprises that have become a burden on the economy that can do so much better if we remodel our thing or we re-engineer our thinking, if we are—what is that word?—innovative, if we actually apply what we say we are going to do and think outside the box or remodel the box itself.

I also think what is very commendable is the movement of the entrepreneurial division from the Ministry of Labour to the newly formed Ministry of Youth Development and National Services under the hon. Fitzgerald Hinds, I think it is a great decision. But how are we going to actually ensure that this results in measurable numbers of new sustainable businesses, particularly start-ups for young businessmen and women in Trinidad and Tobago? We have had NEDCO for many, many years, and I have asked over and over, why have we dispersed billions of dollars over the last 10, 15 years to NEDCO in investment in small businesses without any mechanism for business mentorship sustainably, and monitoring and measuring of the successes or failures of these businesses?

Do we have any idea, after all the investment, of the success or failure rate of NEDCO to make a real decision as to whether is this working or not to continue investing in it? So, now, we move it to a new Ministry and I am wondering what is going to be different about this? What is going to make the difference in us saying, okay, we are moving it to the Ministry of Youth Development and—I cannot remember the whole, I apologize. But are we saying after investing \$500 million or \$200 million, that in three years or five years, we are going to have 15 or 20 businesses in X and Y sectors that will contribute to a particular growth pole in Trinidad and Tobago? Are we doing that kind of analysis, or it just throwing money on the wall and hoping it will stick and something magical will happen?

We cannot continue doing the same thing, the same way and expect different results.

In the past years, there has been quite a significant gap in the Minister's revenue projections and deficit projections. The debt-to-GDP ratio is now projected to be 80 per cent in 2020, and any researcher or scholar in economics will tell you, in principle, there is nothing really devastating about having an 80 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio, you know. But the debt-to-GDP ratio cannot be at the expense of investing in productive enterprises as opposed to paying off interest rates on loans and running recurrent expenditures. So if we say the debt-to-GDP ratio is 80 per cent and we know a significant portion of that—and when I say significant because we have running tabs—will be placed into productive new enterprise areas for real diversification—that word in Trinidad and Tobago, again—then it makes sense. Because there are some countries whose debt-to-GDP ratios have reached over 100 per cent, but part of that is aimed at really generating new growth poles in those countries and not just going towards paying off existing debt and interest rates, and we really have no real idea from many speakers, including Sen. Deonarine, as to what our real debt profile is in this country. We have snippets of it here and there.

The national budget at this point in our country's history presents an opportunity for the Government to present to the population the economic lay of the land and challenges, but also, most importantly, as I outlined before in the example with PTSC, the opportunities, the framework and the plan and direction for the country in the short, medium and long-term. In short, it is a master plan. Over 500 state agencies, entities and enterprises, adding different layers of bureaucracy for many, many decades—I am not aiming this at the feet of the

present Government—have we really done an analysis of what these state enterprises, agencies' present state is and do we really need of them? Are they presently fulfilling the mandates that they may have been created 15 or 20 years before? And are we deciding to make a comprehensive, critical plan to cull the ones that are not working effectively, or are we going to continue paying for letterheads and stamps and salaries that do not make any positive contribution to our GDP or our country, which in many cases of these 500-plus they are doing? There are some agencies on that balance sheet that I do not even know what they do. You look at the names of the some of them, okay, what is this for; how long has it been here; and how much money have we spent on the last 20 years on it? We need to take a look at that.

And there are models that we can adopt. They are very successful examples of this country taking entities like, for example, a good example is TTPost, bringing in specialized expertise—in the case of TTPost, I do believe the expertise came from New Zealand—setting up a system and a structure and a model for efficiency and productivity, understanding what is the core service you are providing and expanding. TTPost is an excellent example of a state entity or enterprise that has gone from a situation of drawing down on the Consolidated Fund in the country's coffers to really making an efficient contribution to providing a service in Trinidad and Tobago and running properly. So there are ways.

Why can WASA, TSTT and others not do the same? Why can we not take critical looks for them and do the same? I think, quite frankly, PTSC is in a perfect position as the state telecommunications provider in the age of the Internet, where the Internet has now become so ubiquitous with every aspect of our lives, to

provide the groundwork and the foundation for a robust Internet Wi-Fi system and technological backbone for the country, if it is engineered the right way. The question is: Why have we accepted this over the years? Quite recently at the Ministry of Finance's spotlight on the economy, Professor Gerry Brooks speaking at the forum, suggested the country's state agencies should be looking at supplying services in the region. An excellent idea because we need to look beyond for new markets, but how can we even begin to provide services in other markets when we cannot even provide services for the people of Trinidad and Tobago? We have to fix here first.

I want to move quickly to my pet area, as you well know by now, education, and my adjuration and cry is not really to denounce the Government because I am laying these concerns at the feet of successive governments. It is really for us to be innovative, transformative, Promethean in our thinking, inspired. So, I have a dream for the education sector in Trinidad and Tobago and part of what I think we should look at doing—and I am being very bold, I apologize for that—is renaming some of the Ministries to really put on the front burner, the mandate.

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

I want to rename the Education Ministry, the Ministry of Education, Training and Citizen Development because that is what the Ministry really does, developing the kind of citizen we want in Trinidad and Tobago. Not waiting until they fall through the cracks and the gangs grab them to try to do the remedial work, but really looking at each citizen from the time they are born all through different stages of their life and identifying what they need. Because not because you are 40, 50 or 60 years old, you do not need some kind of training. The world is changing rapidly and I will draw some examples from the Singaporean model as to how their

budgetary allocation and presentation in 2020/2021 looks at how they intend to our arm their citizenry at every stage with retraining for the digital arena.

1.00 p.m.

I have to tell you that education is the great equalizer in any society. That is why I have a dream for education. If the education sector understands its critical role and function—and by the way, I welcome and congratulate incoming Minister Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly and Minister Lisa Morris-Julian to the portfolio, as I think, without casting any aspersions, that they both bring a breath of fresh air.

And I cannot tell you the pain and concern, Mr. Vice-President, I have felt for so many young people in this country, even before the pandemic, in terms of the system failing them because we have an archaic philosophy or mindset in Trinidad and Tobago where, as opposed to understanding that the child has not failed or the learner has not failed or the learner has failed, that the system has failed the learner. And we have entire educational districts, as recently identified in the newspapers, failing or underperforming. It cannot be the children, it is the system, something is going wrong. And the education system, according to our Constitution in Trinidad and Tobago, is predicated on the rights of any citizen to receive an education that is appropriate for them and that was important because it means every learner may have different educational needs.

Minister Gadsby-Dolly recently indicated that 90 per cent of students are now being engaged in online learning. We have gone through this transition during the pandemic and you know, we really have to disaggregate that 90 per cent benchmark that Minister Gadsby-Dolly has identified and we have to ask ourselves, okay, 90 per cent engaged? Engaged how? Engaged in one connection? Engaged twice per week? Two hours? Three times per week? Have we put

mechanisms in place to see if this engagement is productive in the present environment? We know there is a device problem in some instances, that is being remedied by both the State and private sector, and commendations to the Government and the private sector for really stepping up to the plate in many cases and donating much-needed devices.

But in addition to device issues, we have connectivity issues, consistent connectivity issues and many of the stakeholders, including TTUTA, the National Parent-Teacher Association and the National Principals' Association have provided contradictory information because they are the ones who are on the ground with the learners to which this 90 per cent benchmark has identified. And even if we accept the 90 per cent benchmark as being engaged, what is the level of engagement? So, we really have to look at that 90 per cent number.

I have also a dream for the nation's teachers in this environment to be provided the type of support they need because online learning is not face-to-face learning. Imagine for a second if you were a teacher in this country and you normally have 25 to 30 students in front of you in a classroom, trying to manage those students learning needs and their behavioural issues, it is already a challenge. Translate that to online and think if the same protocol will work. It would not.

In New York state in August, according to the *New York Daily News* of September 22, 2020, New York state in August sent out a call for an additional 6,000 to 7,000 teachers because they understood the online learning environment is much different to the face to face and you would need additional support. Have we done this for our teachers? Part-time teachers, special-needs teachers, support staff to help teachers who are, in many cases, before the hon. Prime Minister's

announcement this past week, are all at home also managing their own households with their own challenges.

So, imagine a teacher who is now required to manage his or her class online for six or seven hours in a day and having two or three children and managing them and their learning protocols also. Have we considered their own situations? Have we sent out a call for retirees who are competent or trained to come back part time to add support to the teaching body in Trinidad and Tobago or in many cases, who would probably give of their time freely because they want to contribute to the well-being of our young people in Trinidad and Tobago? These are the things we need to consider.

I want to draw to your attention a really sad situation that occurred and it speaks to providing my dream for providing adequate special needs education in Trinidad and Tobago, which even before the pandemic was less than stellar. We have a stated inclusive policy in Trinidad and Tobago. And an inclusive policy, for those who may not know, means that as far as possible, provisions and support systems are made available and accommodations for children with special needs and with learning disabilities in the regular classroom setting with neurotypical students as far as possible.

And when we keep talking about disbursements to the school for the blind or the school for the deaf or this agency, that is not in keeping with global best practice with inclusive education. It is continuing the same paradigm because at the end of the day, these learners have to come out and live and operate in the regular world. So, that is why best practice is the inclusive system, not only in statement but in practice.

I am quoting from the *Newsday* Monday, 28 January, 2019, Dr. Radica

Mahase who is the founder of Autism TT. Quote:

“Last week there was a case where Rihanna Reed, an 11-year-old girl who was diagnosed with autism fell from her apartment building and was hospitalised.”

And this January 28th, eh. This is before the pandemic struck us.

“It was revealed that Rihanna along with her 13-year-old brother, who is also diagnosed with autism, were not enrolled in any educational institution.”

The then Minister Anthony Garcia:

“...expressed surprise that Rihanna was not attending a school and later stated that the ministry is developing a plan to have teachers trained properly to deal with special-needs children.”

Quote—then Minister:

““We are going to pay special emphasis to the children who experience a wide range of disabilities. Apart from the delivery of quality education, one of the pillars we are...”—addressing in—“the education system this year is on access.””

Now, I am very sorry but in 2019, to me, it is unacceptable and inadequate that we are now looking at providing provisions for special needs when the data suggest that—and this is from a survey done by registered members of Support Autism T&T with children:

“...ages three to 21 years...61 per cent of all those with autism are currently not attending any kind of formal educational institution. The Survey, The Multi-Disciplinary Needs of our Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder... A Parents’/Caregivers’ Perspective Within Trinidad and Tobago, notes that

of children with ASD”— autism spectrum disorder—“attending SWRHA clinics, 41.6 per cent are enrolled in private school”— private school, not state schools— “16.6 per cent are in a public school”—16.6 per cent alone— “8.3 per cent are home schooled and 31.6 per cent have no schooling...”— at all, almost one-third

And that is why I asked the question earlier on, does every creed and race really find an equal place in Trinidad and Tobago? These are among the most vulnerable groups in society and they are no less entitled to a quality, appropriate education than any other learner in this country and we have been failing them abysmally. We have to rectify this.

Mr. Vice-President, how much more time do I have if you could tell me?

Mr. Vice President: You finish at 14 past one.

Sen. P. Richards: Oh, let me move on quickly. I want to quickly go to the issue of digitalization and the importance of it. I have a dream for real digital transformation in Trinidad and Tobago and there are so many opportunities in the digital realm. Digital advances have generated enormous wealth in record time but the wealth has been concentrated in and around small numbers of individuals, companies and countries. Unlike current policies and regulations, this trajectory is likely to continue, further contributing to rising inequality. As great as digitalization is, if systems and regulations are not put in place, it widens the gaps in societies because of the inability of some sectors in society to access the benefits of digital services.

The digital economy requires a range of new and different skills and new generation of social protection policies and new relations between work and leisure. Inclusivity is essential to building a digital economy that delivers services

and opportunities for all. New technologies, especially artificial intelligence, will inevitably lead to a major shift in labour markets, including the disappearance of jobs in some sectors.

And let me give an example of how I feel digitalization can aid in the education sector. Imagine for a moment that we in Trinidad and Tobago—and I commend the Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, Sen. the Hon. Allyson West who indicated that a unique—

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

Sen. P. Richards: Already? [*Laughter*] Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. That a unique digital ID will be provided to each citizen in this country. Imagine for a moment that from the time a child is born—I know it may sound a bit totalitarian and big-brotherish but that is the way the world is going and we already have numbers assigned to us anyway, assigned to a child from the time they are born. And the system allows for teachers, parents and caregivers to input on a weekly or monthly basis, data related to that child's health status, their education status, their test scores. At a moment's notice, the Education Ministry can provide algorithms to see if this particular child is failing consistently or underperforming so that remedial action can be identified before they reach to SEA. In a matter of weeks, interventions can be identified or problem cases can be identified and we use big data and data collection and analysis to do that. Imagine for a moment that is possible, under a digitalized society.

The problem with it is that Trinidad and Tobago—and I will quickly go through where we are. There are several stages to digitalization and we are only at the second stage and I am rushing here now because—right. So the stages of digitalization, in a sample of 150 countries, on a scale of 1 to 100, with 100 being

the most advanced, falls into four stages: constrained, emerging, transitional and advanced. Trinidad and Tobago falls into the category called the constrained economies and those with a digitalization score of below 25 facing challenges and realizing basic digitization building blocks such as widespread access and affordability. In these nations, services remain expensive and limited in reach. Trinidad and Tobago, sorry, is in emerging economies, I apologize. So, constrained is the first one, emerging is the second one. Those with a score of 25 to 30 largely have addressed the affordability challenge and have achieved significant progress in providing affordable and widespread access. However, the reliability of service and emerging digitization gaps remain on par. The other two stages which are advanced and transitional which encompass those countries with a digitizing range of 30 to 40, and advanced where they start to make use of the digitalization.

And how is it measured? In terms of ubiquity, the extent to which consumers and enterprises have universal access, affordability, reliability, usability and skill. The growth in digital economy is exacerbating digital exclusion, inequality and adverse incorporation. And I really wish I had more time because I can tell you that part of my contribution aimed at looking at the nexus between digital economies and creative industries and the fact that we in Trinidad and Tobago have not really capitalized on the issue of understanding the size of the digital economy. UN CTA reported that world exports in visual arts and creative products have more than doubled in a decade from US \$10.3 billion in 1996 to US \$22.1 billion back in 2005. Imagine where it is today.

We have not put systems in place to properly capitalize on the creative sector as an infinite, inexhaustible contributor to GDP in Trinidad and Tobago,

including creative sector stakeholders, increased access to digital infrastructure, copyright provisions and taxation of the digital enterprise. Because while we in Trinidad and Tobago and in developing countries just accept that Google and Amazon can operate here without a taxation regime, the more developed countries are putting taxation regimes in place to tax the big companies for access to their citizens and we have to be looking at that in Trinidad and Tobago. Music and performing arts, film, television, radio, advertising, marketing, software development, interactive content, writing, publishing, print media, architectural designs and visual arts—in our case, mas, pan, soca, chutney, the gamut. The opportunities are endless and we have not, in Trinidad and Tobago, looked at it in that sort of profitable way, that sort of productive way.

The areas that we need to look at is the economic aspect, the multiple aspects of creative goods, the social potential of creative goods, the cultural value and the sustainable options for it. And I think I have run out of time. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Anil Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I would just like to let Independent Sen. Richards know, I know he is upset and special needs children are very close to his heart but you must remember that if you think back to before 2015 when there was a certain change in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago, special needs children found a very special place through the policies of Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the UNC Government. [*Desk thumping*]

You understand that special needs grants were given to all special needs children at private schools. This was removed by the PNM Government. This was removed and children—that is why you are seeing 41 per cent attending because parents were unable to pay. There were autistic grants of 1,500 which were given

to all parents of autistic children. These were removed by the People's National Movement Government and told that if parents earn a certain level of income that they would not receive the grant, whereas the United National Congress believes that once you are special needs, you earned that grant on your own. [*Desk thumping*]

Furthermore, there was special needs funding in sports. There were sport camps every year for over 7,000 special needs children, put on by the best coaches and the best youth officers in Trinidad and Tobago. Those were shuttered and stopped. There was increased funding for Special Olympics and Paralympics under the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government. So when you say rectify the situation, we had a chance on August 10th and governments have changed and elections have responsibilities and results. So, I am sorry but I hope that your words have fallen on a kinder heart at the Ministry of Education, kinder than the previous administration from 2015 to 2020, so our special needs children may get some service. [*Desk thumping*]

I just want to check, check, check, check, check one, check two, make sure that the mike is good and not too high. I have heard every PNM Senator come here and say that, "People love this budget. Oh my goodness, they want tuh hug up the budget." I was looking to see roses and chocolates. I have heard each and every one of my colleagues across there say, "Yes, if this is fuel, buy ah media that is friendly to you," and I hope that you enjoy that but do not be fooled because the pain is there. The pain is in that little red book of fairy tales.

And the mass media who is friendly to you now, they are crying because somebody is trying to "buy dem up", somebody and they do not know and they are crying for support. But I would tell you on this side, the UNC and 309,000

supporters, we do not get “in family business and family squabbles”. So, if the PNM family is squabbling and if the PNM family is buying up PNM-friendly media, that is not “we, de UNC business”, that is PNM business. Because the great theologian, Martin Niemöller from Germany, during the war, he was anti-Nazi, anti-Hitler and he wrote the famous poem, many of you would know it.

I did not think they would come for me.

And this, he went on to say:

When I was a communist, they thought I was a communist, they came for the communist but I was not a communist so I did not fight, I did not fight.

And he went on, until he said that:

Eventually they came for me and there was no one else left to fight.

So, I tell my friends in the media, the fourth estate of Trinidad and Tobago, if you lay your bucket down on one side, do not lift it up and call other people to help you lift it and carry it because when they came for the UNC with Emailgate, the mass media said, “That is okay, let it go. They did not come for me.” When they came for Petrotrin and fired 5,389 workers, permanent, and 6,000 temporary and fence-line communities suffered, the mass media said, “That is okay. They did not come for me.”

When they collapsed the sea bridge— and imagine in this budget, the Minister of Finance had the audacity to say they met a collapsed sea bridge on September 07, 2015, let me remind the population because truth seems to be a scarce thing in this country. On September 07, 2015, that Government met a *Superfast Galicia* moving superfast [*Desk thumping*], it met a *Spirit* and an *Express* which were maintained well and running well. Now, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport who sits here may not remember because he was not in that portfolio

at the time. It is the now Minister of Youth Development and National Service, the youngest youth Minister I have ever seen. Proud of you all, great selection. I have heard some young Senators talking here today. I would have chosen them before the youthful, now Minister of Youth Development and National Services.

But they came for the poor people and the mass media let it happen. People suffering and because they did not come for you—they come now for the drivers. We cannot drive cars because just now the world is going to start churning and gas price, as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries admitted here two days ago, “It is going to go up, just going to go up ah little.” Okay, let us wait and see how much. And the media let it go. They did not do their analysis. The mass media said, “Okay.”

They came for the children, dey took de laptops, dey took de book grants, dey took de school feeding, dey took the special needs grants”, and the media said, “Okay, because dey did not come fuh me.” They came for the differently-abled, now they come for homeowners with property tax and the media said, “Well, they are not coming for me.” Well, now they come for the media and in the words of my friend, colleague and the great legend Sprangalang, “Well, mass media, yuh on yuh own.” But “who buying up the shares because the country suffering five years before COVID? Who ha money to buy up shares, to buy out media? Who have money to buy out OCM shares?” Do you know the answer? I know the answer. Do you feel you have the answer? “Ah wonder nah, all yuh answer nah.”

Elections, every Senator in the PNM come out and say, “Election, we win, we win, we win, we win. I swear is ah landslide, I say dey win 41 seat.” I did not know it is 309,000 to 322,000-plus, some questionable. We want to see the diaries but the way “they talking dey is like they win ah 100 metres like Usain Bolt

looking backwards”. All right. But remember in 1988, Ben Johnson won too. Remember in the 2000 Olympics, Marion Jones won a few medals too. [*Desk thumping*] And remember in 1973, Haiti beat Trinidad and Tobago in ah football match and ah referee get ban for life, “so all yuh celebrate”.

I saw the hon. Prime Minister showing me his education because I had not seen it in about 40 years. I read books that he was extremely intelligent but in seeing his policies and debating him, I was not seeing it. But I saw a Facebook post a while ago and I saw that he was showing off his philosophy and his Greek methodology, his education. He said that the TTFA thing was a pyrrhic victory. He should be well versed in a pyrrhic victory because the victory that each and every PNM is boasting about is a pyrrhic one, because the people out there are suffering [*Desk thumping*] and this red book of fairy tales is the last nail in the coffin for the people out there and we shall see how it is.

Sport has lost. Sport, our national pride, you cut the budget for five years from 140 million down to 10 million and come here to say, “There is ah Minister ah Sport”. In three hours and 20 minutes, the hon. Minister of Finance mentioned the word “sport” three times. I had fought to get sport on the top business end next to energy. In 2013, go back and check the budget. Minister Larry Howai spoke about sport in the first six minutes of his two-hour and 48-minute presentation because sport was there to diversify: sport tourism, sport science, sport as an industry, sport profession. To take a piece of the pie of the \$2 trillion sport industry, we have gone backwards. “Where we sport?” Well, I like to jog too and play a lil tennis but that is not going to do it.

Let us just deal with some of my colleagues, Senators. Sen. Nigel De Freitas—well, now Mr. Vice-President on the Chair, you speak—a brilliant

contribution. At first, I had thought I was going to invite him to come on this side because it was brilliant, it was going good and then he said, “Well, poor people have to pivot,” and then I had to remind my colleague that “poor people cyar pivot, dey cyar even spell pivot”. When “yuh hungry, yuh cyar pivot. Yuh hata to go straight, slow and take yuh time.”

And then he spoke about Sandals and he said that Sandals was a travesty, that we do not have a Sandals, but the hon. Senator made one distinction that he did not let the population know. Sandals in Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, Sandals in Antigua, Sandals in Grenada, Saint Lucia, four in Barbados. All over. “Sandals spend dey money.” The Sandals that somebody wanted to bring, that did not involve the then Minister of Tourism, Sen. Randall Mitchell who was the Minister but did not know who was negotiating for Sandals, “Sandals PNM-style” was with taxpayers’ money, \$7 billion. That is not the same thing. So, it was not that nobody wants Sandals, “we want Sandals, we want slippers, we want shoe”, but we want people to invest their money as they have done in other islands. To quote a great Tobagonian, the Mighty Shadow, “What’s Wrong With Me”. “How Sandals spend dey money all over in every island but dey doh want to spend in Tobago, what’s wrong with me?” And just to remind you, I am half Tobagonian and proud. “Meh father is ah Tobagonian and meh grandfather is Luther Roberts, Principal Roberts.”

Sen. West came to tell us about beauty and brilliant positivity in COVID. That was nice. She spoke about swans swimming in the canals of Venice next to the Gondola. Well, I was shock “because when I see my people outside dey, dey cyah even see corbeaux floating in the Caroni”. She said that after COVID, she hopes that there is no traffic. Well, I can assure her that her colleague, the Minister

of Finance and this red book and this budget has ensured that there will be no traffic because the middle class and lower class, over 200,000 vehicles are going to come off the roads once the price per litre goes up to international prices as the same as November 2019. So there would not be traffic, so they have ensured that.

Sen. the Hon. Avinash Singh spoke about buy local. He told the population, “Look in yuh plate”. I like that. Local, anything local, I like. The problem with the times now, after five years of a collapsed economy and then COVID on top of it, is that when the citizens look in “dey plate, de plate looking back. PNM turn plate into mirror”. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Avinash Singh also said GATE— he is bright, he is here in the Senate because of GATE. GATE is wonderful, yes. I almost was about to thump the desk, “ah say yes, but then ah look in the yellow books and ah see that he sitting down in ah Government that cut GATE by ah further 35 million while praising GATE”. [*Desk thumping*] I go back and I research and under Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Fazal Karim, average spend on GATE per year for the citizens was up at \$710 million per year. [*Desk thumping*] It peaked at nearly 800 million in 2014 and now it stands at a paltry 400 million. The PNM is half the GATE of Kamla and the UNC. “All yuh” take us back to dollar for dollar under Basdeo Panday in 1997. So I could not celebrate with my hon. Senator.

Sen. Franklin Khan, my mother loved that fella, you know. Twenty years he says he in politics, he remembers my mother. “Well, ah happy, ah must say. She love yuh but she up there now. Ah happy she did not see this budget. Yuh understand? Because she woulda call yuh [*Desk thumping*] and she woulda say, Frankie, meh boy, what yuh doing. Senator?” Right? So I am happy at least there is some positive in that.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

1.30 p.m.

Sen. A. Roberts: He said, “What we have with Venezuela? What de UNC have against Venezuela”? *No sentimos nada mal de la gente Venezolana. Pero no hacetamos el regimen de Nicolas Maduro el criminal.* That is the truth. We do not have a problem with—

Madam President: Sen. Roberts, please. Can we—if you look at the Standing Orders, you will see that we are supposed to be speaking in English. And top of that, as I walked in your voice is reverberating throughout the entire Chamber. So could I ask you to take it down a little bit please?

Sen. A. Roberts: Good afternoon, Madam President. I will guard your endurance quickly. Thank you. I will try my best.

Now, we also have PNM Minister Franklin Khan saying “we taxing the poor”. PNM not taxing the poor, and he gave the example of the 6,000, first it was 5,000 and then PNM raised it to 6,000 a month and now it is 7,000 a month tax-free. There is one problem, my Senator, “poor people does make 1,500 a month”. So 7,000 is middle class. The PNM does not even understand the difference between middle and poor. So \$1,500 a month, “dey did not have tuh” pay tax anyway and now the value of the dollar has gone down.

The hon. Minister spoke about the Houston gas price and he said that negotiation, whatever negotiation, that so-called negotiation. But I forgive my hon. Minister, because he was not invited to that meeting in Houston. The real Minister of Energy accompanied the Prime Minister. And I feel it for my colleague. So he would not know what was negotiated out there. But I can say that Conrad Enill knew, and in his statement for 2018/2019 profits of NGC, which

dropped from a whopping 2 billion in 2017, down to 320 million, Conrad Enill said, and I quote:

The group's reduced profitability was attributable to a decline in margins. Hon. Minister, margins mean the price that NGC was paid. That is the price negotiated when “you was home here” and the other two Ministers went and then they got a grant with a back pay that was brought forward. But we will go ahead.

And the hon. Minister also said, because it is only short time. He said that the Minister of Finance said in 2016, “We are going to remove the gas subsidy”. He may have said that. But in this manifesto that you all just boasted you won an election, I searched the entire manifesto and I did not see where you told the population, “Vote for me, we going and take yuh gas out yuh car and yuh cannot drive again”. I did not see it.

So, the hon. Minister also said that—and he was “bouffing” my senatorial colleague, Sen. Lyder. He said, “Ay, you did not—cessionaires do not have any preferential treatment in the purchase of gas stations”. Well, I point you to page 107 of this budget brought by the People's National Movement now in 2021 fiscal. On page 107:

“All gas stations owned by National Petroleum Marketing Co. will also now be offered for sale to the private sector with first preference given to existing dealers and concessionaires.”

“De last time I check, KFC is concessionaires.” So you may want to apologize to my senatorial colleague.

Sen. Randall Mitchell came in and before he went for his contribution he looked at Sen. Kazim Hosein, he said, “Make sure and pong de table”. “Ah still waiting for Sen. Hosein tuh pong de table. The Minister talk fuh 40 minutes, he eh

pong yet. I still waiting also, like Roget and Patriotic, ah still waiting on de refinery. Four days tuh go for the OWTU Patriotic and Roget.”

Minister Randall Mitchell boasted about a pittance in COVID going out to artistes, and so on, when people are suffering. "If you in ah deficit for seven months for 40,000 and yuh get \$1,500”, what is that going to do? He said that tourism crashed in Tobago. He said tourism is building up, and so on, and they have plans.

But let me remind you that your government of which you were a part, as Minister of Tourism, crashed Tobago's tourism with the collapse of the sea bridge. In 2014, arrivals, international arrivals took to Tobago were 97,000. And during the months of July and August, domestic tourism, the arrivals were 649,000. At 2017, those numbers dropped from 97,000, international arrivals down to 17,600. And then the domestic travel to Tobago, because of the total collapse of the sea bridge, where people's trucks and bananas were going on barges, and so, and getting salt infestations, the numbers went from 649,000, down to 152,000 Trinidadians going across to spend money. So the tourism product in Tobago collapsed under the PNM.

I heard Sen. Mitchell talk about three hotels. I was happy; investment, great. But then when I notice, two are from amalgamated and one is from a chief administrator of the THA—former. “Ah say well only, the only people who hah money tuh invest is people” who are close and friendly with the PNM, so then my excitement was gone.

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing, she walked with “ah book ah facts and she hold de book ah facts and she say: Look de book ah facts here”. But one thing I could say, she did not quote anything from “de book ah facts”. So I am glad to see that Joan

Yuille-Williams' secret PNM scholarship fund did not go completely to waste.

Sen. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal came on and she was brilliant, brilliant, intelligent, aggressive, flowing, lots of words. "I cyah even talk so fast" and she was describing the hon. Attorney General. And when I was listening, I started to see pictures of Karl Hudson Phillips. "Ah see Anthony Smart. Ah see Selwyn Richardson. Ah see Keith Sobion. I even see" Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj and then I realized that the Hon. Senator was describing "Faris Al-Rental", the current Attorney General, and I was wondering who she was talking about. A man who lost 30 cases straight, but I admire her brilliance and her passion.

"Ah put ah lil note on ah piece ah blue paper" here for my hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, you know, because he was speaking, Sen. Clarence Rambharat, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. He was boasting about, you know, nearly 1200 acres for sheep and goat farming, and so on. It sounded great. I was very impressed, in Aripo. So I just have one question from this blue paper: How much of that acreage is bluestone quarry? That is all I would like to know.

So now we are moving to the facts of the budget. And let me say this clearly, the PNM Government, since 2015, has us in the throes of the IMF without being there. They have instituted all prescriptions as dictated by the International Monetary Fund. The only thing is we did not go by them and sign anything for them and we did not take a cent from the IMF. But everything that the IMF is about, we have instituted.

The IMF believes in laissez-faire free market competition, neoliberalism and it has failed in every developing country because competition does not exist. The IMF's prescriptions did not work in Uganda. It did not work in Senegal and has

not worked and will not work here. Because the rich will get richer, the poor, poorer, and the middle class will disappear. The IMF prescriptions, for example—because do not just think that I would come here and just make up things. There is something called prior actions. So let us go to pre COVID-19. What did this Government do from 2015 to 2020? They cut expenditure in everything. I just told you a sport-cut, laptop-cut, education-cut, food card-cut, special grants-cut, everything, down to school feeding, food for children, cut. They removed price controls, it began. We remember our Minister of Finance said, “Hey, ah move de subsidy once, ah move it twice, ah move it three times and dey eh riot yet”. “Ah go move it again and what, it was totally honest because it all gone now.”

Then what is the other prescription? You have to increase revenue. So they increase taxes. We get tax on online tax. We get increased taxes across the board. They put back VAT on food and this is another prescription.

After COVID now, during COVID, because we are not after it yet. We are in the midst of it. They want to increase revenue further. So yes, you have to come with the Revenue Authority. “So bhaigan farmer, all kind ah farmer, plantain farmer, potato, cassava, doubles men.” We have to look out. Then they need to reduce expenditure under the IMF prescriptions. What did they do? Mass retrenchment. Now you freeze the public service. People have lost jobs across the board. We have no data.

The next step of IMF says it is privatization. Do I need to tell you? Everything is selling out one by one. Now it is the port. We have other things coming. And then the last prescription in the IMF is to say stop forex leakages and that is this entire budget.

Now, in the Spotlight meeting they said the Prime Minister said the number

one item and priority of this Government is to pay down national debt above education, above development, above investment, above diversification, above digital economy. The number one priority is to pay down national debt. “How he reach dey?” Trinidad and Tobago was always able to service its debt. But by borrowing and carrying us up to 80 per cent debt-to-GDP and some economists have said we are right now at 84 per cent debt-to-GDP with more borrowing coming.

These are the prescriptions of the IMF. So just because you did not label it IMF, “doh” mean we are not there. I put it to you that the IMF prescriptions are anti-development, anti-people, anti-poor, anti-country and unpatriotic. All you have to do is read the preamble of our Constitution and you will know that there is an inalienable right for our citizens, for all the resources to be put to the use of the majority of all of the citizens. This budget removes that from the mass majority of the people and puts it into the hands of a few. This budget is unconstitutional. *[Desk thumping]*

In the UN in 1966, they passed a resolution, and then it was affirmed in 1986 of which Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory. It says:

“The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development...”

If you all do not believe me, let us go to our Constitution too and then think about this red book that you all are praising. “Yuh holding up and waving, we win, we win.” Read your own constitution. In the preamble:

“(b) respect the principles of...justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material

resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity;”

I put it to you here colleagues on the other side that by supporting this, by bringing this and passing this budget you have gone totally against the Constitution of our beloved Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I “doh” know who consulted with this.

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing said three weeks before the budget, the Minister of Finance went for consultation when she knows full well that budget documents and yellow documents had started, the process had started, in March of the year and it completes and is printed by July. So to consult in September for October, “that and nuttin is de same ting”, according to Sprangalang.

So, I want to just give you an analogy. If the IMF is like the fridge, “is since PNM like fridge and fridge door and when dey saying ting make sure de door close and if de fridge door open”. The IMF is like a fridge and you have a six pack of Carib in the fridge. That is the IMF prescriptions. With this budget, “de six pack done and the citizens cap out”. If you take a Carib “out de fridge and you take de label off and you drink it, does that mean yuh just drink ah beer”? Or did you drink a Carib? So, all of these prescriptions, 100 per cent of the policies implemented, the structural adjustment, the taxation, the cuts in expenditure and everything enunciated in this budget, smells IMF. But it is spelt P-N-M.

I was just reading a little fairytale online for my daughter, six-year-old Anaya. And it was about fairytales and fantasy about a douen. And the fairytale

said “if it look like ah douen, smell like ah douen, dance like ah douen, smile and grin like ah douen, is ah douen”. So to use that analogy with this budget, “if it look like IMF, feel like IMF, read like IMF and bring pain to de people like de IMF”, then it is I-M-F. This PNM feels that if you do not label it, it does not exist.

They say, “it eh hah no devaluation, we not devaluing”. “We eh have no devaluation”, but the foreign exchange crunch, since the shutdown of Petrotrin and the vacuuming of US 1.8billion out of the system by that decision, has put a crunch on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that a black market now exists for foreign exchange where people are buying foreign exchange, US dollars at \$7.50, \$8.00, \$8.20. So while it is not labeled devaluation, out there in the real world the dollar has been devalued. People cannot get “dey” stock. People cannot get “dey” credit cards. Credit card limits have gone down in US from 50,000 down to 12,000, ask anybody. I had to find out about that “cause me eh know bout no credit card with US 50,000, but dem businessmen do”.

They say state of emergency. There is no state of emergency. They did not call a state of emergency to deal with COVID. Well, maybe you should have if you want to deny people’s rights. The Constitution said that you should call a state of emergency, section 8(2). But you are denying people their rights and saying it is under the health rules. And then the hon. Attorney General says, “Well, we did not call a state of emergency, but crime down, murders down by ah hundred”. A state of emergency in the first instance is only three months. The country has been on total, complete lockdown for seven months and you all come to boast that “yuh gone down by ah hundred murders”? That is the absence of competence. That is the absence of a plan. But because you did not say it is a state of emergency, COVID-19 lockdown is not a state of emergency. Okay.

They also said in the election, buying votes. Buying votes, we would never do. That could never happen. But now they call it DSS, Drug Sou Sou. “Me eh know is ah different label.” I am getting fed up in this country of people who have never put on the red, white and black to represent this country for free, telling me I am unpatriotic. I swam for this country 10 long hard years. I played national under 19 football for this country, red white and black. I have coached Olympic swimmers, brought glory to this country winning an Olympic bronze, four Olympic world championship bronze medals, a world record, four NCAA championships, two Pan Am gold, two Pan Am silver. I do not need “a just come small pin” to come and tell me that I am unpatriotic because I do not want to support a budget that is going to suffer people. [*Desk thumping*]

If you were patriotic, Members of the Government, you would not have shut down Caroni (1975) Limited and Petrotrin. If Caroni (1975) Limited was making a loss, you would have diversified, according to Sen. The Hon. Nigel De Freitas. You would have changed scope. You would have utilized land in a different way. You would not just shut down. You would not have shut down Petrotrin if you were patriotic. If you were patriotic you would not have left Couva hospital sitting there for four and a half years as children are sick and dying in the country, and when COVID come, all of a sudden you open it in two weeks. But for four and a half years, our children of red, white and black, this beloved country, could not get access to all of that taxpayer-dollar equipment to save their lives.

If you were patriotic, “yuh woulda never done that”. You would have never, if you are patriotic, when the citizens are locked out, 10, 15,000 outside want to come home, you would have never opened the borders to let Delcy and PDVSA land. If you were patriotic you would have never overseen the total collapse of

Trinidad and Tobago football, where we cannot even play. We cannot go in the stadium. We cannot turn on the TV and see a red, white and black come on. And “yuh” talking about a pyrrhic victory? Where was the leadership when things were going wrong? Where was the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister to tell the TTFA we are funding you, we have supported you, please do the right thing? Where was the moral suasion? If we were patriotic on that side and you lock down and shut down the economy, where we have lost \$35 billion in GDP in the last seven months, if you were patriotic and you were going to make that sacrifice to keep us alive, you would have shut the borders.

You would not have left us with porous borders. You would have put the extra funding for diesel and get the vessels out there. You would have not shut down the air guard. You would have kept them flying to keep us safe from COVID-19 coming from South America with illegal immigrants. You would have put resources down from Fullerton to Cedros. You would have put immigration, army base and kept this place safe. You would have made a dome around us and made us safe, as safe as I am in here in this “half a dome”. If you were—[*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Roberts. You have five more minutes. Use those five minutes wisely and lower your voice, please. You are getting increasingly—it is either you are agitated but your voice is just rising.

Sen. A. Roberts: Well, I am definitely not agitated, Madam President.

Madam President: No—thank you.

Sen. A. Roberts: Thank you, guided, guided. Thank you. This budget finally removes the Trini from Trinidad and Trini to the bone from the *Côté ci Côté la* and leaves people with just the bone. We are talking about US leakages, but leakages

are only for the poor people, you know. So when “yuh” buying luxury \$2 million cars, that is not a US leakage. When PriceSmart spending 500 million, that is not a leakage. “Buh when tanty bringing ah barrel tuh sell tuh make ah little cacadah fuh she grandchild, that is leakage. How come is leakage?”

Madam President: Sen. Roberts, Sen. Roberts, please refine your language.

Sen. A. Roberts: Thank you. I would love to go to the refinery, but I cannot because we do not have one. A refinery made us Trinbagonians. But it does not exist. But this budget, this is a budget of chaos, calamity, COVID confusion, corruption, conniving, cornflakes and Colm.

Our great poet and musician, artiste and legend, David Michael Rudder wrote these words:

“We bright little youths going to waste
Somebody dinge de smile on dey face
Somebody take “One Love” off de the shelf
Then the One Love boys start to sell out dey self
Somebody going to end all this talk about race
But they can’t tell me that with a straight, straight face
Big, big men dying, the crime can’t solve

A madman rant is”—their—“only resolve...” This budget is the epitome of a mad man’s rant. I will vote. Sen. Lezama, you asked me what I would do. The UNC would vote for a budget if it had more GATE, if they kept the fuel subsidy. If you keep the foreign-used industry alive, we will vote for that. If you open back TTHTI, we will vote for that. If you open back MIC and NESC centers, no property tax, removal of online, laptops for all the children, not only those who you like and who you know. And if you stop attacking workers and the labour

movement, we will vote for the budget. If you stop eliminating the middle class and dropping them down under poverty lines, we will vote for that. I and my colleagues will vote for that. But definitely will not vote for this. This budget gets an F for friends, family, financiers, “eat ah food”, while “not a fruit for de people”.

Minister Donna Cox, I thank her for teaching me a little bit about the Bible. She quoted from Proverbs 14:31.

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker.

This budget oppresses the poor, invites the middle class to join the ranks of the poor and thus the creators of this budget show total and complete contempt for the maker. We on this side have been and shall continue to be kind to the needy, thereby honouring God.

I want to thank all the Senators who participated in this debate, my five UNC senatorial colleagues, the eight Independent Senators and the 16 PNM Senators who contributed in the Upper House and with this whisper, Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam President. I wish to thank all Members of the Independent Bench and all Members of the Government Bench for their contributions. Some of them were very encouraging and very illuminating and very interesting. I am sorry I cannot extend the same sentiment to the Members of the Opposition Bench.

Because Madam President, having looked at the notes of the debate in this Senate over the last three days or so, what essentially I saw from the Opposition Bench was simply rehashing of wild statements made in the recent election campaign and “mauvais langue”. That was it. So I do not intend to respond to any

of that.

What I would like to do is to correct the record however. What we are dealing with here is the Appropriation Bill. That is the matter before the Senate. And the Appropriation Bill is for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2020 to 2021. And the Appropriation Bill gives details of various Heads of expenditure and total expenditure.

And just to recap, for fiscal 2021, we have based our projections of income on an oil price of US \$45 per barrel and a gas price of US \$3 per MMBTU. And I would just like to confirm that these parameters were not just plucked out of the sky. But what we did in this year, as we have done for the last five years, in the last six budget statements and the last six budget exercises, is that we utilize the projections from a number of important and recognized bodies that are in the business of forecasting oil prices. And this would include the US Energy Information Administration, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and another research entity out of Europe. And based on all of the projections that are available to us, and based on our own projections, in terms of the region, because our crude oil, contrary to statements made in the past, actually fetches a very good price and the most recent information that I have seen from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, because we get on a monthly basis details of prices and production for all of the commodities in the energy sector, including oil, natural gas, and petro chemicals. And the latest prices that I have seen for our crude, which is known as Molo crude, is \$1 above the world listed price of West Texas Intermediate, quite close to Brent oil price, for example.

So at the present time, for example, if you looked at the oil price today, you would see that WTI is trading somewhere just below \$40 a barrel and Brent a little

above \$40 a barrel. So that the assumption can be made that if we exported crude today that the sale price would be somewhere around \$40 a barrel. And Heritage Petroleum can operate profitably at that rate. Heritage Petroleum's lifting price per barrel is in the 20s, \$26, \$27, \$28 a barrel.

So that at a price of 45, which is what is projected by all of the major research groups in the world, we should be able to earn some significant revenue in terms of royalties, because the petroleum profits tax would hardly apply in this fiscal year because of the trauma that has been wrought on the energy sector by COVID-19 in 2020. So there would be significant losses going forward. But we would get revenue from royalties. And that is a fundamental change that we made in the 2017/2018 period.

2.00 p.m.

Prior to 2017/2018, our oil and gas price regime was based primarily on a profits-based model. The profits-based model is not suitable in a period of sustained low oil prices because what will happen is that you will get no revenue at all. Because the profit-based system assumes that expenses are dealt with first and then, if there is any profit, then the Government would get petroleum profits tax.

And in fact, back in 2015 when we just came in, BP visited us and told us that the then prevailing oil prices and with the investments they were going to make going forward, that they did not think they would pay petroleum profits tax to the Government until the year 2024. That was an untenable situation. So, we switched in the '17/'18 period to a volume-based model which is the royalty system and we applied a royalty on oil of 12 and a half per cent across the board, and that means that no matter what the oil price is, the country will get revenue from our hydrocarbons.

We similarly did the same thing with natural gas. So now, we have a 12.5 per cent royalty across the board on natural gas, and this is for the exploration and production licence contracts. The production sharing contract have a different regimen. But the whole point of all of this is that we have guaranteed an income stream for Trinidad and Tobago in an environment of sustained, low oil prices which is what we have had to live with for the last six years or so.

The gas price, again, is based on projections from those entities that I spoke about, the US Energy Information Administration, the World Bank, the IMF, the energy research unit in Europe, and so on. Based on that, and based on other models of revenue from the other sectors of the economy, from the services sector, and from the construction sector, and quarrying, and all of the other sectors that make up the economy, we expect to get revenue in this fiscal year of \$41.364 billion.

Now, that is a significant increase, just over \$7 billion more than the revised out-turn for 2020. The original out-turn for 2020 was 47 billion. That is what we expected to generate in revenue. And if everything had gone according to plan, we have no doubt we would have achieved that, because we would have achieved over \$46 billion in revenue in fiscal 2019. And we were fairly confident we would get over the 47 billion mark in 2020. Of course, COVID put paid to that and the revenue was in fact 34 billion, so we lost about \$13 billion. Primarily from commodity prices, there was a period there, a credible period in the first part of the year where the price of West Texas Intermediate oil actually went to zero and then turned negative.

And for those who would wonder, how is it possible for an oil price to go negative what had happened is that there was too much oil in the storage tanks,

primarily in the United States. The United States system is a pipeline and tank system and they just could not store the oil, so they had to get rid of it. So, they were literally paying people to take oil from them. We, on the other hand, we are not a continent with a pipeline and tank system so our oil price was not as severely battered as the WTI was, but there are parallels because we dropped down to below \$20 and we stuck there for quite a while until we got back up to the current 40.

So, we are projecting this year that we should get revenue of 41.364 billion. Of course, it will require a lot of work and we will be making our best effort to collect as much revenue as we can. And we have projected an expenditure of 49.573 billion which is a little less than the actual out turn for the last fiscal year, which was \$50.8 billion, but it is significantly lower than the \$62 billion that was spent in 2014. And that is when Trinidad and Tobago reached an unsustainable level of expenditure, \$62 billion up from 46 in 2010. There was a huge increase of \$16 billion in expenditure between the 2010 and 2015 period. It was completely unsustainable. Even at 49, it is going to be hard. We are running a budget deficit of \$8.2 billion which is 5.6 per cent of gross domestic product.

We have decided not to do what some people have suggested that we do which is to spend the same amount that we earn. We are of the firm view that this will crash the economy, that if we were to reduce expenditure down in to the \$35 billion level or the \$40 billion level, this would completely crash the economy. So, we are running a deficit, we have no choice. The major economies in the world are doing exactly the same thing. The advanced economies have all suffered in the same way Trinidad and Tobago has suffered, we are not unique. There is nothing strange or unique about Trinidad and Tobago in terms of what has happened during the COVID-19 period.

I mean, if you look at the United Kingdom, for example, they are now projecting a debt-to-GDP ratio for this year of over 100 per cent, something they have not seen since just after the Second World War. That is the situation in the UK. And in fact, just a couple weeks ago, the Chancellor of the Exchequer abandoned the budget exercise completely because they were unable to do their models and make accurate projections as to what the revenue and expenditure would be. Their budget deficit has expanded by 200 or 300 per cent in just this fiscal year alone in total terms. So that, all around the world, countries are struggling.

The economy of India, for example, dropped by 45 per cent in one month—I think it was April or May when you compare it on a year-on-year comparison. The economies in Europe are expected to decline this year by 10 per cent in real terms, real GDP. So that, Trinidad and Tobago is not alone in all of this. We are projecting a decline in our economy for 2020 somewhere in the region—the 6 per cent area, which is not unusual. The average for the world, according to the IMF, will be somewhere in the 5 per cent region. We expect our economy to contract by 6.8 per cent in this fiscal that is now coming to a close—well, has come to a close in September of this year. We expect inflation to continue at very low levels.

But contained within this Appropriation Bill and the associated budget fiscal measures, Madam President, are a number of things that we consider to be quite innovative. We firmly believe that our policy drive towards digitization on technological transformation and innovation is something that we must do as a country. And I had already removed all taxes on laptops, notebooks, and tablets in September and in the Finance Act of 2020 in December—I am planning that for early December—we will complete that exercise of removal of taxes on all mobile

and digital equipment, mobile phones, in particular. A lot of people are using phones for dual purposes not just as communication devices but also as minicomputers as it were—software, computer accessories and peripherals in order to accelerate and to motivate people to get involved in digitization and digitalization, and move towards an electronic commerce and electronic services, we have made this decision to remove taxes on all of this equipment.

We are also incentivizing businesses that invest in tech start-ups and new businesses providing tax allowances. Also, providing tax allowances to businesses which engage in technology solutions and digitalization, as well as businesses that create employment in the technology industry, particularly young people. One of the points—I heard Sen. Richards talking about it, it is not just devices. We are talking about the need for connectivity as well and that is why we have decided a line Item of expenditure in this budget is the purchase and distribution of 45,000 mobile Internet devices, commonly known as Mi-Fi, that creates a mini wireless hotspot and that will be used by students who do not have Internet access in their homes, and their parents and other persons who just do not have connectivity, particularly in rural areas.

And I think it is quite a bold move on the part of any government to make available 45,000 mobile or Wi-Fi devices. That has never been done before. [*Desk thumping*] And that is all part of our move towards technology and Wi-Fi. The Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation would have spoken about the allocations, because this is all about appropriation and allocation, this is what this debate is all about. The allocation for Wi-Fi hotspots and Internet cafes, we have increased that significantly in this appropriation to give the Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation and her Ministry the ability to

accelerate the expansion of free Wi-Fi services and the creation of Wi-Fi cafes, and that sort of thing throughout the country, particularly in underserved areas.

With respect to giving the economy a kick start, we would be relying to some extent on construction and therefore, we would be providing tax waivers on construction materials for approved building projects. That will be fleshed out in the Finance Act in 2020. Also, to encourage persons to become first-time owners. We know how difficult it is. We know how expensive houses are. We want to help people who are first-time homeowners, so we have increased the stamp duty threshold for first-time purchase of residential properties from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. And this measure would save first-time homeowners \$28,000 in stamp duty and that is nothing to sneeze at, Madam President. Nothing to sneeze at. And we expect it to benefit over a thousand families each year. That too will be fleshed out in the Finance Act in December.

We are also increasing the property development allowance to allow approved property development companies, again, to incentivize the private sector to get involved in construction, so they can claim, as a deduction, 20 per cent of the capital expenditure incurred in the construction of commercial, industrial or residential buildings. We have a timeline on that, these things must be completed before 2024 December, so that this should motivate people to get going.

The tourism upgrade project incentive will now be extended to 2023. This is a reimbursable grant to eligible tourism accommodation facilities. Again, to encourage businesses to invest, we are increasing the wear and tear allowance for plant and equipment from 25 per cent to 30 per cent to encourage person to invest in new equipment.

We also have some control measures in this exercise. We are increasing

penalties for illegal quarrying, increasing penalties for praedial larceny. With respect to supplemental petroleum tax, this is something that has been brought to us by the Energy Chamber who told us that the small producers of oil were having difficulty with the current threshold for supplemental petroleum tax which kicks in at \$50. It was designed many years ago as a windfall tax when the price of oil was in the 20s and therefore, if the price of oil went up to 50, it was truly a windfall. But with oil prices now in the 40, \$45 range, \$50 is not a windfall per se.

So, for small, onshore producers in the instance, which we defined as a producer producing 2,000 barrels a day or less, we are increasing the threshold for supplementary petroleum tax which is an additional tax on top of royalties, on top of petroleum profits tax, on top of oil imposed, oil levy, et cetera, and can be quite onerous, we are increasing the threshold for small onshore oil producers from US \$50 a barrel, as it is now, to US \$75 a barrel. And we do not think that oil will hit US \$75 in the foreseeable future, so that this would allow these small onshore producers to plan and to also access funding for drilling and exploration, because drilling and exploration is the lifeblood of any energy company. Because it is a declining resource, you have to keep drilling otherwise you will run out of product.

We have also looked at the situation with the importation of cars. There are in fact 1.1 million vehicles on the road today; 1.1 million and this is more than one vehicle for every registered driver. There are not as many as 1.1 million active driver's permits in Trinidad and Tobago today, but there are 1.1 million vehicles. So, we are of the view that just too many cars are on the road. And more importantly, these cars consume, in terms of imports, US \$400 million every year, TT \$2.5 billion. We import an average of 25,000 motor vehicles, two thirds of which are private motor cars, and this is a serious leakage of foreign exchange.

When one thinks about it, US \$400 million per year is leaking out in the importation of cars in a situation where there is more than one car per registered driver in this country. So, we felt that we needed to increase taxes on some of the smaller cars in order to reduce the number of imports.

We also have a situation where tobacco continues to kill people through lung cancer and other things, such as bladder cancer and so on, which is related to tobacco for those who may not know. And it costs the Ministry of Health \$500,000 per year; \$500,000 to just treat one lung cancer patient. So, we felt that we would increase taxes on tobacco, again, as a deterrent. We also felt that, again, now was the time to increase penalties for selling alcohol and tobacco to minors.

With respect to food, when you look at the food import bill and you would have heard the Minister of Trade and Industry speak about this. When you look at it, you would see that we are importing billions and billions of dollars in food every year. And this now allows me to turn to the contribution of Independent Sen. Deonarine who was not in favour of the intention to impose value added tax on apples and gapes.

I would just like to put some information into the system because we all need to have information. And one of the problems with Trinidad and Tobago is there is so much misinformation in the system. And going back to the speaker who spoke just before I came here, for the record, the budget documents are printed seven days before the budget is delivered, seven days. And that is what I found when I went into the Ministry of Finance and we have printed these documents one week before, because we spend all of that time consulting, determining, establishing what the figures should be, [*Desk thumping*] and we send it to the printery. They are printed by the Government Printery one week before and that is

what happened in the UNC time, in the NAR time, and the PNM time. They are certainly not—it is absurd to think that budget documents will be completed and printed in July, that is ridiculous. So that is a bit of misinformation I would just like to deal with.

But let me deal with some facts with respect to apples and grapes. I asked the Customs and Excise to tell me what is the CIF value of apples and grapes on an annual basis imported into Trinidad and Tobago? And you would be surprised, Madam President, \$55 million. So, we import \$55 million worth of apples and grapes, almost US \$10 million in apples and grapes. And I think that is something that we certainly need to control and I just picked that out, because if I were to go into all of the other foods that we have mentioned such as lobster, smoked salmon, strawberries, blueberries, and all these sorts of things, you would find that the import cost of these items is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, Madam President.

And what we are in fact doing is simply imposing VAT. Because the way the VAT system works at this time is that unprocessed food is VAT-free. It does not matter if it is lobster. It is the same as rice or cheese. So that is a lacuna in the law as far as we are concerned, that this broad category of unprocessed food is exempt from VAT. So we felt there is absolutely no need to allow these items to come into Trinidad and Tobago without any value added tax on them, and I will just give an example of grapes.

The average CIF price of a kilogramme of grapes is TT \$10.20, that is \$4.64 per pound and by adding VAT, we will increase the cost of a pound of grapes by 58 cents and do not think that is going to prevent apples and grapes from coming into this country—that is grapes. In the case of apples, the price of a pound of

apples will go up by 43 cents—Trinidad and Tobago cents I am talking about. So I do not think that imposing value added tax on apples and grapes will create a situation where we would not have any. And as the goodly Senator indicated, we might go back to a time when we see them only at Christmas time. I do not think that is accurate.

There were some other points made by the hon. Senator and I really must thank her, even though I did not agree with many of the things that the hon. Senator said, this is the kind of contribution that I have come to this place and in the other place to enjoy, [*Desk thumping*] a proper discussion with respect to policy and measures, not *mauvaise langue*.

But let me just deal with some of the points made by the hon. Sen. Deonarine. There was a recommendation that we should consider a devaluation, otherwise we might get to the point of Suriname which had to undergo a very drastic devaluation, but the fact is that Suriname had to devalue because it ran out of foreign exchange, and I mean literally. They went to zero. We, in Trinidad and Tobago, are fortunate. We still have over US \$7 billion in reserves and there is another 5 billion-plus available in the Heritage Fund. Although we would not take all of that, the point is that we have substantial buffers. We are not like Suriname. Suriname went to zero. In fact, Suriname went into the commercial banks and took foreign exchange out of the commercial banks to pay for imports. They could not even service their foreign debt. We are nowhere in that situation.

The policy also of small pre-announced devaluations is called a “crawling peg”. It was a policy option proposed by the IMF many, many, many—three many’s—years ago. However, experience has shown that such an approach precipitates a huge devaluation. And the question is why? Because importers—

rush when you have small crawling devaluations every week or every month, as the case may be, importers rush to purchase their imports ahead of time, while exporters delay, surrendering their foreign exchange to increase their income in local currency. So people who earn foreign exchange, they hoard it because they expect if they keep it for a while, then months later they will get more in local currency. And people who have to purchase foreign exchange to get their goods, they rush and they get it. And the end result of all of this was a collapse of the currency in all of the countries that this was tried.

There is a video going around, it has been going around for quite a while, about the situation in Nigeria. I am sure some of you have seen it on WhatsApp. A Nigerian gentleman talking about how the IMF came to them and told them try this crawling peg devaluation and encouraged them to devalue the Naira every week, it will work, it will balance, it will stabilize your balance of payments, it will balance out your income and expenditure, and they went ahead. And when they began this whole thing, the Naira was almost US \$1 to ₦1. Last time I checked, the Naira was ₦380 to US \$1 and it just kept going. It would not stop.

So that, one has to be very, very careful about this sort of thing. It has not worked in any country and we have no intention of trying that at this point in time. We are going to maintain our exchange rate, we will defend our exchange rate as we have done for the last five years. And there are reasons for that. It will allow wage restraint and it will keep inflation down at very low levels. We are at 1 per cent now for the last five years and we intend to keep it like that.

With respect to the whole question of how the Central Bank participates in the foreign exchange market? That is not dis-equi-rium—disequilibrium, it is not. In our economy, the energy sector is the major foreign exchange earner. The sector

pays taxes in foreign exchange to the Government and the Government in turn redistributes this forex to the Central Bank for the commercial banks to give to importers of goods and services. That is how we do it. The Central Bank just recycles the reserves, the Government's reserves. It has been taking place in Trinidad and Tobago since we floated— we did a managed float of the currency over 20 years ago. That is what we do. It is not dis-eliq-rium—I am sorry, I am getting tied up with this word. But it is not a disturbance in the market. It is a standard practice. That is how you do a managed float. The Government earns foreign exchange, the Central Bank distributes it to the commercial banking sector.

But going back in now, Madam President, to the budget itself or to the Appropriation Bill. One of the things that I am very happy that we were able to convince our colleagues to do was to increase the personnel income tax allowance. That was, in fact, a bold move because the Government is giving up \$750 million on an annual basis. When we increased it from 5,000 to 6,000 per month, we also gave up a huge amount and it worked, because the whole point of reducing personal income tax, because by increasing the personal allowance— although you are not touching the rate of income tax, you are in fact affecting the income tax system itself and you are reducing it.

So when you went from 5,000 a month, paid no tax, to 6,000 a month and below paid no tax, and now 7,000 a month and will pay no tax from January 01, 2021, we are giving up the tax that we would normally have earned from these people. You are talking 250,000 taxpayers, Madam President. Let me say that again, 250,000 taxpayers are going to benefit from this. That is a substantial amount, significant proportion of taxpayers. And we have decided that it is a balancing act, we should get back quite a bit of it in consumption, because this will

be more disposable income and people will spend it. And that will help businesses, it will employ people, it will generate economic activity, so it is a bold step we are making, give up 750 million, and we hope this will stimulate economic activity and it will generate income and we will get it back on the consumption side.

And even if we do not get back all of it, Madam President, even if of the 750 we get back \$400 million in value added tax from increased spending by people, then what we are also doing is providing a social safety net to 250,000 families, Madam President, I do not think that is anything to sneeze at. And I am really pleased that this Government took—bit the bullet and made the decision to make this very bold and innovative move. We believe through the multiplier effect, the net effect on our GDP will be far more than this \$750 million which— all of which we expect will be spent. The Appropriation Bill—how much more time do I have, Madam President?

Madam President: You finish at one second shy of 2.40 p.m.

Hon. C. Imbert: So I have 12 minutes? Okay. The Appropriation Bill also provides allocations to a number of Ministries and I just want to outline some of the things that have been done, and some of the things that will be done. In the Ministry of Health, in its development programme, we are in the process of reconstructing the Port of Spain General Hospital Central Block. This will provide 540 beds. This block you may recall, Madam President, was condemned. It was deemed to be dangerous in the face of a large earthquake, and it was completely decommissioned and decanted. And we are now reconstructing the Central Block at the general hospital to provide 540 new beds. That is very significant. It will service an estimated population of more than 400,000 persons. And we expect it to be completed in early 2022, and that will help the entire north-west region of

Trinidad.

The linear accelerator facility, this is an equipment for the treatment of cancer. I recall when I was first appointed Minister of Health way back in 2001, one of the first things I did in 2002 was to commission a cobalt machine at the St. James Medical Complex for the treatment of cancer and the cobalt machine is old technology.

2.30 p.m.

It sort of pinpoints the radiation, it can burn the surrounding tissue and so on. A linear accelerator is a far more sophisticated device and does far less damage to healthy tissue in the body. So I was very pleased, in fact, I went to the opening of—the launching of this linear accelerator at the St. James Medical Complex just before the general election. I was very pleased to be associated with this state-of-the-art piece of equipment which is now in the public health system available for the public. [*Desk thumping*].

I also noticed the Diego Martin Health Centre was recently opened, I had to heckle my two colleagues from Diego Martin because somehow, they thought I was too busy with the Standing Finance Committee, so they left me in the other place and they went down the road and opened the new Diego Martin Health Centre in Diamond Vale but I was very happy to see that; a brand new health centre in Diego Martin. Diego Martin has been in need of such a facility for a very, very long time.

In terms of the Ministry of Works and Transport, we are also, for those of you who travel through Diego Martin you would see we are in the process of constructing an overpass which will allow persons coming from North Diego Martin, that is the areas like Diamond Vale, Blue Basin, River Estate, Bagatelle, et

cetera, Covigne, Richplain, those areas down there, coming from the north and travelling towards the south, towards the Carenage area, West Moorings area, the Cocorite area, et cetera. But more importantly, more towards the Carenage area, this overpass will allow persons to go over the highway and come down into the park that has been created there, opposite West Mall, the public park, and go down towards the Chaguaramas area without having to go all the way back up to the Peake's gas station area, up in Cocorite. So that is a major development in Diego Martin as well, in terms of traffic management, the management of traffic.

A new headquarters for the Diego Martin Corporation is also being constructed. Diego Martin being almost the last such corporation that would have these kind of administrative facilities. There is one in Chaguanas, I remember visiting that when that was built. And there is also another one planned for Penal and other corporations already have their headquarters, Diego Martin never had one and I am very happy to be part of the Government, we are now building something that Diego Martin has not had, ever, a new administrative headquarters for the Diego Martin Corporation.

We also have the heritage buildings such as this Red House, Madam Speaker—Madam President, I am sorry to call you Madam Speaker. I am so happy to be part of the Government that restored this magnificent heritage building. [*Desk thumping*] I am glad it was done. I recall coming into government again for the second time in 2001, and for that entire period, attempts were made to rebuild this Red House, restore this Red House. I remember the leaking roofs, I remember this Chamber, I remember coming in here and the ceiling was collapsed, there was no ceiling. And then another government came in and for five years, this

building again, was not renovated, and I am so happy to be part of the Government that has restored this magnificent building. [*Desk thumping*]

Similarly, President's House, I remember the condition that was in. Stollmeyer's Castle, Mille Fleurs, which has just been completed, Whitehall. I am really happy to be part of the Government that is restoring our national pride in our national heritage. And these things are important. Everything has its place. These things are important. There are others who may say that that is a waste of money, I do not agree. I am very happy to be in this Chamber right now, speaking to you, Madam President, in this restored building.

The Brian Lara Sporting Complex in Tarouba is now the home of the CPL, the professional league, Caribbean Professional League, and for the enjoyment of everybody, including all cricket lovers in Trinidad and Tobago, no matter what political party you support. And I have been there for the CPL finals and I have looked on at the enjoyment of everybody in terms of this magnificent facility which is now rated as one of the best cricket grounds in the entire world.

The Diego Martin Sporting Complex is world class. It is now providing facilities for footballers and cricketers. Again, that was such a struggle, Madam President, to get that sporting complex built.

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much. With respect to health again, in the north-east of Trinidad we recently commissioned the new Arima hospital with 150 beds. [*Desk thumping*] It is now providing 250,000 persons and surrounding communities with quality health care. We are now building a new hospital in Sangre Grande which will also have 100 beds. We expect that to be commissioned towards the end of 2021. That will serve 110,000 persons in the surrounding areas.

The Valencia to Toco highway is already under construction with the straightening of the Toco Road. And it has been designed to international standards to allow for faster traffic, faster travel to Toco where we will be constructing a ferry port which will allow transportation from the north-east corner of Trinidad, the Toco area, to Scarborough, Tobago in 20 minutes which is something I think we could all look forward to. Can you imagine, Madam President, getting on a ferry in Toco and 20 minutes later you reach in Scarborough? These are things that people only dream of. [*Desk thumping*]

The Churchill-Roosevelt Highway to Manzanilla is well under construction, the Curepe Interchange successfully commissioned on June the 8th, 2020, now allowing you to travel all the way from Port of Spain all the way up past Curepe, and the first traffic light that you will meet is UWI and we are also moving to construct similar interchanges at the University of the West Indies intersection, the Piarco intersection and so on. Madam President, the design process is already initiated and the procurement process is in progress.

Point Fortin Hospital was commissioned in January 2020, it is now serving 75,000 people in the south-west of Trinidad. The Solomon Hochoy Extension to Point Fortin continues apace and we expect to be able to complete that entire project in the near future which will allow persons to drive from San Fernando to Point Fortin in just 20 minutes, Madam President. The Phoenix Park Industrial Estate in Couva, it was affected by COVID as everything was, but now we are restarting that project and we expect that in the near future, there will be significant job opportunities in the Couva area as a result of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate construction.

The Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park was commissioned in July of this year and will help us with the building of food security. So these are just some of the things, Madam President. In Tobago we are about to begin the construction of a new state-of-the-art passenger terminal at the ANR Robinson International Airport. This new terminal, world class, will have a capacity of 3 million passengers a year. Roxborough hospital due for completion by the end of the year. Roxborough and Shirvan police stations have been commissioned. The Dwight Yorke Stadium completely rehabilitated and so on, Madam President. And the reason why I have raised all of this, is that this appropriation is all about this. It is not about bacchanal, it is not about “mauvais langue” and it is not about scandal.

The budget exercise is simply an exercise where we ask for the approval of the Parliament to approve the appropriation for the service of the financial year. These are difficult times, we cannot spend as much money as we used to. We cannot spend 62 billion; we just do not have it. But we are trying our best within our limited resources to balance spending sufficiently to maintain all of the services in the country and to grow the economy and not run too much of a large fiscal deficit. I think, we are on the right track, Madam President, and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Madam President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam 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: That the Bill be read a third time.

The Senate voted: Ayes 23

AYES

Khan, Hon. F.

Gopee-Scoon, Hon. P.

Rambharat, Hon. C.

Sinanan, Hon. R.

Hosein, Hon. K.

West, Hon. A.

Browne, Hon. Dr. A.

Mitchell, Hon. R.

De Freitas, N.

Cox, Hon. D.

Singh, Hon. A.

Sagransingh-Sooklal, Hon. R.

Bacchus, Hon. H.

Lezama-Lee Sing, Mrs. L.

Bethelmy, Ms. Y.

Richards, P.

Deonarine, Ms. A.

Seepersad, Ms. C.

Teemal, D.

Thompson-Ahye, Mrs. H.

Dillon-Remy, Dr. M.

Welch, E.

Deyalsingh, Dr. V.

The following Senators abstained: Mr. W. Mark, Ms. J. John, Mrs. J. Lutchmedial, Mr. D. Lyder, Mr. A. Roberts, Mr. D. Nakhid.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Madam President: Leader of Government Business.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.46 p.m.