

SENATE*Tuesday, April 13, 2021*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam President: Hon Senators, I have received request for leave of absence from today's sitting of the Senate from the following Senators: Sen. Wade Mark, Sen. Jearlean John, Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial, Sen. David Nakhid, Sen. Damian Lyder, Sen. Anil Roberts.

CONDOLENCES**(DAME LOUISE HORNE)**

Madam President: Hon. Senators, as you are aware, former Independent Senator Dame Louise Horne passed away on Sunday, March the 28th, 2021. I now invite you to offer tributes.

Sen. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing: Madam President, thank you. The grand Dame of Arima, the grand foundress of this country's School Feeding Programme, and the great teacher of the grand master Lord Kitchener and others, are all appellations so very suitably ascribed to former Independent Senator, the late Dame Louise Matilda Horne.

Born in Arima in May of 1913, Louise Horne distinguished herself in every chapter of her long and meritorious 107-year journey on this earth.

The eleventh female to ever be appointed to the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago, she was appointed to serve in the First, Second and Third Republican Parliament from 1976—1991. Former President Sir Ellis Clarke remarked that, "So invaluable was her contribution to the working of the Senate, I appointed her again

Sen. L. Lezama Lee Sing (cont'd)

for two consecutive terms”. This is testimony to the fact that she took the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago very seriously that she showed up on every occasion, and during her 15 years contributed in real and meaningful ways to the debates surrounding the governance of this country.

The fibres of Louise Horne included threads named teacher, lecturer, adviser, author, social worker and nutritionist, and combined with title Independent Senator, the woven tapestry that was Louise Matilda Horne was undoubtedly a blanket for the vulnerable in society. It was Dame Louise who tabled the issue for the need of a national nutrition programme which led to the successful implementation of the School Feeding Programme, which to this date, is relevant, necessary, and beneficial to the young minds being schooled and shaped in our land.

In November of 2004, Louise Horne was awarded the Order of St. Gregory by Pope John Paul II and was bestowed the title “Dame”. This ceremony took place in the Santa Rosa R.C. Church in Arima where she worshiped, volunteered and served. Dame Louise was feisty, passionate and a sprightly spirit who loved life, who loved people, and who championed those less fortunate. Yet, she was one who walked with Kings and Queens and never lost the common touch.

She is what we in Arima call J’arime, a title given to those of us who are born in Arima and whose navel strings are buried there. She transcended politics and her political divide and was revered by all. All Arima political personalities befriended her and were all beneficiaries of her vast knowledge and wisdom. She is highly regarded as an icon, a legend, and a champion of and for Arima. She was passionate about the reconstruction of the Arima Hospital and was delighted to have been informed of its completion and opening in 2020.

On a personal note, Madam President, I had the pleasure and privilege of

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Sen. L. Lezama Lee Sing (cont'd)

knowing Dame Louise, or Auntie Louise as many of us call her, for the entirety of my life. She lived across the street from my godparents, the Marajs in Arima, whose home I frequented, and I was blessed to have had many opportunities for tea, interaction, conversation and life lessons. Further, we both worshiped at Santa Rosa R.C. Church and we were both lectors at the 7.00 a.m. mass. All of the young ones aspired to be like Dame Louise. Her enunciation, diction and oratory delivery were as legendary as the fact that she sat in the same seat, in the same pew, every weekend without fail, with an unspoken understanding amongst worshippers that that was her seat and hers alone.

Madam President, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend the deepest condolences to her godson, Dr. Lennox Pierre, her friends, her loved ones, and all in Arima. Our country is so much richer for having had her traverse this land. What a life well lived. Rest in God's eternal peace Dame Louise. Thank you for your faithful service. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Richards.

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you, Madam President. Good afternoon, colleagues. It is my deep honour to pay tribute to this patriot on behalf of the Members of the Independent Bench. She epitomized service, dedication, sacrifice and patriotism. She lived as a shining example of national service. She blazed the trail for much of what we take for granted and do in this august House today, having made sterling contributions to over 150 Bills at a time when she did not have Google or Bing to search for information or research her noteworthy contributions.

Dame Louise Horne served as an Independent Senator from 1976—1991, making her one of the longest serving Senators in the history of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Dame Louise was first appointed as an Independent Senator in 1976 by His Excellence Sir Ellis Clarke. She was also a successful Senator and

the President reappointed her to two further terms of office in the Senate.

Dame Louise was awarded the honour of St. Gregory by Pope John Paul II and henceforth would carry the title, Dame Louise Horne. She was awarded this title on Sunday, November 7th, 2004, for her service as a Roman Catholic to her parish community and the Catholic community of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. She distinguished herself as a nutritionist and served as a Chief Nutritionist Officer in the Government Service, as well as in an earlier career as a teacher. She was an educator at heart. In fact, one of her former pupils was calypsonian, the well-known globally Lord Kitchener, Mr. Aldwyn Roberts.

She has been involved in several service non-governmental organizations in Trinidad and Tobago such as the Coterie of social services, the Arima Community Welfare Council, and Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association. Her life has always been and continued to be oriented around service to her countrymen. In 1992, she was awarded Trinidad and Tobago's Medal of Merit, Gold, for her work in the field of dietetics and in the public service. She was also honoured on a postage stamp that commemorated the 1980 the Debacle of Women—Decade—sorry—of Women. In her invaluable history book, *The Evolution of Modern Trinidad and Tobago* in 2004, she writes that she considered herself fortunate to be living during the most important era in the life of her country. At that time she still led a quite active life which included participation at meetings of the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

She had many memberships in committees in the Parliament including the Regulation Committee; the Joint Select Committee in 1977; the Committee of the Senate to consider the Federation of Women's Institutes Bill in 1977; the Select Committee of the Senate to consider the Wesleyan Holiness Church; the Standing Orders Committee in 1978; the Standing Audits Committee also in 1979; the

Regulations Committee in 1982; and the Joint Select Committee to consider Consumer Protection legislation and Law Reform legislation, and the Hindi Lindi Committee amongst several others.

On behalf of the Members of the Independent Bench, we send condolences to her family and thank her and them for their sacrifices and her sacrifice on behalf of a grateful and beloved nation. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I too wish to join in paying tribute to the late Dame Louise Horne. Dame Louise Horne, as we have heard, served as an Independent Senator in the First, Second and Third Republican Parliament from September 1976 to November 1991. The length of time of her service is noteworthy enough. It is also noteworthy that she was the lone female Independent Senator in the First Republican Parliament, and one of only five female Senators all together during that period.

In the Second Republican Parliament, once again, she was one of the four female Senators, as in the Third Republican Parliament, clearly, a trailblazer who paved the way for all of us female parliamentarians who are serving decades after she did. Her contributions to the debates were scholarly and her commitment to this institution unparalleled. I am told that Dame Louise Horne encouraged civil debate by never talking down to others; rather she communicated across. She possessed a value of respect. In fact, one of her favourite quotations was:

Where respect is lost there can be no living.

In 2001, some 10 years after she ceased being a Senator, she continued to show interest and her support of the Parliament when she took the time to attend an Annual General Meeting of the Local Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Senator Horne, as we know, was a teacher, a voluntary social worker and an author. She, even as she served her country in the Parliament, continued to

serve her beloved Arima, the place where she was born and had lived her entire life. She never lost the feisty spirit of which Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing spoke. In fact, one of her favourite stories was of her fighting off bandits who invaded her home at Lopez Street, Arima.

We pay tribute to a truly remarkable human being, someone who served her country, her community, and her church. We extend our deepest sympathy to the family of the late Dame Louise Horne, but acknowledge at the same time and celebrate a beautiful well-lived life, a life that was steeped in service and faith. May she rest in eternal peace.

Hon. Senators, we will now please—I ask you to stand and allow us to observe a minute of silence.

The Senate stood.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I instruct the Clerk to convey to her family the sentiments that have been expressed today.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for the period 2016/2017. [*The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox)*]
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for the period 2017/2018. [*Sen. The Hon. D. Cox*]
3. Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2020. [*The Vice-President (Sen. Nigel de Freitas)*]
4. Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Extension of Period for Payment of Fifty Percent of Fixed Penalty) Order, 2021. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan)*]

5. Consolidated Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon)*]
6. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended September 30, 2015. [*The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat)*]
7. Annual Report of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

(Presentation)

Cannabis Control Bill, 2020

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Order Paper in my name:

Second Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020, First Session (2020/2021), Twelfth Parliament.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam President: Acting Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, the Government is prepared to respond to the Urgent Questions which were posed and is also prepared to respond to on the questions on notice, questions Nos. 82, 89, 90, 91, 115, 116 and 117, and we are asking, Madam President, respectfully, for a deferral of question No. 127 on notice. The Government is also responding to written questions Nos. 126 and 92,

and we are asking, Madam President, respectfully, for a deferral on 114 and 125. Thank you.

Madam President: Question No. 127 is deferred for two weeks, question No.—are you in a position to answer 125, no, 126, Minister?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Written response on 126 will be circulated, Madam President.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Edmonds Marshall McMohan (EMM)

(Details of)

92. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs:

As regard the British company known as Edmonds Marshall McMohan (EMM), can the Attorney General provide the Senate with the following information:

- (i) the date on which the company was contracted by the Government and/or the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service;
- (ii) the sum paid thus far to the company; and
- (iii) the amount owed to the company?

Increased Activities – Financial Intelligence Unit

(Details of)

126. Sen. Charrise Seepersad asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Given reports that the Financial Intelligence Unit has recorded an increased total of 1,831 Suspicious Activity and Suspicious Transactions Reports for the period 2019-2020, valued at \$27Bn, and that ninety-seven percent (97%) of said reports were related to Tax Evasion (29%), Money Laundering

(29%), Suspicious Financial Activity (22%), Fraud (12%), and Drug Trafficking (5%), can the Minister advise as to the following:

- (i) what are the reason(s) identified, if any, for the increase in said activity;
- (ii) what deficiencies in anti-money laundering policies, if any, have been highlighted by the said statistics;
- (iii) does the Unit operate on par with international standards in relation to the collection, analysis and dissemination of financial intelligence and information; and
- (iv) is the Government actively taking steps to implement further reforms to address any deficiencies identified at (ii)?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Charrise Seepersad.

ECLAC 2021 Report on Financial Losses

(Status of)

127. Given a 2021 report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) which highlights significant financial losses to this country as a result of transfer pricing in the energy industry, can the hon. Minister of Finance indicate:

- (i) what measures, if any, are being taken to recover said losses;
- (ii) whether the Government is considering the introduction of legislation to guard against transfer pricing; and
- (iii) if the answer to (ii) is in the affirmative, when will said legislation be brought to Parliament?

Question, by leave, deferred.

National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago

(Details of)

115. Sen. Amrita Deonarine asked the hon. Minister of Planning and Development:

As regard the Bill brought in the Eleventh Parliament to establish a National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago, can the Minister advise as to:

- (i) whether a similar Bill will be brought for consideration in the Twelfth Parliament; and
- (ii) if the answer to (i) is not in the affirmative, how does the Government propose to address the CSO's ongoing challenges as regard access to the data necessary to calculate more accurate GDP figures?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, in response to the first part of the question, the Government understands the benefits of having access to reliable statistical data as a vital tool for the effective decision making. The timely and accurate data is sourced from the Gross Domestic Product data. It has always been of utmost importance to this Government as it recognizes that GDP is one of the most widely used measures of an economy's output and production. The Ministry of Planning and Development, Madam President, also notes that reliable GDP data allows policymakers, economists, and businesses, to analyse the impact of variables such as monetary and fiscal policy, economic shocks and tax spending plans.

As such, Madam President, the proclamation of a Bill similar to the Bill that was brought in the Eleventh Parliament to establish the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago which would grant greater access to the relevant non-identifiable VAT data is critical for accurate GDP estimates. The Government

recognizes the benefits of such a Bill and has prioritized it in its legislative agenda. Madam President, it should be noted that the CSO currently has GDP data for the period 2019 to 2020. The data is collected by several surveys administered by the CSO such as the surveys of domestic production and survey of retail prices, or directly from data provided by stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education—Energy and Energy Industries sorry. Additional, a survey of establishment is undertaken to acquire annual data from business and other entities involved in economic activity, and this data is subsequently used to provide annual benchmark estimates for the current value of economic output. Further to this, Madam President, the CSO continues to work closely with the various stakeholders and with the IMF, the centre for—Caribbean Technical Assistance Centre to improve and develop its price and volume indicators, and more generally GDP estimates.

Finally, as an interim measure, the CSO has signed an MOU with the Board of Inland Revenue on February 14, 2020, and which has granted access to non-identifiable VAT data. Under this agreement, the CSO committed to provide training and assistance to the BIR offices in the coding of establishment. It sought to ensure that the availability of properly coded VAT data can further enhance the timeliness and accuracy of GDP estimates.

Madam President, as a result of what I have just said, the response to part (ii) of the question is not required. Thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Deonarine.

Sen. Deonarine: Thank you, Madam President. Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, could you advise that given the prioritization of the National Statistical Institute on the legislative agenda of the Government, is there a timeline in which you are looking at to bring this piece of legislation to the Parliament?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, the Government recognizes that

we are a few months away from the end of this first year of the Twelfth Parliament, and the Government intends to have the Bill laid before the end of this first year of the Twelfth Parliament. Thank you.

Madam President: Next question, Sen. Deonarine.

Sen. Deonarine: Madam President, I have a supplemental.

Madam President: Oh, I am sorry. Yes, sure. Go ahead.

Sen. Deonarine: Thank you, Madam President. Thank you, hon. Minister, for your response. Now, in your initial response you indicated that there has been improvements in the calculation of GDP figures and surveys are being used and sent to businesses. Initially there has been a problem with the response rate of these surveys, what is currently being done to improve the response rate of these surveys by businesses used to calculate the GDP figures?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, quite honestly I am not in a position to provide a response to that, but I am quite prepared to undertake to put it in writing and have it delivered before the next sitting.

Disposal of State Land Regulations

(State of Readiness)

116. Sen. Amrita Deonarine asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Can the Minister advise as to the state of readiness of the regulations with respect to the Disposal of State Land under section 57A of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. I actually came to answer question 90 as well. If I had known I would have given my honourable colleague the responsibility to answer 116. It is very simple. Madam President, regulations to give effect to the public procurement retention and disposal of public property should be laid in Parliament in May of 2021.

Incidents of Praedial Larceny**(Details of)**

117. Sen. Amrita Deonarine asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Given the increase in incidents of praedial larceny being experienced by farmers, can the Minister advise as to the following:

- (i) whether praedial larceny squads exist in all station districts where there are farming communities;
- (ii) if the answer to (i) is in the affirmative, what are the names of said station districts; and
- (iii) are the squads in the station districts identified at (ii) above active; and
- (iv) if the answer to (iii) is not in the affirmative, will the inactive squads be reactivated?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you, Madam President. And, Madam President, I thank the Senator for the question. Madam President, I want to first make it very clear that the Praedial Larceny Squad which forms part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries really provides assistance to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and is not a crime fighting squad independent of the TTPS. So the Praedial Larceny Squad was established in 2013 and was as a result of a study on the nature and extent of praedial larceny in Trinidad and Tobago, which was commissioned five years before by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources as it was known then.

Madam President, with respect to the part of the question, part (ii), the Praedial Larceny Squad operates from four divisions in the country: the Eastern Division, Northern Division, Central Division, Southern Division. And the areas which are served in the Eastern Division places like Salybia, Oropouche, Sangre

Grande, Manzanilla, Plum Mitan, Ecclesville, Poole and Rio Claro. Northern Division: Cumuto Heights of Guanapo, Wallerfield, Arima, Blanchisseuse, Aripo, Mausica, Piarco, Wallerfield, Trincity, Lopinot, Pasea and Macoya, Caura. The Central Division: Caroni, Cunupia, Las Lomas, Chaguanas, Talparo, Carlsen Field, Todd's Road, Caparo, Freeport and Chickland. And finally, in the Southern Division: Cedros, Gasparillo, Oropouche, Point Fortin, Tableland, New Grant, Princes Town, Penal, Debe, Moruga, Bastia, La Lune and St. Croix.

So, Madam President, with respect to part (iii) of question, the squad operates in the four divisions and all are active at this time. Thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Deonarine.

Sen. Deonarine: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, through you, hon. Minister, could you advise if in all of these station districts whether resources such as vehicles are available for readily responding to requests by farmers who have reports of praedial larceny?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, as the Minister with responsibility for this, I would say that the vehicles are available. They are abused, they have been destroyed, particularly in the hands of the leadership of the squad. So the taxpayers of this country provide vehicles and equipment, they are used for various private enterprises, and many times they are not available for the use by the officers for responding to calls by farmers. It is something that we have been addressing and it has proven to be a difficulty to keep the vehicles on the road, but even now as we have a newly appointed superintendent and assistant superintendent in the service—they were just appointed, maybe formally appointed in the last two weeks and they have been charged with the responsibility as they should be to take ownership of these issues of absenteeism, abuse of equipment, and various things in the Praedial Larceny Squad so that the squad can be effective

in supporting the TTPS in dealing with the matters of praedial larceny.

Madam President: Sen. Deonarine.

Sen. Deonarine: Thank you, Madam President. Given the response, Madam President, through you, hon. Minister, could you advise whether there is a timeline for these superintendents—recently appointed superintendents—to report to you on rectifying these challenges that they are put there to address?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, I do not know if to say fortunately or unfortunately they do not report to me, but the Permanent Secretary has been given very clear instructions and I hope that the newly appointed superintendent and assistant superintendent will report to her and satisfy her in relation to the care of these assets, but before that, the availability of the assets because there are assets that have to be brought back into functional state.

2.00 p.m.

**ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS INTO AND OUT OF
COURT (AMDT.) BILL, 2021**

Order for second reading read.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Electronic Payments into and out of Court Act, 2018, be now read a second time.

Madam President, there is an air of peace and calm in this Chamber, like none other that I have experienced in the Senate in the 11 years that I have been in Parliament now, this year. [*Desk thumping*] It is refreshing to approach the holy month of Ramadan tomorrow and to have this form of peace descend upon us. May it continue for as long as it must.

Madam President, it gives me great pleasure to move a very simple

amendment to a very important piece of law, and I do not propose to use my entire time at all, because I think that we are all literally on the same page, if I can be so boldfaced to say that, today.

Madam President, we propose an amendment to the parent law, which is the Electronic Payments into and out of Court Act, 2018. That Act was an Act of Parliament which, by its name, obviously implies and certifies that we had caused an exception to the Constitution by allowing for parent law in the form of this legislation to be born. The parent law very simply establishes the fact that collectors of revenue can be situated in the court. It allows for electronic payments to be made. The electronic payments are done in a very precise fashion, where we treat with the various types of money that a court can actually accept. Those moneys are defined in section 5 of the parent Act into the forms of fees, fines and trust moneys. Fees speak for themselves. Fines speak for themselves. Trust moneys are of various types: moneys belonging to someone else, maintenance payments, other forms of money, payments into court, payments in respect of security for costs, et cetera. That, we have allowed to pass through the signatories defined in the parent legislation, with the two-step authentication there and for the establishment of custodial bank accounts.

The law specifically made this payments into and out of court Act subject to section 116 of the Constitution. Section 116 of the Constitution is simply the acknowledgment that public accounts will be audited by the Auditor General. There has arisen a question, and out of an abundance of caution and only an abundance of caution, we have sought to bring to life the provisions of section 112 of the Constitution.

Section 112 of the Constitution makes it pellucidly clear that you may have

an establishment of a Consolidated Fund which treats with all revenue or other moneys raised or received by Trinidad and Tobago, not being revenues or other moneys payable, under the Constitution or any other law into some other public fund established for specific purpose.

First of all, I would say what this law proposes to do is very simple. The Bill proposes that:

“Where electronic payments are made into Court, the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago may, by agreement with a Financial Intermediary,”—that it is doing business with—“cause the bank charges, credit card charges, debit card charges, chargeback, administrative and other fees to be deducted from the Custodial Bank Account referenced to in section 5(1) and (2) of the Act.”

In other words, these fall within the category of payments that do not stand as public moneys and do not stand as revenue; quite simply. The payment of a bank card fee, the 3 per cent transaction fee, if you use your credit card to make an electronic payment, what this law proposes to do is to allow for net payments to be received by the State and not gross payments.

If we do not take this step, there will be a small bit of confusion in the mind of the Treasury. In the mind of the Treasury it could be viewed, whilst manual systems coexist with electronic systems, that the credit card charges, et cetera, would have to be collected by the State and then paid out a month later under a manual system. What this law does is that it—by an Act of Parliament, in keeping with the supreme law of Trinidad and Tobago, section 112 of the Constitution—allows for an Act of Parliament to say what happens with charges.

All that we are saying is that the charges may be deducted at the point of the

transaction. So that the money which belongs to the bank goes to the bank, and that we take into effect the automatic clearing on a daily basis, by way of electronic transaction recordkeeping on a real-time basis.

This law quite simply takes into perfection the methodology that is required to allow for real-time transactions. Unlocking this key allows the Treasury to move with a very calm mind into allowing the opening of the accounts by the Treasury for the Judiciary. That is, the custodial accounts which are of two kinds: that which is intended to collect revenue in fines and fees and that which is intended to be open for payments which are in trust: the maintenance money that belongs to someone else, the security for cost that belongs to someone else; those trust moneys. This allows us to carry out the perfection of removing physical attendances from the courts.

By this particular stroke of law, you will be allowed to sit in your bedroom at midnight, at 2.00 a.m., whenever you are minded to do your transaction work, use your credit card online, use your debit card online, use your other forms of payment online and avoid having to go to the court to line up to hand over cash transactions. It is important in a structure such as COVID, as we learn to coexist with the pandemic, that we remove the congregation of persons from the mix that we carry out the ease of doing business.

I will remind that in 2018, when I was piloting this law, I was met with a lot of jaundice and criticism coming from the Opposition Bench. Back then, it could not be contemplated that you could file documents electronically at the court. Now, that is a standard feature. Nobody attends a court to file documents. [*Desk thumping*] Back then, the payment of court filing fees had to be done in person. Now, that is a thing of the far distant past. [*Desk thumping*] Back then, the

payment of the vast majority of transactions, which is in fact the motor vehicle and road traffic transactions, 104,000 cases per year. Out of the entire Magistracy pot of 146,000, the vast majority of those cases, where the fines for motor vehicle and road traffic offences were given, back then in 2018, it was a far distant possibility for the Opposition, at least, to contemplate what came to life. On May 26, 2020, when we turned on the e-trafficking system and you are now allowed to decentralize your payments across Tobago and Trinidad to pay things without having to go to the court.

Today we laid, by way of Papers, the Minister of Works and Transport, item 4 on the Order Paper, the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Extension of Period for Payment of Fifty Percent of Fixed Penalty) Order, 2021. That Order allows for the extension of the 50 per cent sale of the 90,000 motor vehicle and road traffic fines that are outstanding. In other words then, we are today providing an unlocked opportunity for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to pay their fines for motor vehicles and road traffic, to pay their fines for mask wearing, to pay their fines levied by the court by way of any order of the court, to pay maintenance, to continue to pay maintenance, because CourtPay is in proper operation, to continue to pay for filing fees and other arrangements, all of this without having to leave your home.

This, Madam President, constitutes the continuation of a Government committed to work for the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This constitutes a celebration of the sharp-minded, aggressive reforms led by the honourable Chief Justice, Mr. Justice of Appeal, Ivor Archie. This carries out the digitization of our economy. And I am very pleased to say, as the Minister that had the responsibility to promote this legislation and these structures, that in 2018, we

had the foresight to do what is now reality in Trinidad and Tobago.

I will end by saying, Madam President, that this Government gives a continued pledge to work for the benefit of the peace, order and good governance of our society. We will turn up every single time. [*Desk thumping*] We will do our jobs. We will continue to persevere under the unjustified criticisms brought against the Government by a now lost Opposition, and we are determined to carry Trinidad and Tobago into better days. With these few words, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy: Thank you, Madam President. Attorney General, I have one question for you because I still am not clear. Who pays the charges for the credit card? Normally right now, there are some vendors who increase the charges so that they do not have to pay it. What will happen in the case of the Judiciary? Who pays those charges for credit cards?

Hon. Al-Rawi: May I, Madam President? And I am not assuming that the hon. Senator has ended her delivery. Right now the customer, by electing to pay for the transaction, takes the 3 per cent charge. So, we have arranged with all of the credit card providers, Master Card, Visa, First Atlantic, any one of the intermediary entities, financial intermediaries, the system that has been developed and approved by the Treasury is that the person who chooses to use the electronic transaction will pay the 100 per cent that is due, plus the percentage that is due by way of transaction fee.

So it is on the client utilization, by a voluntary methodology. And that way, we did not have to do the reconciliation of the intermediary charge. So, just like it is when you buy a top-up card for your phone, as most people will be accustomed

to that, you are buying a \$100 card, you will pay \$100 plus the fee. So that has been put into successful operation at the TTPost end of the equation where this works already. The charge is 100 per cent that is due and you pay your 3 per cent.

At the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, which I should say is the first Ministry in the Caribbean to go live with electronic payments, it is the same transaction that is in effect. So it is a net transaction, goes to the Treasury, in this case the Consolidated Fund or the maintenance and other positions trusts and the person who is electing to do the transaction electronically bears the charge, as they would always have, by way of agreement. The commercial side of the equation is slightly different. On the commercial side, the merchant pays the 3 per cent charge. But that is by way of agreement. The ease with that is that the merchant is not complicated by the Consolidated Fund. So to reconcile the transaction would mean that we would have to do it every month. And that, when you look at it in the context of \$21 million or \$250 million, if you are looking at motor vehicle and road traffic charges, that would become a nightmare. So those who wish to pay electronically, they pay the sum plus the percentage, and that has been working very well so far.

Sen. Dr. M. Dillon-Remy: Madam President? It has been working very well so far in the Family Court? That is where this is rolled out right now?

Hon. Al-Rawi: So, it is working at the Family Court. It is working at the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, Registrar General's Division. It is working at the UTurn system, which is the motor vehicle and traffic offences which run via the TTPost decentralization system. So there are three places that are fully at work and, of course, in the maintenance transactions, if you engage in the CourtPay system, pursuant to an order of the court. So there are multiple areas that

are all at work.

Sen. Dr. M. Dillon-Remy: Thank you, Madam President.

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you, Madam President. Good afternoon again colleagues. And my contribution would be quite short, as was Sen. Dillon-Remy's, and it is just a couple of questions to the Attorney General. Certainly this move on this Bill today, certainly this move is toward moving the court system in Trinidad and Tobago to a more digitized environment which, certainly is welcomed, given what we have seen of COVID-19. And what we have seen, in terms of some quick research, is that the global economy declined in terms of cash transactions by 6 per cent between 2006 and 2016.

We have also seen economies like Canada moving toward stopping the printing of money, for obvious reasons, and the potential for surveillance of economies is also counteracted by the potential for digital crime, including fraud, unauthorized access and data breaches.

The very question, through you, Madam President, that Sen. Dillon-Remy posed opens up quite a bit of conversation through you, to the Attorney General, about if this is part of an overall policy to move Trinidad and Tobago's economy to a digitized cashless economy, as many of the economies in the world have been doing, in terms of electronic payment systems, as with the courts, and if the country has put in place at this stage, moving through the courts, which is a significant move, the infrastructure, digital protections, accountabilities and redundancies in place for that type of digital society.

One of the challenges that many of the countries, and developed countries at that, encountered while moving in this direction was the fact that, as per usual, many of the vulnerable groups including the elderly and those in remote rural

areas, were left at a significant disadvantage in terms of moving in this direction. And I hope the Attorney General can clarify what systems are in place to facilitate those persons. We have seen what COVID has done, in terms of the education sector alone and the gaps that we have uncovered in that regard.

So, as I said I am going to be very short. I am just hoping that the AG can identify the systems that have been put in place, in addition to the public awareness campaign, to deal with public concerns and queries as some of those were raised by Sen. Dillon-Remy. Thank you.

Sen. Charrise Seepersad: Thank you, Madam President. I just want to pose a question to the Attorney General, please. Hon. Attorney General, I was concerned about two things. Are ACH transactions going to be allowed as well, under this system? And were you able to negotiate down the fees charged by the various credit card and financial institutions? Because when I did some research, I mean, it could be as high as 5 per cent which is a quite significant charge. And I would imagine you have bulk transactions. So you are in a position to negotiate down these fees. Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: The Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I will quickly answer the last bit of questions put to me. Yes ACH transactions are permitted. It is permitted pursuant to the parent Act and it is defined in the Act, including how we define ACH, et cetera. Of course, we have a host of other laws that operate in tandem with this. There is the Constitution. There is the Exchequer and Audit Act. There is the Electronic Transactions Act. There is the Exchequer and Audit (Electronic Funds Transfer) Regulations, 2015. There is the Electronic Transfer of Funds

Crime Act and we have the Financial Regulations, et cetera, that coexist with these things, and all of them are intended to be in harmony with each other.

As to the question as to whether we have negotiated down on the transaction fees? At the Ministry of the Attorney General, I can say certainly yes, and they have been applying a similar standard across the base. Because Treasury, i.e. Minister of Finance, is the one that negotiates the contracts on behalf of the Ministries. If you look at the definition of “Department” and other positions at section 23B of the Exchequer and Audit Act for electronic funds transfer, you will see that those things are clearly defined.

So yes, we are negotiating in a bulk transaction to get the best benefit. And as we now progress to the first set of questions put by Sen. Richards, it ties into some of the underpinnings that Sen. Seepersad asked. Yes, the policy of the Government is to aggressively move to electronic transactions. Yes, the policy of the Government is to treat with the unbanked, the term that we use for the people that do not have access to credit card or debit card, et cetera, is the unbanked. And this Act, the Electronic Payments into and out of Court Act, was the first piece of legislation in Trinidad and Tobago to deal with the unbanked. Because when you look to the structure of the legislation we allowed for the issuance of a card by the Judiciary, similar to a top-up card.

So if you are unbanked, you did not have a credit card, you did not have an account, what the Judiciary did, by way of legislation in the 2018 legislation, is we created the unbanked opportunity where you get a Judiciary card, similar to what the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services does with its food payment structures, as we deal with food support mechanisms. So the Government is extremely aware of the unbanked in our society. It is why we have aggressively

pushed to make sure that they are treated with dignity the same way. Cashless society can operate by incorporating the unbanked difficulty.

It is why peer-to-peer transactions are going to be a solid feature of where we go. We have with us Sen. Bacchus who is a leading expert. We have with us Sen. West who is the Minister with full responsibility, together with Minister Bacchus as we drive the solution for the unbanked.

This, in the last bit of response, deals with fraud. It deals with following the money. It deals with avoiding people being arrested for things that they have paid for. There were far too many cases of persons who were in maintenance structures where outstanding warrants were on the bench for people who had paid but the court records were lost. Those are things of the past because we now have e-vote books. We have e-transactions.

A person who participates in the CourtPay system, on the app, can see when the payment is made and the person who paid knows when it is paid. So if there is any warrant that is issued for somebody mistakenly, that is dealt with immediately. We are in a dramatically better place than we were before. And I would like to say, as I end, this is how you—[*Interruption*] Yes please, Sen. Vieira.

Sen. Vieira: Thank you. Hon. Attorney General, thank you very much for allowing me. I was just wondering where are we in terms of capacity? Have we experienced any teething problems so far? I am thinking too in terms of the ease of doing business. So are we ready with all of the various courts and registries throughout Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Sen. Vieira. I can confirm that we are fully ready. As of October last year, we were ready. The final ironing out—what we have done carefully at the Judiciary's end and at the AG's end, because we were test piloting

the lead, together with the Ministry of Works and Transport, you notice none of our systems have failed. It is because we went into beta testing. We did not deliver an alpha product before we did the beta testing. And we did our beta testing in the AG's office for the Registrar General's system. We did it for up to two years with all of the stakeholders. We tested the environment. We checked the position. We made sure to get this position right, to get it into gear. So the antifraud mechanisms, the ease of doing business mechanisms, we are about to take that on steroids, literally. As at the AG's Office again, we will be taking lead on the property business real estate solution and on the electronic filing. You will not need to walk in to file any company's document, any registration document. You already do not need to go for birth certificates, et cetera.

Minister West will lead the charge on the first bedside registration for a birth. Minister West and Minister Bacchus will lead that charge and the horizon is immediately upon us. These are very exciting times, times for— [*Interruption*]
Would you like me to give way? Sorry?

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: I have a couple of questions for you, please. Under the parent Act, section 15:

“The Rules Committee established under section 77 of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act may make Rules of Court for carrying into effect the provisions of this Act.”

My question is: Have these rules been drafted? Have they been put into operation? And that is one question.

Now, you will recall that there was quite a bit of correspondence—

Madam President: Sen. Thompson-Ahye, perhaps let the Attorney General respond.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I do not mind taking the questions.

Madam President: No, let us do it this way, Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: As you please, Madam President, my pleasure. The answer is, yes, the rules have been drafted and we are all set and ready to go. Do you have another question?

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: They are drafted; they are not yet enforced or anything?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: No, rules are in place already and there are further rules that will come upon us as well. There are Practice Directions and there are rules as well.

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: There were some concerns about the fact that money that is paid from fines and so in criminal matters, coming into the Judiciary and the question of blurring of the separation of powers. Have these been addressed?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Well, that was an argument that we had dealt with in the course of debate which, most respectfully, does not arise. The Judiciary has, since the creation of the Judiciary, received fines. They have forever received fines, fees, and trust moneys since the Judiciary existed, even before we became an independent Republic. So those arguments that were brought about back in 2018, about the blurring of the separation of powers, did not stand scrutiny in the face of the history of the Judiciary. Certainly, if you look to the Exchequer and Audit Act which predates the Independence Constitution, it is also provided inside of there, as well as the Constitution. Again, that is an artificiality, most respectfully, to those who had raised the concerns about the separation of powers. Because then, if that is the case, the Judiciary should never be the beneficiary of appropriation moneys under a coordinating Minister such as the Attorney General. There is a confluence of operation of structures. I am not sure if you have any further questions for me.

No?

Madam President: Attorney General, perhaps you can continue your winding up.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. Madam President, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Senate in committee.

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

2.30 p.m.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the Senate.

Senate resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

Madam President: Attorney General.

QUARANTINE (MARITIME) (AMDT.) REGULATIONS, 2021

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):

Madam President, I beg to move the following Motion standing in the name of the Minister of Health:

Whereas it is provided by section 4 of the Quarantine Act, Chap. 28:05 (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”) that the Minister of Health may make Regulations, with respect to the whole or any part of Trinidad and Tobago, including the ports and coastal waters thereof, for preventing;

- (a) danger to public health from ships or aircraft or persons or things therein, arriving at any place; and
- (b) the spread of infection by means of any ship or aircraft about to leave any place, or by means of any person or thing;

And whereas it is provided by the said section 4 of the Act that Regulations made under this section shall be subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament;

And whereas the Minister has on the 4th day of February, 2021 made the Quarantine (Maritime) (Amdt.) Regulations, 2021 (hereinafter called “the Regulations”);

And whereas the Regulations were laid in the House of Representatives on the 5th day of February, 2021;

And whereas it is expedient to approve the Regulations:

Be it resolved that the Quarantine (Maritime) (Amendment) Regulations, 2021 be approved.

Madam President, I am pleased to deliver this Motion on behalf of my colleague, as I have just indicated. It is why, I guess, it is quite prudent that the Attorney General drafts the laws in any event so you are always ready at a moment's notice to take up the work of the Parliament.

Madam President, we have before us the affirmative resolution of the Quarantine Regulations. They are effectively very straightforward. There are four substantive matters that we seek to do. The first of all is the removal of the term, “deratisation certificate” and also “deratisation exemption certificate”. We are instead proposing to substitute those terms with “ship sanitation control certificate” or “ship sanitation control exemption certificate”.

Secondly, we propose the repeal and replacing of the provision set out under Part VI of the Regulations. We are replacing with new Part VI, which will detail the requirements for ships entering our sea port and processes relating to the issue of the ship sanitation control, and we are also allowing for an examination of the ship by authorized officers for clinical signs, et cetera, in the event that the

certificate is not produced or in any event.

Thirdly, we propose a repeal of Sixth Schedule and replacement with a new Sixth Schedule which will contain the actual ship sanitation control certificate and ship sanitation control exemption certificate.

Fourthly, we are treating with the repeal of the Second Schedule, replacement with a new Second Schedule containing the new declaration of health which requires submission of clinical critical health information, persons on board ships, et cetera.

These come about, Madam President, quite simply because Trinidad and Tobago's Regulations predate the Health Regulations 2005, where Trinidad and Tobago was treating with the International Health Regulations of 2005. The rest of the world has moved on. The concept of deratification, removal of rats and rodents from ships, has now become a thing of the past. They have gone for a broader extent of sanitation control. We quite recently dealt with the Animal Health Regulations. We also dealt with the Animal Welfare Bill. We were introduced in that legislations and by COVID to the concept of zoonosis which is the transfer of diseases from animals to humans and vice versa, et cetera. How real a situation COVID-19 has presented for this country.

I would like to say that the amendment of these Regulations and why we are taking them today, as quickly as we are, helps us quite importantly to make sure that ships that come and go are not subjected to an antiquity that the harbour may not be expecting, that the masters of ships may not be expecting. Because when we look to what is happening in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as our prayers go out to our brothers and sisters there, as our 50 troops have left this morning at 6.00 a.m., as Minister Young and the Cabinet was up all of last night making sure that the procedures were put into place and approvals were done, there is a clock that

does not stop on Government schedule. We need to make sure that we can actually bring people in, in the easiest way possible and what a better situation than to be on standby for your brothers or sisters in the Caribbean.

So again, timing is extremely important. We are very pleased to do these Regulations. It is really to bring them up to speed. The hon. Minister of Health has been hard at work, as the population has seen. Trinidad and Tobago is upfront and personal and very well accustomed to what is going on in the whole COVID pandemic. Our vaccination drive is going on. These Regulations help us to harmonize law. I would like to stick a pin and say as Attorney General that I have defended hundreds of pieces of litigation under the COVID pandemic and we have won all. We have won all of our pieces, [*Desk thumping*] notwithstanding, in particular, the massive amount of litigation brought against the Government in COVID by the Opposition.

In fact, we have had costs awarded in favour of the State as we continue to say that sunlight does not cure COVID, [*Desk thumping*] that a dome will not protect this country, that the vaccination roll out is still something still to be measured. I above all having starred for my five minutes of fame, I can attest to COVID fatigue; how people feel under this COVID pandemic, how tired we are of living in the situation that we are in. It is not easy to be on diligent watch 24 hours a day. It is something that we are reminded to do every now and then. We are all human, nobody is perfect. We need to make sure that we do our very best. This Motion takes the Maritime Regulations, quarantine aspects of it, into the modern situation and there is no better reason to stand to deliver a Motion, such as this, than for those reasons. In those circumstances, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you, Madam President. just a short intervention. There

are many Members of the Independent Bench who have not had sight of the Regulations, even on the Rotunda. I do not know if that can be facilitated. Thank you.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I am advised that the Regulations are available on the Rotunda. And I just want to further point out that these Regulations were laid in the Senate on the 9th of February, 2021. So they are available on the Rotunda. Sen. Richards, are you to continue your contribution?

Sen. P. Richards: No thank you. That is it, just one question, Madam President. Thank you.

Madam President: Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam President. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed.

Resolved:

That the Quarantine (Maritime) (Amendment) Regulations, 2021 be approved.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Madam President: Hon. Senators, with your leave, I wish to revert to item 14 on the Order Paper. Acting Leader of Government Business.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

Cannabis Control Bill, 2020

(Extension of Time)

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, having regard to the Second Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to the consider and report on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020, First Session, (2020/2021), of the

Twelfth Parliament, I beg to move that the Committee be granted an extension to May 31, 2021, to complete its work and submit a final report. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam President: Acting Leader of Government Business.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, I propose that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 1.30 p.m. and at that sitting the Government proposes to move an Act to amend the Sexual Offences Act, Chap. 11:28. Thank you.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for a matter to be raised. Sen. Deonarine. [*Desk thumping*]

Unemployment and Poverty Statistics

(Collection and Publication of)

Sen. Amrita Deonarine: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to raise this matter on the need for the Government to prioritize the collection and publication of up-to-date unemployment and poverty statistics.

Madam President, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, up-to-date data on poverty and unemployment was not being published in a timely fashion. Up to March 23, 2020, when we were entering the lockdown, the most updated data on unemployment was for the third quarter of 2018, at 4.6 per cent at that time. To date, the latest quarterly unemployment figure we have available to us is for quarter one of 2019, at 4 per cent. And the latest annual measurement or annual unemployment rate available for any in-depth analysis as at 2018, is at a rate of 3.9 per cent.

Madam President, we are in the second quarter of 2021, more than two years later, and we have not seen the publication of the Continuous Sample Survey of

Population, commonly known as the CSSP, by the Central Statistical Office for labour market data for the year 2019 or any quarters of 2020.

Madam President, with respect to poverty data, it is even more worrisome. The latest poverty data available to us is for the year 2015, when the last Survey of Living Conditions, more than 15 years ago, was conducted. The 2005 SLC estimated that the percentage of the population living in poverty was at 16.7 per cent.

Another SLC was however done in 2014, but it was flawed with technical difficulties, warranting the updated version not being worthy of publication, so it was never published. But looking at the Caribbean Economic Bulletin, Volume 9, Issue 3, in November 2020, published by the Inter-American Development Bank, they referred to the 2014 Survey of Living Conditions with a poverty rate of 24.5 per cent of the population, indicating that between 2005 and 2014, approximately 117,000 additional persons started living in poverty.

But still, Madam President, if the 2014 SLC was published and available, it is still six years too old. I question any policy decided on, on such outdated data. How reliable is it to the current socioeconomic conditions today? With this outdated data, we cannot be making comments such as:

The—“...social agenda...”

I quote:

“The social agenda during the pandemic has averted marginalization and significantly alleviated poverty.”

As cited in the national budget—the fiscal 2021 package.

To deal with the absent data on poverty, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services have been trying to use workarounds such as inflating the poverty line to give a more realistic point in time estimate. This is used to apply the

means test to qualify persons for social programmes. However, these workarounds should only be temporary and not continued for an extended period of time, as it is not consumption-based—as it is not based on consumption-based statistics.

Unfortunately, we entered into the COVID-19 pandemic not knowing what proportion of our population were, one, living in extreme poverty; below the poverty line; considered vulnerable, and who were unemployed for at least two years when we talk about the unemployment rate, and for more than 10 years when we speak about poverty and the poverty line. Without this data, how does the Government intend to ascertain the extent of the damage of the pandemic on various income groups, example, the middle-income earners, women, youth and the previously already vulnerable population who were falling out of the middle class into vulnerability and their risk were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, their risk to enter poverty?

Madam President, timely data on where we stood in terms of poverty and unemployment, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and where we stand now, would give policymakers a clear picture on the full extent of damage on labour outcomes and the potential or already existing unequal impact of the crisis on both women, youth and other vulnerable members of the population. This information allows us to efficiently allocate our very delicate financial resources.

Further, to be better able to assess the impact of the Government's programmes against poverty and unemployment, such data is critical. It will help the Government understand how different sections of society are managing, and so they can plan for the future; assess the effects of policy changes; measure the effects of policy changes, such that public expenditure could be efficiently targeted to dealing with the negative socioeconomic consequences.

Now, I understand the challenges in conducting surveys, both the CSSB and

the Survey of Living Conditions, as these are surveys that are done on a face-to-face basis. I understand the challenges doing this during a pandemic. However, Madam President, prior to the pandemic official data reported on a quarterly, or even a monthly, or an annual basis have struggled to keep up to pace.

Furthermore, a year has passed giving the Ministry of Planning and Development, and the Central Statistical Office, ample time to redirect resources to suit the pandemic environment to conduct these surveys. The Office of National Statistics, for example, in the UK, as a result of pandemic, has stopped all face-to-face survey interviewing in the home and are conducting household studies by phone or online, so that when they visit—and they reach out to additional homes and they get their addresses and other contact information, and update their list so that they can conduct these phone surveys. They also started collecting new information that the Government and the public need on a readily basis. They also set up a new dedicated page on their website to enable quick assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are even conducting a Survey of Living Conditions this year and I believe our Ministry of Planning and Development also has this outlined for this year as well, where they are arranging for interviews during a suitable time to visit the dwelling home and collect face-to-face data using computer-assisted questionnaires.

Statistics Canada is another example. They are committed to ensuring the safety of employees and are going ahead with conducting their 2021 census. Statistics Canada's census employee is sent, in person, to a dwelling home and the employee will be required to wear the necessary protective equipment, as well as maintain proper physical distances, in accordance with guidance from the public health authorities.

Going further to give additional examples, when we speak about

unemployment, Barbados, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, a lot of other Latin American countries were able to publish up-to-date unemployment data as of 2019 and 2020, even during this pandemic time.

By now, in terms of the Government's agenda moving towards a digital economy, the Ministry of Planning and Development, Central Statistical Office, and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, should have a comprehensive plan being executed to move towards the collection of high frequency data when it comes to tracking the rapid economic disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For many countries, this information has also helped confirm, nearly in real time, the unequal impact of the crisis.

Madam President, I know the public statements about these figures, unemployment and poverty tend to generate more heat than light, but it is important that the decisions are based on up to date—policy decisions are based on up-to-date information especially when we have a pandemic social response which costs the Government \$6 billion, almost amounting to 4 per cent of GDP. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation.
The Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, according to the Central Statistical Office, the COVID-19 pandemic affected fieldwork resulting in the non-collection of unemployment data for approximately six months. I can personally attest to that because this agency has been working with the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, which falls under the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, to gather information as well, to ascertain the digital divide, so that in this time when we are so reliant on home schooling and working from home, we can clearly understand

where the gaps are in our digital coverage and address that.

However, currently, the CSO is undertaking an intensive field operations exercise to reduce the backlog of unemployment and other data. The collection of relevant unemployment data for the first, second and third quarters of 2019 was being undertaken up until March 2020, and has been completed. The unemployment tables for the second quarter of 2019 have been produced. The collection of all relevant outstanding unemployment data for the fourth quarter of 2019 to the first quarter of 2021 is planned for completion at the end of July 2021.

However, the computation of unemployment data also involves data editing, coding, and processing. The priority will be the completion of the 2020 unemployment tables as this data will be most relevant. The first and second quarter of 2020 unemployment tables are estimated to be completed by June 2021 and the third quarter tables by the end of August 2021. The CSO will, however, continue its efforts for data collection to gradually reduce the backlog of 2019 unemployment figures, third quarter 2019, and fourth quarter 2019.

It should be noted that poverty data will emanate from the collection of data from the Household Budget Survey and Survey of Living Conditions. Both surveys are to be carried out jointly in January 2022. And I would like to assure the Senator that while we undertake what continues to be a largely manual exercise, our thrust into the digital world will allow us to more efficiently and effectively continue to carry out surveys, despite the occurrence or reoccurrence of pandemics such as the COVID-19. So while we continue to work towards collecting the current data and we expect to have that available soon, we are working towards more efficient collection of data generally. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.57 p.m.