

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, November 17, 2021*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members I have received communication from the hon. Faris Al-Rawi, MP, Member for San Fernando West, who has requested leave of absence for the period November 14 to 25, 2021 and from Mr. Davendranath Tancoo, MP, Member for Oropouche West, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**FOREIGN LABOUR CONTRACTS (REPEAL) BILL, 2021**

Bill to repeal the Foreign Labour Contracts Act, Chap. 88:11 brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Labour*]; read the first time.

**URGENT QUESTIONS****Third COVID-19 Vaccine  
(Persons Eligible for)**

**Dr. Lakram Bodoë** (*Fyzabad*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Health. In view of the information released by health officials that of a total of 1,437 persons who died from complications associated with COVID-19 that 56 are fully vaccinated, will the Minister indicate when the Government intends to expand the category of persons who are eligible to receive a third primary COVID-19 vaccination regardless of the brand?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Health.

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it continues to amaze how the UNC tries at every turn to sabotage the country's vaccination plan.

**UNREVISED**

**Hon. Members:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** What this question is saying, based on a false premise, is that those persons with diabetes who died, died because they did not get a third shot. That is absolutely false and untrue.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** The purpose of the additional primary shots is based on studies of each brand to capture those who would not have mounted the appropriate immune response in the first place. And it is based on data per vaccine brand. In my case, I am over 60 and diabetic but I got AstraZeneca. I am not entitled to a third dose. Why? Because the WHO data says the Sinopharm vaccine, over 60, regardless of health status, get your third shot; under 60 together with—if you got your other brands—under 60, if you are moderately to severely immunocompromised. That is the WHO data which we have been following from day one.

Diabetes, as my friend knows, does not necessarily mean you are immunocompromised, and we have had doctors come to our press conferences to explain this to the population. But what my friend is trying insinuate is that these unfortunate persons who died, did so because they did not get a third shot. That is absolutely false and that type of insinuation should be condemned. The Government's third shot, or second primary shot, is based on WHO protocols, based on whether you are moderately to severely immunocompromised and over 60 with Sinopharm. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Bodo:** Thank you for your answer, Minister. And just to be clear, I am not insinuating anything with regard to this.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Bodoë:** So, Minister, the question is, can the population rest assured that the categories of patients who are receiving their third primary dose are those persons who are required to do that at this point in time?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Health.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you very much. So Madam Speaker, I welcome the new tone and attitude of the Member of Fyzabad. The Government's approach to the extra primary doses is based on the WHO's principles. Anybody over 60, who received Sinopharm, regardless of disease state can get their extra dose. People under 60, who received Sinopharm, you have to be moderately to severely immunocompromised, same thing for AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer. And what are the disease states we look at? HIV/AIDS, especially those with a CD4 count of under 200; dialysis patients, we had a doctor speak about that.

The NCDs, we have had several doctors speak about that. If you have active cancers, not cancers in remission, but active cancers, we have had Dr. Asante Le Blanc speak about that. And anybody else in a moderately to severely immunocompromised state, example—you are on immunosuppressant drugs, for example, a kidney transplant patient. Conditions like lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, where you are taking drugs which depress your immune system. So I am thankful now for the approach taken by Fyzabad and again thankful for the opportunity to clarify. Thank you very much.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Minister, for giving the population that assurance. Minister would you be in a position to say whether at this point in time, the—any studies by the WHO regarding further primary shots that are taking place, are you in a position to indicate whether that will change the position going forward?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Health.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question. As this pandemic does two things, explodes and evolves, as you know more and more data is going to come to bear, and we not only look at data from stringent authorities like FDA or CDC. What are the reasons we adhere to WHO protocols, is that unlike FDA, which is a good authority, do not get me wrong, but they are based on one country, one experience. We look at WHO which brings to bear experiences from 193 countries—across all ethnicities, racial groups, socio economic groups, which has much more rich data, and reliable data, for us to base our protocols on. So as more and more data becomes available, we will look at it and alert the population and I thank you for raising the issue.

**Quarantine Loophole  
(Details of)**

**Dr. Lackram Bodoie** (*Fyzabad*): To the hon. Minister of Health. In light of today's newspaper headline "Quarantine Loophole", will the Minister explain the collapse of the monitoring and supervisory system of the Ministry of Health in relation to the critical quarantine process and procedure?

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Sorry, and I forgot to say good afternoon to all, good afternoon to all. Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to sincerely thank the TTPS. From day one, they have been a staunch ally, with the Government, with the Ministry of Health in this fight against COVID-19 together with all frontline workers. They have been really, really fantastic and I want to thank them again publicly. The issue raised is a real one and we are going to look at this administratively by having a much closer relationship—working relationship between the task force setup at the TTPS, together with the individual county medical officers of health.

So when the quarantine orders have to come out, especially for those who are on extended quarantine, or their relatives have to be in quarantine, what was

highlighted today—which I understand is an issue, could be—well to use the term—close the loophole. It is not really a loophole, it is a matter of getting these orders out in a more timely fashion. So we do recognize the issue and the solution lies administratively with the TTPS and their task force working in much closer concert with the individual CMOHs of the individual counties. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Madam Speaker, there are three questions for answer and we will be answering all three.

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### COVID-19 Pandemic (Support given to Women Entrepreneurs)

**9. Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro)** asked the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry: Given the severe negative impact that the ongoing pandemic has had on women entrepreneurs, could the Minister indicate what support has been provided for this group during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**The Minister of Trade and Industries (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The National Development Strategy Vision 2030, underscores the importance of mainstreaming gender issues, in the development agenda that grants women equal rights to economic resources and promotes entrepreneurship. And to support this, the Trinidad and Tobago National Trade Policy 2019 - 2023, reconfirms the Government's commitment to identifying and removing all obstacles hampering the full participation of women in the development of trade. Through the trade policy, the Government has

explicitly committed to mainstreaming gender issues in trade development, by pursuing the following policy initiatives:

- Building the capacity of the Central Statistical Office to collect and compile disaggregated data by gender, and develop gender sensitive indicators needed to inform granular trade related development policy prescriptions.
- Fostering the accumulation of human capital of women and girls in order to optimize their contribution to improving the country's productive capacity and productivity.
- Promoting gender equality in the development of industry, entrepreneurship and trade.
- Reviewing all laws and regulations with an aim to introducing amendments and provisions that eliminate discrimination against women in the development of enterprise, including provisions that limit their access to credit.
- Promoting the development of non-Government bodies and business associations that support the participation of women in business.
- Establishing education and training programmes dedicated to promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women in business and other spheres of work life.
- Promoting access to trade financing for women, through the development of innovative programmes.

Recognizing the integral role women entrepreneurs play in achieving economic development by generating revenue, creating employment opportunities, diversifying Trinidad and Tobago's basket of goods and services, and contributing to rural development, the Government has continued to focus on strengthening the

entrepreneurial ecosystem to alleviate the negative impacts of the ongoing COVID-19. For example, the Ministry of Trade and Industry in collaboration with the International Trade Center and the exporTT launched the Trinidad and Tobago SheTrades hub in October 2020.

The SheTrades Initiative was developed by the ITC, with the primary objective to support women-owned small and medium sized enterprises to generate economic growth and contribute to poverty reduction globally. Under this initiative, a local Trinidad and Tobago hub, which is one of only 25 globally, was launched and our local hub already has over 474 registered women-owned businesses registered to date. The SheTrades hub provides a platform for our local women-owned businesses to access capacity building training, expert advice, mentoring and invaluable export opportunities. Women entrepreneurs can also use the SheTrades platform to showcase their goods and services, build strong networks, strike business deals and connect to international markets.

During the pandemic, registered women-owned businesses have participated in a number of webinars, where they learn how to unlock and access key tools and resources offered on the platform; identify and access new export markets; adopt new methods allowing integration into sustainable and ethical value chains.

On Thursday 25, November, 2021, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, exporTT and the ITC will host a SheTrades networking event for registered women-owned businesses on Trinidad and Tobago's hub and the objectives of this event are to provide knowledge and insight in the areas of accessing financing, sustainability and digitalization, facilitate networking and B2B linkages among these businesses and introduce ITC's new competitiveness self-assessment tools.

**1.45 p.m.**

Additionally, exporTT is preparing 17 export-ready women-owned

businesses from Trinidad and Tobago to exhibit virtually at SheTrades Global Dubai. SheTrades Global is the ITC's premier annual event and is being co-organized with Dubai Industries & Exports and Expo 2020 Dubai. And at this event, female entrepreneurs from Trinidad and Tobago will join over 3,000 women-led SMEs from around the world to showcase their products and services and participate in clinics and master classes facilitated by the experts. And registered women-owned businesses on the platform can also virtually attend the SheTrades Global Dubai expo. And it is important to note, women entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago—

**Madam Speaker:** Minister, your time is now spent.

**Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister identify if any particular analysis would have been done to provide a report to show the efficacy or the effectiveness of these policies that she has now described?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** It is a continuing analysis because this Government and past PNM governments affiliated with our party, we have always focused on gender and the promotion of women and women in business. So it is a continuing analysis but this programme which I detailed here today is one element—it is but one element where we are promoting women's businesses and encouraging them to grow and participate in all of the capacity development programmes.

So in addition to that it is important to note that there are all of the other services and programmes that are provided by this Government to assist businesses before and during the pandemic and all of the women entrepreneurs can



facilitate—all can in fact partake in all of these services providing they meet the criteria for all of them. The support offered by Government to businesses is based on specific needs of these businesses, including access to finance, capacity-building initiatives and so on, and all of the women entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago are able to continually participate in all that are on offer for women entrepreneurs and women in business.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister say if the suite of support that was offered by the Government during the COVID-19—well, during this COVID-19 pandemic, how accessible those facilities were to women entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago?—if she has an idea of how it evolved. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** So—[*Interruption*] One minute. Member, in terms of—you said the suite of support; we have the Minister of Trade and Industry, would you want to narrow that question or else I would not allow it?

**Mr. Paray:** Sure. Minister, the grants and so on that were afforded to small and medium enterprises by the State, can you say how effective accessing those facilities during this COVID-19 pandemic was by our women entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** It was only last week that I came to this honourable House and I spoke on three questions. I answered three questions pertaining to all of these services that are available to businesses across Trinidad and Tobago, in particular the small and medium-sized entrepreneurs and I followed on the Minister of Finance who the week previously answered very similar questions on the same matter. And again I make the point that it is important to

note that women entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago do not face discrimination in accessing any of the services offered by this Government.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Directors of State Enterprises  
(Extension of Indemnification)**

**10. Mr. Rushton Paray** (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister inform the House whether it is the intention of the Government to extend indemnification to Directors of State Enterprises?

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of Finance.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for allowing me to use this platform to answer this very important question. Madam Speaker, it is a sine qua non that corporate directors and officers may face potential personal liability for claims made against them in the roles for the companies they serve. In many jurisdictions companies provide in their articles of incorporation that a director does not have monetary liability to the company, except in cases of extreme misconduct, such as breaches of fiduciary duty of loyalty, bad faith conduct, intentional misconduct or violations of the law or transactions where the director derives an improper personal benefit. It is standard practice worldwide for corporations to indemnify any director or officer if he or she acted in good faith, acted in a manner believed to be in or not opposed to the best interest of the corporation and had no reasonable cause to believe that his or her conduct was unlawful.

In fact, most companies' by-laws or articles of incorporation contain indemnification and advancement provisions, especially when individuals are the target of claims after they have left the company. In the USA, Madam Speaker, by statute, the State of Delaware has established a minimum standard of conduct that if met by a director or officer permits a state-owned corporation to indemnify such

director or officer pursuant to a charter or by-law. To benefit the director must act in good faith, in a manner believed to be in or not opposed to the best interest of the company, and with respect to any criminal action he must have no reasonable cause to believe that his conduct is unlawful.

The purpose of this policy in Delaware is to ensure that any indemnity provided by state-owned corporations seeks to ensure that officers who genuinely require an indemnity are protected to enable them to manage their potential exposure to personal liability and to support the recruitment and retention of high-quality directors and CEOs. This practice is also well established in the public sector in the UK. And in the guidance published by Her Majesty's Treasury entitled, "Managing Public Money", last updated in June 2021, in Annex A5.4.19; that document with respect to directors of government-owned companies, states under the heading, "standard indemnity for board members" as follows:

"The government has indicated that an individual board member who has acted honestly and in good faith will not have to meet out of his or her personal resources any personal civil liability, including costs, which is incurred in the execution or the purported execution of his or her board functions, save where the board member has acted recklessly."

In Trinidad and Tobago, a number of state enterprises provide indemnity insurance in accordance with the by-laws, such as Trinidad Petroleum Holdings, Education Facilities Company, National Enterprises. In the interest of time I will not read the actual by-law, Madam Speaker. In general, state enterprises are incorporated under the Companies Act which provides detailed guidelines for boards of directors on their role and indemnification. Sections 99, "Duty of care", and 101, "Indemnifying directors" of companies states:

“Every director and officer of a company shall in exercising his powers and discharging his duties—

(a) act honestly and in good faith...”

—and:

“...in respect of an action by or on behalf of a company...to obtain a judgment in its favour, a company may indemnify—

(a) a director or officer...

(b) a former director...

(c) a person who acts...as a director...”

This does not imply, does not apply if the person did not act in good faith.

In summary, Madam Speaker, each request for an indemnity for directors of state corporations is considered on its merits on a case-by-case basis. There is nothing extraordinary or unusual about this and this has been the practice in Trinidad and Tobago for over 30 years.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Madam Speaker, has the hon. Minister considered the request made by the NGC board for indemnity as reported in the media most recently?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I think that question, Madam Speaker, has been answered on multiple occasions by multiple Members, from as high a personality as the Prime Minister, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; there is no point in answering that. That is in the public domain.

### **Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (Measures to Support)**

**11. Mr. Rushton Paray** (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister inform the House what are or will the specific measures to be taken by the commercial banking sector to support mitigation requests

made by Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) during the Covid-19 pandemic?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. A worldwide survey of SME lending indicated that although financing has improved since the 2008 global financial crisis small businesses have experienced considerable difficulty. Micro industries and start-ups with less credit history or tangible collateral reported greater difficulty accessing mainstream financial services, less sophisticated institutional frameworks and shallow financial markets, limit financing sources and hamper financial inclusion. I am talking about SMEs. Greater regulatory burdens also often induce banks to favour larger, more well-known firms when allocating funding. However, Madam Speaker, the Member for Mayaro has a habit of asking different Ministers the same repetitive questions over and over in different ways, as well as unreasonably asking Ministers to make speculative statements on the policies of the private sector. It is not the first time. Notwithstanding, I can provide an indication of measures taken by both the Central Bank and the Government to support SMEs during the COVID pandemic.

In addition to relief measures in 2020, such as the reduction of lending interest rates the Central Bank has extended further COVID-19 relief measures to the banking sector, effective October 01, 2021; just a month ago. The first measure allows commercial banks for a period of one year, commencing October 01, 2021, to restructure commercial loans more than twice over the life of the original loan and mortgages more than twice over a five-year period without a downgrade in the asset classification to non-performing loan status. In the second measure the Central Bank agreed to suspend the calculation of the mortgage market reference

rates for a two-year period, commencing October 01, 2021, one month ago, to allow banks greater flexibility in lowering their mortgage rates outside of the anniversary date and more than once a year. This will provide relief to SMEs.

On September 13, 2021, the Central Bank also issued simplified due diligence guidance for a basic banking account to the banking sector. This is intended to provide easier access to individuals and micro-enterprises, like sole traders whose transactional limit is 84,000 or less annually to obtain a basic banking account; all in the public domain. The Central Bank has also made a number of recommendations to assist and create a more structured approach to resolving barriers to financial access for small businesses such as simplification of processes in terms of risk, financial inclusions for SMEs, greater advisory support and training programmes to meet bank reporting requirements. In addition, incentivizing small enterprise lending through making credit more easily available to SMEs, enhanced credit information systems, access to collateral.

The Government has also done a number of things, such as its Gateway to Trade programme, a programme of the Ministry of Trade and Industry; a nine-month market readiness accelerator programme targeted to assist SMEs. We have also introduced tax breaks for small and medium-sized enterprises. We have also created an export booster initiative; again, another initiative of the Ministry of Trade and Industry aiming to increase the value of select manufactured goods from Trinidad and Tobago. There is also a green manufacturing initiative of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. There is a grant fund facility for small and medium enterprises to produce high-value products in a number of areas. This facility is administered by exporTT.

There is the COVID-related support to SMEs; the entrepreneurial relief grant from the National Entrepreneurship Development Company, NEDCO. You

also have the loan guarantee programme, the phase two of which will give 100 per cent guarantee for loans to SMEs and forbearance with respect to statutory obligations. I can go on and on, Madam Speaker, but I only have five minutes. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE  
(Appointment of)**

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):**

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, whereas it has become necessary to make appointments to Joint Select Committees, I beg to move that this House agree to the following appointment:

Mr. David Lee in lieu of Ms. Anita Haynes on the Joint Select Committee on Energy Affairs.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Revocation of State of Emergency Proclamation**

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Whereas* it is enacted by section 8(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that the President may from time to time make a Proclamation declaring that a state of public emergency exists;

*And whereas* it is enacted by section 9(2) of the Constitution that a Proclamation made by the President for the purposes of and in accordance with section 8 shall, unless previously revoked, remain in force for fifteen days;

*And whereas* it is enacted by section 10(1) of the Constitution that before its expiration the Proclamation may be extended from time to time by resolution supported by a simple majority vote of the House of Representatives, so however that no extension exceeds three months and the extensions do not in the aggregate exceed six months;

*And whereas* it is enacted by section 10(3) of the Constitution that the Proclamation may be revoked at any time by a resolution supported by a simple majority vote of the House of Representatives;

*And whereas* the President, by Proclamation made on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2021, declared that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;

*And whereas* the House of Representatives, by resolution on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2021, extended the said Proclamation for a period of three months;

*And whereas* the House of Representatives, by resolution on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2021, extended the said Proclamation for a further period of three months;

*And whereas* it is necessary and expedient that the said Proclamation should be revoked:

*Now therefore, be it resolved* that the Proclamation made by the President on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2021 declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be revoked with effect from midnight on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2021.

Madam Speaker, this issue covers a period of time which is unique in the history of this nation. Since the early part of 2020, we have been coping, fighting and surviving in a pandemic and, Madam Speaker, we were in different situations at different times. At the beginning we had no idea what we were dealing with



except to observe what was happening to other people. We had no large body of information on the biology and science of the virus. We had no known date of any vaccination programme that could have started until a vaccine was tested and approved. We had no authority to make our own and we had no idea when we would share in the market place for vaccines. So every month is different; every day is different and, Madam Speaker, it appears as though every year is different because as we speak now in the second year of the pandemic we are hearing about a fourth wave in the developed countries and we too have to gird our loins in preparation for that because it appears as though this virus is going to be with us for a long time. But in our own experience, Madam Speaker, what we have done is to be as best prepared as we could and to respond in the best way that we could.

So in May of this year we took the opportunity, in attempting to restrict movement and gatherings and exposure, to enact and operate a state of emergency to direct the population in some way to reduce the exposure. It was one method, Madam Speaker, of managing in a situation where that exposure at that time had to be managed and it was probably one of the best things we could have done then. There was nothing else we could have done. Madam Speaker, if I tell you that on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May we were just in a desperate situation. We had been trying very hard to purchase, even to talk to vaccine manufacturers, and we could not get through to obtain a supply. And the reason why I mentioned vaccines, Madam Speaker, is because as of now over and above the physical aspects of things where we stay away from each other, wash hands and sterilize ourselves, in terms of a clinical response for using medication or drugs of some kind, it is only the approved vaccines that is a response that can come from us. But fortunately, Madam Speaker, we are now able to say with some confidence that the vaccines that are available provide a benefit that they work.

While they may not prevent us from getting infected we are discovering that even if the level of infection is increasing, that vaccinated people can get infected, but, Madam Speaker, such persons are largely not requiring hospitalization. And therefore we ought to view our circumstance today as quite different to the period in May when we had only 14,000 persons vaccinated in Trinidad and Tobago; 14,000. Today, Madam Speaker, I can tell you we have 633,000 persons who have had at least one dose of a vaccine and we have 629,000 persons who are fully vaccinated in Trinidad and Tobago, a far cry from where we were in May. And, Madam Speaker, we are now talking about third doses and possibly moving into a booster situation where the science is telling us that we may need to boost our immunity as we go forward because one dose in a one-dose vaccine or even two doses in a two-dose vaccine may require support as the immunity subsides in the human body.

Madam Speaker, during that same period I could report that we have received in this country 1.9 million doses of vaccines. We have administered 1.2 million doses of vaccines and we have in hand 650,000 doses of vaccines. Against that background, Madam Speaker, of the efficacy of the vaccine, the use in helping us to stay away from a desperate situation where we need to all get to the hospital for intensive care and possibly end up in a high dependency unit, what we are is a population that is vaccinated, 45 per cent, and those people, 45 per cent vaccinated, are not in fact pressuring the health system. So what we do, Madam Speaker, we no longer are driven by the number of infections but we are now more concerned about what is happening with respect to the population, the infected population demanding and receiving the requisite health care that is available.

So we keep our eyes, as I have been saying all along, more now than ever, on the state of play at the hospitals with respect to persons requiring health care

because we know that— In fact, in some countries, Madam Speaker, the virus is now being viewed as endemic, meaning that it is a standard part of the environment in which we live and we will remain so. And therefore, counting and saying how many people are vaccinated—infected, sorry—is not really giving you the clear picture of the response of the country where, yes, we are having people infected, and you would see some fairly large numbers. But the interesting thing, Madam Speaker, is that we do not want to get to a situation where you get an equivalent number of persons getting into the hospital and requiring intensive care attention or even ward care attention, because vaccinated people are largely escaping that outcome.

There is the story coming out from the medical end in the Ministry of Health is that 90-odd per cent of the persons who are in the hospital are persons who have not been vaccinated and that is why we have in fact placed such great store now on the vaccination programme and vaccination as a response to us—to the virus. So, Madam Speaker, in catering for saving lives and saving livelihoods we have come back out even when the virus is still raging. We have expanded our exposure. We have accepted a higher level of risk. We have opened up our economy in very many sectors. In fact, most of our sectors are open and we are in fact operating safe zones to allow persons who have been vaccinated and have some element of protection to get the benefit of that by operating in areas of business and socialization where to be vaccinated is a requirement to be in those zones. And so we are, Madam Speaker, in November of 2021.

Madam Speaker, when the first three months of the state of emergency were ending I came to this House in anticipation of the House approving an extension and asked for a three-month extension as approved by law; the law permits that, and this House listened to us and the majority of Members of this House agreed

that there should be an extension from August going forward and the law permits that it could have gone forward to the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. But knowing, Madam Speaker, that we were not having a state of emergency just for the sake of a state of emergency, it was part of a package, but now that we are in a situation, Madam Speaker, where we are requiring to place greater emphasis on the individuals in the community to look after themselves because the Government has done virtually everything that the Government could do, we have run a parallel health system, unlike most countries in the world; it has worked very well for us.

We have had our health care people working overtime for us and, Madam Speaker, we have procured vaccines to the point we are having administered 1.2 million doses; we had in hand 650,000 doses and we are saying to the population now, that we are not now going to be fighting this virus by locking down the country and staying home. We are trying to get our economy to be—to breathe life into the economy again—

**Hon. Members:** *Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—and we will not be restricting persons under a state of emergency as we did at the time when we had no vaccines and so, Madam Speaker, we have moved from one state to another.

**2.15 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, when I came here in August of this year to ask for this extension which would have expired at the end of November, which is a few days from now, I had this to say, and permit me to quote, Madam Speaker. I said to you, Madam Speaker, that the Government will discontinue it at the earliest opportunity once we believe that we will not unnecessarily increase the risk and expose us to something that we do not want to be exposed to.

I went on to say to you, Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“...I want to give this country the assurance, that at the first opportunity that is medically safe and encouraged, this Government will discontinue this emergency even if Parliament today...approves a 90-day extension...”

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**

“...I give the country the assurance that we will end it right then and there.” That is what I as Prime Minister told you in this House in August of this year, a few months ago. We gave the assurance, and even as we gave that assurance, we could not get the support of our colleagues on the other side in a pandemic. We could not convince our colleagues on the other side to give us that piece of the package of response.

But interestingly enough, even as we come just ahead of the time when it is due to expire under law and say that we are now going to end it because we have a different approach and a different arrangement in Trinidad and Tobago for fighting the virus, we are in a different position, we are differently armed, and there is greater responsibility now on the individual, and the Government will continue with the programme of vaccination and the encouragement, and continue to work overtime at our hospitals and with our healthcare givers, we have to listen to our colleagues on the other side, join with their colleagues in the media, who they rely on when they want to make mischief.

Interestingly enough, there are members of the media who just parrot the nonsense that come from persons who create disturbance in this country, without even questioning it for a minute. Because, Madam Speaker, let me spend a couple of minutes telling you why we know—we know that, God forbid, if we needed as a major part of our fight, an extension to the state of emergency, people in this country would have died for that reason because our colleagues on the other side

said there is no way they are supporting that.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And the reason is that they believe that it is politically useful to take that position. Madam Speaker, permit me to quote a few of the positions taken publicly by our colleagues on the other side.

“Persad-Bissessar’s Independence Day message: SoE an insult to constitution”

I just read for you what the Constitution permits. I just read for you the commitment I gave to this House, as leader of the Government, that we will end it before, if we have to, at the first opportunity. But as far as she is concerned, it is an insult to the Constitution.

The same person goes on, Member for Siparia, Leader of the Opposition, to describe our fight in a pandemic, managing the population in this way, to get the best of a difficult circumstance, as far as she is concerned it is a tyrannical move.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition went on to say, the Leader of the Opposition, in a Republic Day message, that is September gone, and I quote:

“Nothing of the past can compare to what our citizens are being subjected today.”

That is talking about the state of emergency to fight a pandemic, eh:

“It is an insult to our constitution and the pioneers of our independence that on Independence Day 2021, all our citizens’ rights are suspended for no good reason.”

Madam Speaker, those are the words of a parliamentarian in a pandemic who knows what is going on in the world, who knows what we are fighting here. But just to try to be different and opposing and to try to mislead the public that something bad is happening to them, those are the words of the Opposition Leader.

It goes on:

“Under the present unjustified and unsubstantiated...”—state of emergency—“we have had our God-given rights and freedoms stolen by the PNM as they seek to repress and silence the Opposition, inside the Parliament and outside on the pavement...”

**Mr. Gonzales:** Talking on all sides of the mouth.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And then concluded on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, a statement issued by the UNC to the population, and I quote, that they are:

“...vehemently opposed to the extension of the State of Emergency.”

Well, Madam Speaker, they are free to take those positions because this is still a free country and they are free to do that because they believe they are supporting—they are defending who, I do not know. But if that is your position, how come when the state of emergency is to be ended you have a problem?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** They were not content to only make their own “manima”. They go now, Madam Speaker, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July:

Opposition support calls from JTUM and other labour leaders to ensure that Government does not extend the state of emergency beyond the deadline of 12—one minute past midnight on August 30.

So they are mobilizing the labour movement, who represent the same people who are facing death and destruction in a pandemic, to move with them to prevent the Government from extending the state of emergency beyond one minute past midnight on August 30. But you come here now to end the state of emergency and “dey disturbing the country’s psyche, talking about dey want to know why de Prime Minister is ending it”. You want to know why? Because we said we will only keep it for as long as it is required to be done.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** The Opposition Leader goes on, and I quote:

“I call on the Government to abandon this draconian measure and instead focus their efforts on restarting the economy and getting citizens vaccinated.”

That is precisely what we are doing.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** So you make “de” call, according to you. You know that it will contribute to restarting the economy, according to you. You know that we focus on the vaccination programme, according to you, but you have a problem when it is ending? You should be jumping up and down today singing hallelujah.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader, leading her hapless crew, goes on to say on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August:

“The SoE has only succeeded in one thing: destroying thousands of jobs by closing down thousands of small and medium-sized businesses.”

Well, if that is so, and we are ending it, then say thank you. You cannot be saying that and then saying you have a problem with it being ended.

Madam Speaker, another one of them—because they have a lot of leaders over there, “yuh know”, a lot of leaders, that is why they could go no one direction on any matter. Quoting:

“I want to remind him”—and the “him” is the Prime Minister—“that he cannot seek an extension of the SoE, because they will get no support from the Opposition. The matter is a moot point.”

“Dat” is Oropouche East, “de” other leader.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition has put out media releases, and I quote, 25



August, Wednesday:

“...This unjustified SoE extension is a PNM power grab”

“It...has nothing to do with public health, rather it is a power grab by the PNM.”

That is an official statement put out by the Opposition. And as if that was not enough, the following day they put out another statement that they are:

“...vehemently opposed to the extension of the State of Emergency.”

And, of course—you must have heard this, Madam Speaker, this is the other one on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, a few days ago:

“Dictator Rowley knows that he cannot extend the...”—state of emergency—“because he needs the approval of the Opposition to do so, and we will never do so.”

**Hon. Members:** Oh God!

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** So there was no point in wasting Parliament time. They have made their position very clear, very contradictory—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** —very useless and very obstructive. It is a good thing the people of this country did not have to depend on our colleagues in the Opposition to fight this pandemic because “crapaud did smoke we pipe”.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** But there is another good thing, Madam Speaker, that they do not represent the broad cross section of the views in Trinidad and Tobago. Permit me to quote for you, Madam Speaker, from one of the very many top leaders in our country, because in this pandemic I said everybody who influences anybody else is a leader, and in this pandemic every leader is required to lead whoever he or she is influencing into the right place.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Listen to what—on the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month, which is—when was that? A couple of days ago? Two days ago? On the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month, the South Chamber, speaking through its President had this to say, and the headline is:

Sando Chamber expects boost when the SoE is lifted

I quote from the article:

President of the Greater San Fernando Area Chamber of Commerce Kiran Singh said the lifting of the state of emergency, SOE, would mean an opportunity for more shifts for employees. We certainly welcome the news to end the state of emergency and, by extension, lift the curfew hours. We look forward to that resulting in an increase in business activity especially in the entertainment sector, the casinos, the bars, restaurants, cinemas and even the manufacturing sector.

So, Madam Speaker, sane and sober people in this country have seen what the ending of the state of emergency can do.

Let me just end by pointing out, we have had a state of emergency in this country from May, and hopefully up until tonight, and I am very pleased to report to the world that during that period, I am not aware of any reports of any abuse of the citizenry in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Even though we have given this additional power to the State and to its agencies, we have acted in an exemplary manner in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** The only place you heard anything about tyranny and dictator and so, is from the Opposition Bench that is seeking to create political

mischief—the only voices you hear that from. So as it ends tonight and goes down in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, I am proud to have led this country through this period in a state of emergency with no abuse.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** So, Madam Speaker, I think I have said enough for you and the population not to take the Opposition seriously. They are agents of convenience, they have precious little to offer and in this pandemic, we do not have time to waste.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

**Hon. Members:** [*Sustained desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate after the hon. Prime Minister has piloted his Motion. Just let me just put on the record the last part of the Motion today and it is really—the preamble is:

*“Now therefore, be it resolved that the Proclamation made by the President on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2021 declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be revoked with effect from midnight on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2021.”*

Madam Speaker, I listened to the Prime Minister very intently because after listening to the Prime Minister, I think the country is more confused than ever before.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** Because for the last six months that we have been under a state of emergency, and literally I have watched and listened to the Prime Minister nearly

every Saturday that he presents his press conferences on the television—

**Hon. Member:** You have time?

**Mr. D. Lee:** No. Because he represents the country and he is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Because I listened as an ordinary individual to understand what is happening in our country over the past 18 months, especially in the last six months under the Prime Minister of our country. When I listened to him for the last six months and I listen to him today piloting this Motion to revoke and lift the state of emergency that this Government brought by extension on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, there is one thing I want to agree with the Prime Minister, that this Opposition was always against the state of emergency that this Government brought.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** And we will say it and he has said it, we have always been against the state of emergency because we always felt there were other mechanisms that this Government and the Prime Minister could have utilized to ensure and keep our citizens safe, Madam Speaker. They used it in 2020 and they are going to use it after midnight tonight.

So, Madam Speaker, I listened to the Prime Minister and he has not put one piece of information for how successful the state of emergency has been for this Government in fighting the pandemic. Because the state of emergency, when it was first brought in May 2021—15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2021, for the first nine days by Proclamation of the President, and we came back here twice after for three-month extensions on each session, it was about limiting the movement of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to be able to give the country a fighting chance.

So now, I see the Prime Minister, I listened, he is saying that there is a different approach now. Before I get in, I think the country is more confused because we have not heard anything, any concrete evidence of what—the success

of that state of emergency under this Prime Minister. Not a single—and I want to say, the Opposition has always been against the state of emergency. Almost three months, the actions of this Government has proven that we were right, the Opposition, in standing up against the state of emergency. This state of emergency has nothing, but been a farce—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** —that has produced no benefit and was simply stifling, suffering and suppressing the citizens of our nation.

Madam Speaker, again, almost three months ago, literally on August the 25<sup>th</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>, we in the Opposition told the Prime Minister that there was no need for a pointless extension of the state of emergency. We told him that. We rejected his claims that this was to reduce the spread of the virus and we were correct. Because in the last six months the only thing that this state of emergency has reduced has been the prosperity, jobs, business activity and the economic well-being of our nation.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, right here, we did not vote for the SOE, because we questioned and pointed out that there was no need for that extension of the state of emergency. Back in August, we demonstrated and pointed out to the Government that the state of emergency was not working because cases and deaths were still rapidly occurring. Back in August, we told the Government, do not continue the state of emergency because you are taking away the food and jobs away from our citizens.

Today, the Prime Minister comes to this Parliament to act as if our actions to revoke the state of emergency have been always in the national interest and they are simply acting as if—I believe the Government has betrayed our citizens.

Madam Speaker, if you look at the data put out by the Ministry of Health, and I want to—because I am confused. This is data from the Ministry of Health's website. When we came here on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August to ask for that—when the Government asked for that extension on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, the cases on that day were 194 new cases; eight deaths; persons in hospital, 294. The Prime Minister, I have listened to him every week on a Saturday conference, and he always said—the Prime Minister—he is following science and the data given to him by the Ministry of Health and the officials that appear with him weekly, and the Minister of Health, on those Saturday press conferences.

So on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, when we came here, 194 new cases, eight deaths, 294 persons in hospital. The 24<sup>th</sup> of August, 199 cases, seven deaths, 311. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, five days before, we had the extension of the state of emergency, 112 cases, 12 deaths. The 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, 71 cases, six deaths. The 21<sup>st</sup> of August, 123, four deaths. For the total of those five days leading up to that extension in Parliament, a total of 699 cases, 37 deaths, to an average over those five days, an average of 140 new cases.

Let us look at the cases, because I have always believed that the Prime Minister was saying that when he follows the science and follows the data, he knew what he was saying. So let us look at the cases as at today or yesterday because that is the latest information. Yesterday, Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, the cases were 414 new cases of COVID in our country, 15 deaths, 461 individuals in hospitals. Compare that to the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, when the Government came for that extension, 194 cases, eight deaths, 294 individuals in hospitals.

And when you look back at the last five days, you see numbers of cases of 403. Saturday—when the hon. Prime Minister presented in his conference on Saturday, 403 cases were on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup>, 22 deaths. The second largest deaths

since we have since started our pandemic back last year around March 2020.

So I am confused where the Government today, through the Prime Minister, is telling us they have a different approach. I want to know what is that different approach that he is now revoking and removing the state of emergency literally 12 or 13 days before it expires on its own.

I ask the Prime Minister, this revocation or lifting of the state of emergency before, is it self-interest versus national interest? Is it about self-interest? And I put that out there, and I will expand on that. Because if you listen to the Prime Minister's logic for the last six months, and the country has—I believe the country has bought into that logic, and you are listening today, Madam Speaker, it defies logic. Because business people—the Prime Minister said today he is opening back up the economy. The business people have been asking for that. The business people have been crying out, asking the Government, asking the Prime Minister, open back the economy months ago. Months ago, we were in a much better place, as far as what is happening in our country with COVID three months ago, than we are today, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** So I do not understand what is the new approach or different approach the Prime Minister is telling this country here today. That is why I am asking is it self-interest versus national interest? Because I really believe prior, the Prime Minister was really national interest. But we have something, an election, in literally December the 6<sup>th</sup>, and I ask: Is that the reason why we are opening up the country today? It just does not make sense. Right? So it does not make sense, Madam Speaker.

So I ask the Prime Minister. Because when you listen on Saturday in that press conference, Dr. Avery Hinds told the nation—it is reported in the *Guardian*,

the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, that based on the data that they would have presented at that press conference—and I quote Dr. Hinds:

“...if we continue at the rate we are going for the first few couple of weeks in November, the possibility of getting to 1,000 cases a day is actually quite real...”

These are not our words, these are not the Opposition’s words. This is Dr. Hinds that the Prime Minister has said to the country, “Put your faith in this group of people every Saturday that they present data.” These are the facts. I did not say that, the Prime Minister has always—I mean, I listened to the Prime Minister. So I am asking the Prime Minister, taking into consideration what Dr. Hinds said on Saturday, a few days ago: What is the difference in approach that the Prime Minister is talking about today, that he is opening up the country, that we had asked him previously to open up before? Because it appears to me, it is much worse.

Madam Speaker, for the last six months, I want to believe that the Government, the health officials, to be able to invoke some sort of passion in the citizens to get vaccinated, really scared the population. Because when you look at the state of emergencies that were presented, the extensions by this Government, two three-month extensions, to be able to go into to get that extension, the Government in my view created fear to the people that we need these state of emergencies—these three-month state of emergencies.

The Prime Minister has yet to explain here today, maybe he might say it in his wind-up, what was the benefit, the effect of the state of emergency? Because we all know, the country, all citizens, gave up six months of their rights and freedom under this Government, under the pretense—and I use the word “pretense” guardedly, that it was for the betterment of the country to be able to do



something for our country and our citizens, and we are yet to understand what was the benefit of that state of emergency.

I go back to the words I used, and I listened to the Prime Minister week after week. The Prime Minister says, “I follow the science,” Madam Speaker. The Prime Minister has always been boasting about using science, and I ask the Prime Minister today: Where is the science?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** Where is the science? As my leader would say, the maths is not adding up, it is not “mathsing”. That is why I think after listening to the Prime Minister piloting this Motion—I mean, I think the country is happy that we are removing the state of emergency but there is also a part that the people are trying to understand, why did we have one in the first place? Because the Public Health Regulations that are in place did an effective job all of 2020 and will continue to do that after midnight tonight.

Now, what the state of emergency did, in our view, it limited the movement, according to the Prime Minister. So limiting the movement between 9.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m., or some days in the last six months it was a total shut down on that particular day for a few more hours, but no vaccination was carried out during that period of time. So the state of emergency did not improve the vaccination drive by this Government.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** All it did is that it limited the freedom of the people that we believe that the Public Health Regulations could have done.

**2.45 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, on August the 25<sup>th</sup> right here in the Parliament and I want to quote the Prime Minister on the *Hansard* on page 6 when he piloted that Motion

on the first extension. The Prime Minister. stated and I quote:

“Madam Speaker, any data in this House, it would be nothing new because I am not in possession of any data, none whatsoever that has not been made public to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I want to repeat that.

“...as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago leading the team that responded and is responding to the coronavirus, I have no information, none whatsoever that has not been put...”—forward in—“...the public domain by the medical experts who we rely on to guide us through this...troublesome process.”

So, Madam Speaker, again today that was on August 25<sup>th</sup> when the Prime Minister piloted that Motion for an extension, he brought no data. He said that the data is also out there in the public domain. Today he brought no data again to give comfort to the country and, you know, we are opening up but where is the data, Prime Minister? I listed the data earlier on in my contribution about the number of cases and so forth.

The question that we keep asking and the country keeps on asking, Madam Speaker, why did we have that extension of that state of emergency in August when the numbers were much lower then and was more under control than it appears to be now, Madam Speaker. So I ask the Prime Minister, that he is opening up the country from tonight, the same medical experts that the Prime Minister and the Government depend on, are they also telling this country that they are in agreement with the Prime Minister and the Government in opening back up the country tonight after midnight today? I have heard nothing from them, nothing from them about being in agreement with this Government of opening back up the country, Madam Speaker. And the citizens might have a comfort if the CMO and

Dr. Richards, Dr. Hinds, Dr. Trotman also come out and tell the country, we have nothing to worry about, it is fine to open back up the economy after midnight tonight, Madam Speaker. We have heard nothing from them on that, nothing. So, Madam Speaker, that is why we are saying, I think the country is more confused.

Now, Madam Speaker, from the start I want to say, I want to quote a statement by Archbishop Gordon. Archbishop Gordon, and it is reported in the *Trinidad Guardian* November 11, 2021. And I quote him:

“...when you lock down you’re killing one part of the patient, which is the economy. For me, the patient is the whole of society. It’s not the person who has COVID. It’s the whole of society you have to treat as your patient.”

That is the Archbishop Gordon. And I agree with that, Madam Speaker. I think Archbishop Gordon quote might be five months too late, Madam Speaker. And he goes on to say. He said:

“You have to start balancing very carefully between the treatment of one ailment that is creating another ailment that is going to be long-term (and) it is going to have dire consequences.”

Madam Speaker, so I ask, the reality is, has this Government really balanced the welfare of our citizens over the last six months under the state of emergency? And will say, no, Madam Speaker. The Government ignored the single mothers who work in restaurants and needed that pay to protect their families. The Government ignored the youth who depended on sport as a career. The Government ignored the artistes and the creative art craftsmen of our country and women who need to make a living. And so because, Madam Speaker, we were in a lockdown for six months. The country suffered, the people suffered, Madam Speaker. And I ask, are we pointing out—and you want to say, Madam Speaker, I know my time is very limited. Because I listened to the Prime Minister, he talked about small business.

This Government boasted about, we will help small businesses. Yet when small businesses were begging for protection, Prime Minister, from landlords, not a single policy was put in place to protect them. Not a single policy, Madam Speaker. Even the small business loans were so rigorous it benefited few. Sometimes it seems as if this SOE was really just to displace small businesses and give larger firms a larger market share, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, over 25,000 people in the restaurants, the food business, the casino sector remained unemployed for an additional 90 days from when we went into that second lock—second extension of the SOE. Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I am amazed, I am surprised that when everyone was asking the Opposition, the businesses were asking the Prime Minister and the Government to open back the economy so that we can breathe, we can live, we can survive, you know, nothing happened. And for 12 days to come and revoke the SOE, one really has to ask why, and the Prime Minister has really not given any clear, concrete answers on why he is opening back the economy before time, Madam Speaker. Because the Prime Minister is the one that came here on August 25<sup>th</sup> and asked for a three-month extension. It was a simple majority vote.

So, Madam Speaker, I ask and I want to ask something to the Prime Minister: On the August the 25<sup>th</sup> when we came for this new three-month extension, on August the 12<sup>th</sup> they had an issue with that Police Service Commission and no Commissioner of Police, Madam Speaker. And I ask, did the extension of the three-months from August 25<sup>th</sup> have anything to do with not having a Commissioner of Police in place, Madam Speaker? Because right now yesterday I noticed there is a new Police Service Commission in place and I would not be surprised if next week, if next week we get a merit list.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). My friend is totally

irrelevant.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I realize that you are veering into another area which I am not going to allow you to develop under Standing Order 48(1).

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** So that you are going into something that I think you were really offending Standing Order 48(1).

**Mr. D. Lee:** I am guided, Madam Speaker. I am guided. Madam Speaker, when I listened to the Prime Minister talk about businesses and because he is opening up the economy so forth, today in the papers, in one of the articles in the media, talked about the safe zones that the Government has put in place is not really helping businesses to grow, Madam Speaker. It is not working, Madam Speaker. The safe zones are not working in the businesses that the Prime Minister talked about.

We in the Opposition have always been against the SOE given the grave socioeconomic distress placed on our citizens. I want to remind the Government that our freedom as a people, the constitutional rights of our citizens and the ability of breadwinners to maintain their families must never be disregarded again. The Government must give reassurance through the Prime Minister that the removal of the state of emergency is just not a temporary measure to meet some self-interest, only to be re-imposed on the people of our nation later on. Because the Prime Minister talked about a fourth wave. He mentioned a fourth wave. So I hope, Prime Minister, by mentioning that fourth wave in your Motion, it is not—you are signalling something for the future, Prime Minister.

The Government must manage this virus going forward, Madam Speaker, without taking away the rights and endangering our economy, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, as I close I really hope when the Prime Minister is winding up

that he really gives the case and the concrete evidence of how successful the state of emergency was, that the people of this country have been put and their rights and freedom have been removed for the last six months, Madam Speaker. I thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Rushton Paray** (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I join this debate on this Motion to revoke the state of emergency at midnight tonight, Madam Speaker, let me commend my chief whip [*Desk thumping*] for a very interesting, accurate delivery in his response to the Prime Minister's Motion. But, Madam Speaker, I want to continue a bit from where the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre left off because I do feel that one of the greatest impacts that the SOE has made in this country has been to the business community. Madam Speaker, in considering this measure to bring the end of this state of emergency it is important to deliberate on why the SOE was introduced in the first place and whether the objectives were met. Madam Speaker, benchmarking is a part of the overall business culture when we are setting goals and it is a primary factor in all decision-making processes. So when the Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, announced the SOE in mid-May he said the decision was taken to deal specifically with the surge of the COVID-19 infections.

Madam Speaker, at that point in time the hon. Prime Minister offered no or very little targets to be achieved during the run of the state of emergency. So it is impossible to indicate today whether or not the goals and objectives were attained. The Prime Minister did not offer any data to substantiate that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister imposed the state of emergency, in my respectful view, without a strategic design or an ambition at least, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Government today is seeking to bring an end to the SOE in the same nebulous and vague manner in which the measure was introduced in the first place. This, Madam Speaker, in my respectful view is not effective governance.

Madam Speaker, this is not purposeful leadership in an emergency. Effective management, I would say, Madam Speaker, with crisis really requires that the objectives be spelt out and that the plans must be time-bound, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the success or failure of any of those items must always be carefully weighted and new tactics must be adopted if and, at least, when there is a need to do so. We have not seen any new tactics being adopted during the run of this entire state of emergency, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Government as of today has not provided any plausible justification or any permanent data for its decisions and its statistics collection capability is still woeful even after six years of the promise of having a data system with the CSO and so on, which I will not go into, Madam Speaker. But outside of not having the data that the Government should really have to make some effective decisions, there is a lot of anecdotal data throughout the region and some of our international locations that we can hedge on in terms of the impact of SOEs on societies in this COVID-19 pandemic. Madam Speaker, I will just touch briefly on one or two of those anecdotal pieces of data that is information in the public domain.

The International Trade Centre, Madam Speaker, says that three-quarters of all small and medium-sized enterprises especially those in accommodation and food services have been drastically affected. Madam Speaker, other sectors such as transport, retail, wholesale, non-food manufacturing have also been hurt more drastically during the addition of the curfew arrangements and so on under the state

of emergency. Notwithstanding the fact that the general pandemic decisions in terms of handling would have already started some constraints in these sectors but the SOE itself, Madam Speaker, would have added tremendous strain on top of that as well.

Madam Speaker, the European Union as well reported similar effects throughout all their territories as well in several reports that they have made public. If we were to come much closer to home, Madam Speaker, our next door neighbour of Barbados, the pandemic and the Government measures there have also had a tremendous contracting effect on the economy as well, causing business closures and, you know, hurting their important tourism sector. What is interesting, Madam Speaker, is that those territories have data. When they publish their reports, they have data to show the effects. Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of having that data before us in the public domain.

In Jamaica, Madam Speaker, the media reported that the curfews and other measures, they referred to it as a black eye for the entire business sector. So one can refer anecdotally that without the data presented here in Trinidad and Tobago, a similar condition must be existing at the end of the day because it has similar tendencies throughout the region where curfews have been imposed.

Madam Speaker, if we come back home now to Trinidad and Tobago, several captains of industries, in commerce and finance and so on, have revealed in their newspaper articles, their newspaper reporting that a large number of businesses have been suffering and many are in danger today to fold up because of the SOE.

Madam Speaker, the SME sector has been the most badly—especially those in south Trinidad, Madam Speaker. I mean, I read one article where some of them were even asking for assistance to pay their utility bills. That is how bad—



**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So I have allowed you some leeway. I think we have to remember this is about revocation of the SOE. So the impacts that you are talking about, hon. Member, and that you are developing in the short period of time you have left, if you could link that quickly.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Sure.

**Madam Speaker:**—to what is the subject matter of the debate.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Sure.

**Madam Speaker:** This is not about an extension—

**Mr. R. Paray:** Sure.

**Madam Speaker:**—but a revocation.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Sure. And, Madam Speaker, thank you. I am guided. And it is that reason why I am in agreement that the consideration for the ending of the SOE must be considered today because of these measures that we have said that is hampering the economy.

However, Madam Speaker, what I want to make clear, right, is that, at the end of the day, this situation that we have arrived in is solely the cause of the decision-making process of the Government and it is their—I mean, for want of a better word, it is their mess that the hon. Prime Minister has come here today to ask the Parliament to revoke it. And this is what we are doing. We are—in connecting the reason why the hon. Prime Minister has come here today. Madam Speaker, so we wish to state and I wish to state that we have no objections in terminating the SOE today.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Mr. R. Paray:** We are simply indicating that the Government, Madam Speaker, has provided no rationale for either introducing the measure or for seeking to bring the measure to end. And that is the point, I think, the hon. Member for

Pointe-a-Pierre has been making during his delivery today and in this case is that Prime Minister has not made the case for its discontinuance, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is just another shot in the dark. There was no reason or rhyme for the state of emergency in first place. This is not—it is like another typical off-the-cuff decision by the Government.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Paray:** Madam Speaker, even more puzzling and worrisome is that state of emergency is being concluded while the pandemic is soaring. Vaccinations have essentially stalled and the parallel health care system is overburdened as mentioned in several of the press briefings by the hon. Prime Minister and the health care professionals are all exhausted which we all are grateful and thankful to the medical professions that are dealing with this pandemic.

Madam Speaker, the closest the Government got to justifying the state of emergency was that the assertion by the Minister of Health that it was required for mass vaccination by permitting ENTs, vets, pharmacists, dentists and others to administer vaccines. But, Madam Speaker, that could have been done without the state of emergency, Madam Speaker. That could have been brought, like what the Government normally does in miscellaneous provisions Bill to give the authority for these persons to act in that manner, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this House has met on 19 occasions since the SOE was introduced in May and those Bills, those issues around setting the curfews and so on could have been done in the Public Health Ordinance which I suspect, Madam Speaker, when the new Public Health Ordinance come out from tomorrow, I suspect it will achieve what the SOE, the intention of the SOE was. And it brings to the question, why could we have not done that before, rather than exposing the country with all the challenges that the SOE brought, why could we not have done

that? So the same new strategy that the Prime Minister, hon. Prime Minister is saying that will be employed from tomorrow, that question will always be, why could we not have done that from before, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, I pray that we do not see an explosion of infections. I trust that whatever strategy that the hon. Prime Minister is putting in place continues to work to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in this fight against COVID-19. I do not subscribed to the “vooping” actions of the State in terms of some of its decision-making process.

Madam Speaker, now clearly the state of emergency, I would say, has not led to the intended results as purported by the hon. Prime Minister when he brought this SOE in May because that control in the rate of infections, that has not been achieved, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we wish to state that, in my respectful view, this is not how lethal pandemics such as COVID-19 must be responsibly managed. So while we do not object to this measure, we remain in the dark like the rest of the nation over the reasons for the emergency in the first place and for ending it at this time. We urge the Government to carefully develop a strategic approach to confronting the pandemic going forward. COVID-19, Madam Speaker, is not going away at any time. It is a life and death crisis of our times. In creating an effective plan, Madam Speaker, the Government must continue to consult with experts both locally and internationally for best practices especially now as we go out of the state of emergency. Madam Speaker, with those few words I wish to thank you for the opportunity in joining the debate. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Saddam Hosein** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to make a brief intervention in this debate regarding the revocation of the state of emergency that was proclaimed by Her Excellency on the 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2021.

And, Madam Speaker, as the Prime Minister would have indicated, that had this state of emergency been allowed to live its natural life, it would have ended at the end of November, that is, midnight of the 29<sup>th</sup> of November. However, we are here, the Parliament has been summoned some 12 days or so earlier in order to determine whether or not we should revoke this particular state of emergency. And one would have expected that when the Prime Minister presented this most important Motion, the Prime Minister should have given a proper report to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—

**Mr. Young:** Madam Speaker, 55(1)(b). This is tedious repetition following almost word for word the previous two speakers about the Prime Minister and reporting and really about SMEs, et cetera.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you so much, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. I will give you a little time to develop your argument.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, one would have expected that we would have gotten a report on the successes of the SOE because we would want to know that we had reached a point in time where the Government is very comfortable enough now in order to reduce and remove the SOE from Trinidad and Tobago.

And if we go back to the Prime Minister's logic and the science that he had used when he came to this Parliament on May 24<sup>th</sup>, is that he said that the cases were rising so much that you needed to restrict movement and you needed to restrict gathering, so hence implement an SOE together with a curfew. Today, the

cases are still rising, the deaths are still rising, and by the Prime Minister's own logic, he is coming to now revoke the SOE.

So, we are asking the Prime Minister especially in his wind up to just make it make sense for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because what we would have expected is that, there must be some level of projection because we are at a position now where we need to save lives so therefore there must be a projection of where will be after this state of emergency.

Now, Dr. Hinds, Dr. Avery Hinds has been quoted in the media by saying that the cases are expected to rise by 1,000 cases per—at the end of the month per day. So now we have to ask, well what are the responses after we revoke this SOE to those 1,000 cases per day that was projected? Because Dr. Hinds is saying that but yet we have no report from the Prime Minister by saying, well, there will be more movement so they are expecting more cases, hence where are the additional ICU beds, where are the additional resources being given to the hospitals. Madam Speaker, we have doctors in this country that are burnt out. We have doctors and nurses in this country that need a rest and whatever decision that the Government makes affects them at the end of the day. The members of the Cabinet are not wearing PPE eight to 10 hours a day in tents in this country outside medical facilities, dripping in sweat, taking care and saving lives of the citizens of the Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, whatever decision that we make in this Parliament, we must understand the repercussions of those particular decisions. We must understand it.

So the Prime Minister needs to come clean with the country and really give a clear explanation of why. Why is the SOE being revoked if you, by your logic, are saying that this thing has worked? The Prime Minister must give an answer to the country why. Is it because the only thing that is different from May, Madam

Speaker, to now in November is something. There is one difference, and that is a THA election—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:**—that will be held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December. That is the only difference. That is the only difference. But, Madam Speaker, I will now move on to some of the consequences that the country face when the SOE is revoked that is very important to understand what the consequences are.

The first consequence is that, we need an SOE in particular to implement a curfew. So therefore, at the end of the SOE when it is being revoked at midnight tonight, there will be no more curfew after this. But we will have two hours of curfew tonight, Madam Speaker, because the curfew starts at 10.00 p.m. tonight but when it is revoked at 12 midnight, well then there is no curfew. Persons can start moving freely afterwards. So there are two hours of curfew tonight. That is the first thing.

**3.15 p.m.**

Then the second point, Madam Speaker, is that there is something called Emergency Powers Regulations. So as soon as the SOE is revoked, that proclamation is revoked, it means that the Emergency Powers Regulations, they stop. They die together with the revocation of the SOE. And one would have expected, Madam Speaker, that the Members of this Parliament should be treated with a little more decency, that the Prime Minister should have brought here today, and explain to the country what will be the public health regulations that will now supersede the Emergency Powers Regulations. He should have told us, because the country is listening on to find out what will happen after this SOE is revoked. Because when you look at the Emergency Powers Regulations they deal particularly with several important matters such as the opening and closing hours

of certain businesses, the operations of certain business and certain services of Government. There are several of those matters that were formerly found in the public health regulations pre the SOE, but now as the SOE has ended you will now have to revise and implement fresh public health regulations.

And, Madam Speaker, I listened this morning to the press conference being held by the Ministry of Health, and the Minister of Health was asked a question: Where are these public health regulations? The public health regulations, Madam Speaker, according to what the Minister has said, he said that they are currently being drafted. This was up until about 11.00 a.m. this morning. They are currently being drafted by the acting Attorney General, then it has to seek Cabinet approval, and hopefully by tonight we shall then see those regulations. Madam Speaker, if you had a plan to have revoked this SOE in advance, you would have already prepared those particular regulations.

This Government is operating with “voops”, “vaps” and vaille que vaille. Madam Speaker, if you remember when we last met in this Parliament, that was last Friday, this particular House was adjourned to a date to be fixed. We had no intention of coming back here on Wednesday. It was only on Saturday that we heard the hon. Prime Minister announcing that they are coming to revoke the SOE. These decisions are being made off the cuff. This is science and lives we are dealing with here. You owe the people of Trinidad and Tobago at least that decency of respect. And then we ask, where are those public health regulations that will now supersede the Emergency Powers Regulations? And the Prime Minister came to this Parliament to say they are as prepared as they can be. Madam Speaker, if that is the level of preparedness, then God save us in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, what is next for Trinidad and Tobago? And what is next is

that there must be a delicate balance that has to be struck between the public health regulations and also the business sector and the economy, because we all understand where the economy will be. And, Madam Speaker, those are the things that—and the recommendations we make as an Opposition to the Government. But before I close, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister says that, basically, any person who expresses a different view from the Government is considered a UNC or they are unpatriotic. Madam Speaker, I look at the Trinidad *Guardian* yesterday, and this is an article, a column written by Dr. David Bratt. Now, he is no UNC member, and I am quoting, and he had this to say about the revocation of the SOE and the increasing cases. He says:

“Everything comes from the top, everything is controlled from the top. There is little participation of ‘the people’ at the bottom. Now when you need guidance from the top, all we get is ‘is the people fault’. This is ‘victim blaming’ and is medically repugnant.

But T&T is world-class when it comes to excuses. The ‘system’ is a well-used excuse here. Some years ago a politician called it ‘systemitis.’ Now it’s the ‘people’, ‘peopleitis.’ Not the leaders. Not the buck stops with me. No, the people are to blame. There will be many, lovers of authority who agree with this excuse.”

Madam Speaker, that is Dr. David Bratt, and that is what we are seeing here, that the Prime Minister, based on his statement when he piloted this Motion, is placing the responsibility solely on the citizens. While we understand that the citizens have a responsibility, the buck stops with the Government and the Prime Minister at the end of the day, and he must take responsibility for what has taken place in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, as I close I encourage all of our citizens to keep safe,



adhere to the health protocols, because we need to save our own lives, because this Government seems incompetent to do that, and I thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. Anita Hayes** (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this very important debate as the House of Representatives discuss the end to the state of emergency that this country has been under for the past six months. Madam Speaker, as I join this debate here today my intervention will be brief because shockingly, we have very limited persons to respond to today. Now, my understanding as a responsible Executive, and I know that Members opposite are very antsy, but there has been several persons on the public record in their remit as members of the Executive, in some cases Members of Parliament, have been on record speaking in defence of the state of emergency, the reasons we needed it, et cetera. And those persons today are very silent. Very silent on the rationale for the end of the SOE.

And so I listened very carefully to the Prime Minister, and I listened to the Prime Minister read into the record a number of instances and a number of statements made by the Leader of the Opposition with respect to this state of emergency. And as the Prime Minister did that I was wondering where the Prime Minister got the impression that the Opposition was going to take a specific route today. Because that is what the impression that was given, the impression was made that we were coming here to do a specific thing. But we, Madam Speaker, intended always to come to the Parliament today to say to the Government—and I reflected on my contribution in May, when we spoke on the first three-month extension, and it was very clear to say that to recognize the seriousness of the matter, to recognize the space the country was in, and that we were embarking on a very serious state of emergency. This is not a light weight thing, this is a very important tool in the

arsenal of a government, and it says that we as a country are facing an emergency.

And now if you are revoking it, you are saying we as a country are at the end of that emergency. Because that is the only logical space that I can see. Unless you are telling us that we are at the end of one point, but these are the plans, this is what we will follow through with for the next few months. You see that is a responsible move for today. It is not what we got here today. We got rhetoric in the beginning and silence to follow, and that to me, Madam Speaker, is a blatant disrespect to the people of this country. Blatant disrespect.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. A. Haynes:** Because as I stand here today we have as a country in the beginning said, we will allow an executive to assume more power unto itself, which is what the state of emergency does, in order to keep us safe. We will allow, as the people of this country, a space where we will limit our rights to movement. We will limit our rights for a number things under the state of emergency, under the assurance that you will use this time to put measures in place to keep us safe. Have you done that?

And that is the point, Madam Speaker, where anybody on that side holding multiple portfolios could stand here and say this is what we are doing to keep you safe. And then they would say to us, given the numbers that we are seeing here today, given what we are seeing here today, this is how your safety, your public health is assured. That is absent, Madam Speaker, and that is why I say it is a blatant disrespect to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because I sat here fully prepared to; one, maintain my position, the position that we have always been in, which is as you proceed do what you need to do to keep the nation safe, but be accountable and be transparent. That is a very simple messaging. That is not confusing. It ought not to confuse anybody opposite because I cannot see how. But

it should have informed their thinking as we came here today. And so as we debate the end of the SOE, it is a very simple thing for anybody from the Government side to get up and say whether or not they believe that the state of emergency succeeded in doing what it intended to do. Very simple.

**Madam Speaker:** So Member for Tabaquite, I think you are about the fourth speaker—

**Ms. A. Haynes:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:**—and therefore at this stage I am going to invoke Standing Order 51(b). Okay. So that I would ask you to go on to an issue that has not been dealt with.

**Ms. A. Haynes:** Absolutely.

**Madam Speaker:** All right. The thing about the record, about the accountability, about the successes. All those things I have allowed by different speakers. They have said it in different ways but it is the same thing.

**Ms. A. Haynes:** Absolutely, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for your guidance. And like I said, my intention coming into this debate is not to repeat anything that was said before, but it was to ensure that the record states that from May what was asked—what I asked and as a Member of this House, in May, from the Government, has been ignored during this debate. And so, Madam Speaker, while I hear you on the repetition, and I agree that the points have been made, we are also in a position to discuss what happens next. What happens to the country after we—

**Madam Speaker:** And again, and this might be the difficulty coming at number four. Members before you—in fact the Member that just spoke before you, and the Member before that, spoke about what happens next. Their wording might have been different to yours, but it is the same issue. You are removing it, what next?

**Ms. A. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, again, as I tell you, we are now strictly operating within 55(1)(b), and therefore I hope it is new slant.

**Ms. A. Haynes:** Yes. Well, Madam Speaker, well, it would have been a new slant but you have offered your guidance prior to that. Because I had in my possession, I still have in my possession, correspondence from members of the medical fraternity who had asked me to raise certain things in this debate. But, Madam Speaker, I take your guidance and I am going to be able to raise those points elsewhere, as I am sure. But as we—as I take into consideration your guidance, I just want to reiterate, Madam Speaker, that the silence coming from the opposite side shows an admission on their part that they are aware that the state of emergency has failed and they do not want on the public record their defence of the state of emergency. So, I thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we were treated in the last couple of hours to a confession by our colleagues on the other side who made it quite clear, through their lead-off speaker, that they are confused and thus all the contributions we have heard so far are the contributions of people who are in fact confused. We do not have any argument with that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, much of what was repeated by my colleagues on the other side had something to do with what is going to happen next. Madam Speaker, last Saturday I spoke to the country in front of the entire media core on all media platforms, and I went into detail as to what was going to happen after the state of emergency has been removed on Wednesday. I was speaking on Saturday and I indicated that on Wednesday we will end the state of emergency, but, of course, we will continue to manage and to make our interventions under the Public Health

Ordinance. So, I am quite surprised to hear my colleagues come in here today and one after the other parroting, “what is going to happen, what is going to happen, what is going to happen”? And, of course, to speak about the Public Health Ordinance in such a loving and caring way, you would not believe it is the same Public Health Ordinance that they fought tooth and nail at the beginning of the pandemic, in and out of the courthouse, suing left, right and centre to say we should not use the State Public Health Ordinance to respond to the COVID. They sued the CMO, they sued his staff, they sued the Government, they sued the Attorney General, and they have been up and down the courthouse wasting taxpayers’ money about the Public Health Ordinance. And all we said very quietly, from here on in going forward even if the numbers are increasing, because we are almost at—we as a country can even possibly say that COVID-19 is endemic.

As I said earlier on today, some countries have done so, have accepted that COVID as a virus is among the population and would be here for quite some time if not indefinitely. So to come and ask now about what is going to happen is to separate yourself from the reality of what we have been doing, and then very conveniently ignoring what you have been saying before and pretending as though you are this responsible group and the rest of us have been irresponsible and destructive. The gist of the argument from my colleague for Pointe-a-Pierre was that all these bad things that happened to our economy have happened to our small business because of the state of emergency. Madam Speaker, that was a misrepresentation. Those things that he was pointing to were happening to our economy and our people before the state of emergency was introduced in May. It was the pandemic and the requirement to respond to a pandemic that caused these disruptions. And Opposition confusion and disjointed argument is not going to change that, because all they are about is trying to see how they could score a

political point even if they sound “dotish” in saying that.

We had a pandemic declared in the world in early 2020. It disrupted the economy of the world! But my colleague comes here today and says, it is because of an ill-conceived state of emergency why. And if I had known that they would have come here and said that, I would have brought quotations from them in the beginning calling for a state of emergency when the Government did not agree at that time to do it. And then, of course, trying to compare then and now is to disregard the moving state of the conditions in the pandemic. The population in May is not the same population as in November, and asking me to tell the country and to provide data as to the effect and the success of the state of emergency, they want to know how many people would have been infected and how many people would have died if we did not have a state of emergency.

Madam Speaker, they are serious? The state of emergency was meant to prevent an explosion of cases. I do not know how they would have known how many people would have been infected if we had not done, but anecdotally and from looking at other people’s experience who did not do that, we have seen situations where some persons in some situations were having 200 infections per day, and that jumped to 2,000. That is the kind of change you could have had. We have not had that in Trinidad and Tobago so we can easily say that during the period when we had an unvaccinated or lightly vaccinated population, that had we not restrained the amount of movement and mixing it is reasonable to assume that a larger number of people would have been infected and would have generated a larger number of sick people, many of whom could have died.

Madam Speaker, we are not the only country in the world that took that approach to limit the movement of people before vaccines were available or before vaccines kicked in. So why are my colleagues coming here today to pretend as

though the population in May and in June, in July knowing that that was the period, that three-month period, May June, July. The fight then was to try and get vaccines. And at that time we spoke about how many vaccines we could get, how we can use it and what position we could be in by November going into the end of the year, including our school children. Thankfully, many of them are out to school now, and we look ahead to January as to what might happen then, but in the meantime, Madam Speaker, there have been resurgences of the virus not only in our country but elsewhere.

But, we are also saying today as I said last Saturday as we shifted gear, the issue now given that we have a fair amount of persons vaccinated, the issue is not only driven by the daily report of how many infections, but because we know that there is a large amount of vaccinated people, those infections are not going to necessarily result in an equivalent amount of sick people in the ICU. But we are keeping our eyes on the hospitals as well. So, we have not declared the pandemic ended on the day when there was no death. We know that it is an ongoing arrangement, so all of what is being said here, Madam Speaker, why did we have an extension at all? Simple, we extended it to allow the vaccination programme to go, to kick in and to vaccinate people. And why are we stopping it today? Madam Speaker, because last Saturday I said to this country, given what we now have to accept, and the first thing we are accepting is rising numbers, because we know as we open up the economy there are more people moving around, more people exposed, and therefore we expect that it is quite likely that the numbers of infected persons will go up. But we are hoping that those infected persons are vaccinated persons who would not require hospital care and intensive unit care and high dependency unit care. That is what the world is showing. And so far that is what we are seeing, unvaccinated people are the ones who are demanding health care at

the systems.

And I also said, even though the numbers are going up and are likely to go up, we cannot fight this pandemic by a lockdown of the economy every time the numbers go up, so therefore do not expect a locking-down of the economy. We have to buckle down and survive by fighting the virus. That was said last Saturday. That is our position as a country today. So we are not going to be doing it by a state of emergency and lockdown. We are doing it by greater individual responsibility. What is so difficult to understand? What is so difficult there to understand? You come here today repeating yourself over and over and confusing the public. What I want the public to understand is that we are in a different, we are in a different plane now, and the plane is, do not expect a locking-down of the economy. The storm is with us and we are going full speed ahead, trying to keep our economy going. We have vaccines, get vaccinated. If you are vaccinated and you are infected there is a 95 per cent chance that you will not get sick enough to want hospital care. So, the number of infected persons is not the frightening number. The number is the number of people who are not getting vaccinated. That is what is worrisome. And we took every step to ensure that we have vaccines for everybody who needs to get vaccinated, but you are coming here and talking about rights and rights and rights, not talking about the danger and the encouragement of the virus in any population, not only ours, the encouragement of the virus in any population where people are not responding in the one way that we know is working for us, which is get vaccinated, and in the event that you are infected, it will not be something that will throw you down or kill you.

But, of course, Madam Speaker, come here to talk, and I do not want to be unkind to my colleagues, because I guess they have to say something. But when you come here and talk about personal reasons for ending the programme now, the



state of emergency now, what exactly are we ending, Madam Speaker? The state of emergency was largely with respect to the curfew which was meant to restrict people and so on. When did it kick in? In the early part it kicked in at nine o'clock in the evening, telling you get home, get away from your normal socializing places and so on. Then we even went to 10 o'clock. So, as of now, Madam Speaker, the curfew is really about mixing and moving between 10.00 in the night and 5.00 in the morning. Fact! That is what we are ending now. Activity, 10.00 in the night to 5.00 in the morning. My colleague from Pointe-a-Pierre and the UNC will have you believe that that is when they campaign for election in Tobago. Absolute dotishness.

Madam Speaker, everybody knows those who are canvassing for any political party, especially the PNM, as soon as sunset kicks in you end your canvassing programme. Nobody canvasses in the night. So the removal of a state of emergency between 10 o'clock in the night to five o'clock in the morning has nothing to do with any election. But you would not know that, because you do not engage in canvassing. You appeal to race and religion, and your party is fixed for that. Madam Speaker, you do not take part in the election in Tobago.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, 48(1).

**Hon. Members:** 48 what?

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. You do not—an election is taking place in Tobago, you take no part in it, you hide behind the PDP, you cannot find a candidate to put up in Tobago, but you know about canvassing in Tobago, to come and disturb people's psyche with nonsense. Madam Speaker, there is no canvassing taking place in Tobago during the night. None! And therefore to come and talk about this is about election, and then you get some friend in the media to

write the same nonsense in an editorial about politics trumping public health. So because the UNC talks nonsense some editorial writer writes the same thing. I would like to see an elevation of the thought process of my country. Canvassing.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Canvassing in the night. Nobody canvasses in the night. And another one got up there, my colleague or one of them from, where is he? Famous Barataria/San Juan, to get up here and talk about Tobago elections. Nobody canvasses there in the night.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** You would have thought after he had made such a character of himself here about Tobago elections, that he would have stayed away from Tobago elections. He had to be told nobody lives there!

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** No, I have to tell him, at night in Tobago nobody canvasses there!

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And whether the emergency had stayed in place or not the people in Tobago are governed by the Public Health Ordinance about gatherings. Five people can go out. We now allow 10 people are out there. It is the same thing. So stop trying to create a situation that does not exist. All we are saying is that we are shifting our focus from lockdown and state of emergency because we now have a larger number of people who are vaccinated, we love to have many more but at this point in time we step forward and take responsibility.

I heard one of my colleagues take issue with the fact that the Government is asking people to take personal responsibility for yourself. That is exactly what you have to do to protect yourself in a pandemic. If you do not keep your hands clean

or your surroundings clean, who are you going to blame for that if it gets to infecting you? You can only take responsibility for that. And if you are protecting yourself, who can better protect you in a situation where the virus is being spread by aerosols? You stay away from people if you believe that they are in fact not your family bubble, or your people who you know and are comfortable with. There is a huge chunk of personal responsibility in this matter, and to pan that to other statements is just to be unhelpful. I would like my colleagues on the other side to spend one day, one minute, one hour, at least agreeing with the Government and presenting a united front to the virus and telling our population—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—telling our population in sincerity, not publicly saying one thing and privately saying something else.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), he is imputing improper motives.

**Hon. Members:** Nah! Nah!

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so, Member for Caroni East, I overrule. Remember the Chamber allows for some robust language, but I overrule.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I am not going to take up anymore of the Parliament's time on this. No more. Because they could say what they want, they always have to oppose for opposing's sake. It reminds me about a famous calypsonian who sang a calypso about a small islander who came to Trinidad with a different accent. He was in some difficulty, personal inconvenience, and he went up to the neighbour and he asked, he wants "two sheet". The neighbour being neighbourly from East Port of Spain, and he saw this islander who had a problem and he "want two sheet". He goes into his house and comes out with two sheets and gave it to him because he arrived of the boat and he wants two sheets.

The fella is still distressed, and then he discovered, “you want to two sheet”? “I give you two sheet. Yuh no want two sheet?” Right. That is what we have today, Madam Speaker, exactly what they ask for they get. You give it to them, they do not want it, Madam Speaker. How can we please our colleagues on the other side?

**3.45 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, we have done everything that is required at different stages and this emergency now, removing a curfew from 10 o'clock until five o'clock in the morning, that is where we are in November, where we were not in May. It has worked well because we believe that our circumstance would have been far worse with respect to the number of persons infected in May and in June or even an earlier period. And as we go forward now, we look forward to being able to have our economy—you heard it today being implied that this is opening the economy. We have been opening our economy for months now step by step.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I am not trying to open any economy by ending the emergency today. So, Madam Speaker, all this confused attempt to make a debate of this matter today was null void and of no effect with respect to making it look as if we are worse off than we are. We are fighting the pandemic and we continue so to do, but we would love to have our colleagues on the other side on board if only for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put.*

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Division.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, hon. Members, a division has been called. We will allow three minutes for Members to make their way into the Chamber. As

Members are quite familiar with right at the current time, if a Member's turn is missed while the count is taking place, he or she will be allowed to vote once he is in the Chamber before the vote is announced. The three minutes commences now. [Pause] Hon. Members, the vote shall now commence.

*The House divided:*                      Ayes 20

AYES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Young, Hon. S.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Forde, E.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Monroe, R.

Cummings, Hon. F.

Manning, Hon. B.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland, K.

*The following Members abstained:* Mr. D. Lee, Ms. K. Ameen, Mr. R. Charles, Mr. R. Paray, Mr. R. Indarsingh, Dr. L. Bodoë, Mr. S. Hosein, Mr. B. Padarath, Ms. A. Haynes, Mr. D. Rambally, Mr. A. Ram, Dr. R. Ragbir Dr. R. Seecheran and Mr. R. Ratiram.

*Question agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Proclamation made by the President on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2021 declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be revoked with effect from midnight on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2021.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):**

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> day of November at 1.30 p.m. At that time, we will continue the debate on the revenue authority, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, can I invite the additional Members who have come in to vote to kindly leave the Chamber?

Hon. Members, there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion for the adjournment of the House. I now call upon the Member for Caroni East.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

### WHO-approved Rapid Antigen Test Kits (Availability of)

**Dr. Rishad Seecheran (Caroni East):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to begin by giving thanks to all healthcare and frontline workers that have put their

life on the line to serve this country during the pandemic. Madam Speaker, in the last few days, COVID-19 daily infections were 512, 509, 535, 535, 345, 403 and 414. Madam Speaker, there were also numerous deaths during this period and may they rest in peace. Five weeks after the Government has implemented safe zones for vaccinated people, the Ministry of Health is noting a steady increase in COVID-19 infections from October into November.

The Government must reassess its policies to bring things under control. Daily and weekly cases are rising approximately by 10 per cent per week from October 2021 into November 2021. The country could climb to as much as 40 per cent positivity rate this week. The safe zone initiative was an experiment and one that has not worked. Poor implementation and improper policies have resulted in a surge of COVID-19 cases given our current vaccination protection.

Madam Speaker, the Government safe zone initiative “became operationalization” on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 2021.

**Mr. Hinds:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** Sorry about that. We are five weeks into this safe zone initiative and we are now seeing a marked increase in COVID-19 cases. This current surge is because of the lack of testing being implemented in these safe zones.

Madam Speaker, the Public Health [2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)] (No. 20) Regulations, 2021 has mandated a negative PCR test or another approved test every two weeks for unvaccinated employees. The problem with this directive or policy is simply that according to the science, a PCR test is only valid for three days from the time of taking the test. Thus, Madam Speaker, an unvaccinated employee can, in theory, be COVID-19 positive from day four to day 14 from the date of taking the test.

Madam Speaker, in Europe, employees must have either proof of vaccination, a negative test within the previous 48 hours or recent recovery from COVID-19. Also, Madam Speaker, WHO-approved rapid antigen tests are widely available and in many cases, provided at no cost to the employer, thus eliminating the need for costly PCR tests.

My question is, Madam Speaker, should an asymptomatic vaccinated person who is COVID-19 positive continue to work in a safe zone, how would anyone including patrons or fellow employees know that they were in danger of contracting the virus? This is a safe zone, Madam Speaker, everyone's guard is down and apparently approved by the Ministry of Health.

Madam Speaker, persons that are fully vaccinated with a WHO-approved COVID-19 vaccine are not required to take a test while working in a safe zone. So how do you detect breakthrough infections that are asymptomatic? A breakthrough infection, Madam Speaker, is someone who is fully vaccinated with two WHO-approved vaccines, if that is the protocol, plus 14 days and still becomes COVID-19 positive and infectious. It is a superspreader scenario in addition to being discriminatory.

Madam Speaker, in fact just today on the news Atlantic LNG has stated that: "From"—next week—"Tuesday, unvaccinated...personnel will be required to do a covid19 antigen test every three days while vaccinated personnel will now have to do..."—one—"every week."

So even Atlantic LNG is seeing that this policy is not scientific. Madam Speaker, the Government has totally ignored the asymptomatic carrier in society and this can account for as much of 50 per cent of the COVID-19 cases. When we look at the official figures of COVID-19 cases for Trinidad and Tobago, they are skewed to reflect mostly symptomatic COVID-19 positive patients. Every other



nation around the world utilizes WHO-approved over-the-counter rapid antigen test kits to screen for this asymptomatic carrier. This person who does not know they have COVID-19 is basically allowed in Trinidad and Tobago to become a superspreader. These persons drive transmission of the Delta variant as vaccinated persons are becoming COVID-19 positive and in many cases, without symptoms.

I am asking the Minister of Health again to approve WHO-approved rapid antigen test kits to be allowed for importation and sale by licensed pharmacists. Minister Deyalsingh is on record of saying the existing penalty for such sales is a fine of several of hundreds of thousands of dollars plus six months in jail. So while the Delta variant is in our midst, the average man on the street cannot access a testing kit which is over-the-counter in every single country around the world.

Madam Speaker, with our fully vaccinated level around 45 per cent and in the absence of effective therapeutics, we will have to adopt additional testing in order to combat the Delta variant. So how does someone know they need a PCR test if they have no symptoms? In addition, a PCR test is cost prohibitive. How many of us here can afford to pay \$1,200 for a test every couple weeks? A WHO rapid antigen test retails for around US \$12 in the United States. Had we used these tests in March and April of this year, we may have avoided the surge after the Easter weekend. Madam Speaker, it is given out free by the Government. The Abbott's rapid antigen test kit has a 99 sensitivity rating and a 97 per cent specificity rating. Both vaccinated and non-vaccinated persons can transmit the virus.

The WHO is on record of saying that at-home COVID-19 diagnostic tests are a high priority and a public importance. We must be able to identify a person that is a carrier and more specifically, we must be able to identify a fully vaccinated person who has little or no symptoms and may be a carrier. Vaccinated

persons will feel that they are immune to this virus and become superspreaders in the community. The science has shown us that the Delta variant will literally hunt you down. Rapid antigen test kits should be allowed for sale in pharmacies to allow persons to know their status within 10 minutes. President Joe Biden has expanded COVID-19 testing kits in the United States by purchasing an additional \$2 billion of rapid antigen test kits, 280 million additional kits for the US population. Another 25 million was spent to buy rapid test kits for community health centres and food banks. What could possibly be the reason why a rapid antigen test kit cannot be purchased at a pharmacy in Trinidad and Tobago? Minister Deyalsingh, why are you refusing to make WHO rapid antigen test kits available to the public? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First of all, I must rebut the gross untruth. The Minister of Health made no statement about banning rapid antigen tests. What the Minister of Health said is once the test gets the approval of the Chemistry, Food and Drugs, they can bring it in. So that, my friend, is untruth number one. Anybody who wishes to bring in a rapid antigen test kit approved by the Chemistry, Food and Drugs, can bring it in. Let me say that clearly again.

Madam Speaker, the narrative put out by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar on October 4<sup>th</sup>, in the *Newsday*:

“...Safe zones bound to fail”

Kamla Persad-Bissessar, October 8<sup>th</sup>:

“...slams safe zones ‘gimmick’”

The fact is, from an epidemiological point of view, safe zones have succeeded and let me tell you why, again to rebut the untruths that my friend said. To date, there

has been not one report of a cluster or clusters of infections from any safe zone, none.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** So this hogwash about the safe zones not being safe today is simply to verify or try to verify his political leader's fallacy that the safe zones were going to fail. Because I have always said in this House, for the UNC to succeed, Trinidad and Tobago must fail. Let me repeat, there has been no cluster, no cases of COVID-19 and the Delta variant reported in any safe zone. He wants to blame the Delta variant on the safe zones.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Sorry, the hon. Member. What the hon. Member did not say is that the first case of Delta was on August the 11<sup>th</sup>. The first case—and that was imported cases. The first case of local spread was on September 20<sup>th</sup>. The only—sorry, one truthful thing he said was that the safe zones were implemented on October 11<sup>th</sup>, two months after the first Delta case was brought into Trinidad and Tobago.

So you cannot blame the safe zones for Delta when, one, there has been no cluster or cases related to a safe zone. Singing for your supper to try to make your political leader's statement that the safe zone was bound to fail, was a gimmick, is not going to work in the right thinking population of Trinidad and Tobago. They are more intelligent than that. Because what is a safe zone? A safe zone is a place for vaccinated people and I have given the rationale for testing for Delta with a cycle threshold of 20. We test all positive cases for returning nationals and so on, the migrant population. But you know what? He gives the impression—sorry, the hon. Member gives the impression that we are not doing antigen testing in Trinidad and Tobago. To date, we have done 19,800 free antigen tests in Trinidad and

WHO-approved Rapid Antigen Test Kits  
 Hon. T. Deyalsingh (cont'd)

Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Let me repeat that, 19,800 free antigen tests paid for by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** But the Member will not acknowledge that; will not acknowledge that. You see, Madam Speaker, leadership in difficult times is difficult for some people. Compare the leadership of my Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley versus Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

You know, they always boast 350,000 people voted for them. But you know what?—350,000 people are looking to you for leadership. I have never heard a concerted attempt by the UNC and their spokespersons to tell people, to encourage people to get vaccinated. But every time a UNC spokesperson opens their mouth is to throw cold water on the vaccination programme and put doubts in people's minds about the effectiveness of vaccination.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Up to yesterday in the Senate; up to yesterday in the Senate, a dinosaur called “T.rex” resurrected, came to the Senate to throw cold water on the vaccination programme. And every day, the UNC shows a complete lack of leadership for their followers, 350,000 voted for you. But for heaven's sake, ask them to get vaccinated on an ongoing basis, please. That is leadership. Leadership in difficult time's calls for people like my Prime Minister, put country first, not party. For heaven's sakes put country first, not party.

**Ms. Ameen:** Madam Speaker, the Member is misleading—

**Mr. Young:** What is the Standing Order?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** What Standing Order?

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Hon. T. Deyalsingh (cont'd)

**Mr. Young:** [*Inaudible*]—the Standing Order.

**Ms. Ameen:** I just want to bring it to your attention—

**Hon. Member:** No

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. Ameen:** —the Member is misleading. The UNC has been on record as—

**Madam Speaker:** Member—

**Ms. Ameen:** —encouraging persons—[*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Augustine. Member for St. Augustine, you are a seasoned parliamentarian. You know that if you want to interject there are two specific ways, either there is a Standing Order or you ask your colleague to give way. All right? So as a senior Member, I expect you to follow the Standing Orders.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, as I close, the narrative being put out today by my colleague that the safe zones are responsible for this surge in Delta is fictitious, it is a fallacy, and it is fraught with untruths, and it is to be rejected out of hand, because there is no reported case of Delta outbreak in the safe zones. It is just to fit a narrative by his political leader.

And, Madam Speaker, as I close, there is a saying, either lead, follow or get out of the way. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 4.12 p.m.*