

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, April 20, 2022*

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 Ms. Anita Haynes MP, Member for Tabaquite, who has requested leave of absence for the period April 20th to the 25th, 2022, and from Ms. Vandana Mohit MP, Member for Chaguanas East, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended 30 September, 2014. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Brian Manning)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on an Inquiry into the Administration of the Children's Life Fund Authority. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

**Commission of Enquiry into the Divers Tragedy
(Status of)**

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

UNREVISED

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will give the Acting Prime Minister the time to get his bearings right. Having acted—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Always, always, always, Leader of Government. Having acted on how many occasions, I think he would have had his bearings correct by now.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Let us proceed! Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister: Will the Prime Minister update the House on the status of the Commission of Enquiry into the Divers tragedy of February 2022?

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is expected that the two Commissioners: Justice Dennis Morrison and Mr. Gregory Wilson will be presented with their instruments of appointment within the next two days. They will also be meeting with the Counsel to the Commission, Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC and his team. The terms of reference for the enquiry have been settled and will be published shortly. It should be noted that the conduct of the enquiry will be the sole responsibility of the Commissioners.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you. Prime Minister, could you clarify for the benefit of this House, whether the Commission will, in terms of the number of Commissioners, will be two or three? Has the Government finalized on that?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I think this matter has already been addressed

in the public domain. Maybe the Member did not hear this. The decision is that a specialized firm of experts will act as an independent consultant to the Commission rather than the appointment of a third Commissioner.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Would the Prime Minister indicate the Government's position as it relates to providing legal representation for the families of those divers before the Commission of Enquiry?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, the Government will be advised and take advice from the Commissioners and other advisors on that matter. I would not want to make a premature statement on that at this time.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, could the Prime Minister inform this House of the procurement procedure in relation to the firm that he just alluded to in relation to the third Commissioner?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister

Hon. C. Imbert: The firm has not yet been procured but—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—a search will be done using best practice to acquire a firm that would have the necessary specialist expertise.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam. Prime Minister, are you indicating to this House and the country that as a result of the answer you just gave, there is absolutely no date to begin this Commission of Enquiry—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal:—into the tragedy of those divers?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I have already said the conduct of the enquiry will be the sole responsibility of the Commissioners. I expect them to commence as soon as possible with dispatch. I therefore do not accept that insinuation from the hon. Member.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Procurement Regulations (Implementation of)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister: Based on a recent report which quoted the Minister of Finance as stating that the passing of the Procurement Regulations clears the way for the implementation by the end of March for a system of procurement in Trinidad and Tobago with equitable and transparent procedures, will the Prime Minister state if implementation of this new system has taken place?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (**Hon. Colm Imbert**): Madam Speaker, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act is being reviewed by the new Attorney General prior to its full implementation.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: As a follow-up, Madam Speaker, to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, as Minister of Finance you made a statement on February that the ending of March we would have these things in place, whether you have a new Attorney General or not, when would this happen for the country of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I think it is only proper that the new Attorney General be given an opportunity to advise the Cabinet on this matter.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: As a follow-up, Madam Speaker. Are you saying that the past Attorney General work was not sufficient—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Lee:—to meet the standard that is required?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I did not say so. I have said what I said. I said that the new Attorney General is reviewing the legislation and will advise the Government on its implementation.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Lake Asphalt New Business Model
(Preservation of Employees Jobs)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister: Given the recent announcement of the Prime Minister for a new business model for Lake Asphalt, will the Prime Minister confirm if all the employees of the company would have their jobs preserved during this transition?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): At this point in time, all the employees at the company have their jobs. The new business model will be finalized by the new line Ministry, the Ministry of Works and Transport. All that has happened is a reassignment of portfolios and therefore any view on employment at the company is premature.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker, a follow-up. Prime Minister, could you enlighten us what this new business model would be for Lake Asphalt?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I think I was very clear. I said what has happened is a reassignment of portfolios. The entity has been assigned to the Ministry of Works and Transport. The commodities produced by Lake Asphalt are utilized primarily by the Ministry of Works and Transport and it was felt it was a good fit. And I just, very clearly and unambiguously said that the new business model would be finalized by the Ministry of Works and Transport, and therefore, by definition it is not yet finalized.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, could the Prime Minister inform this House based on the fact that a new business model is being adopted for Lake Asphalt, that the Interministerial Committee's Report on Lake Asphalt headed by the Minister of Public Administration has been rejected by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I do not know why Members of the Opposition want to introduce all of these irrelevant insinuations into these questions. Of course, the Ministry of Works and Transport will utilize that report in designing the new business model.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Can the Prime Minister indicate whether or not the crisis taking place at Lake Asphalt is a result of the unfortunate closure of the Petrotrin Refinery?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, again, I do not know why Members opposite like to introduce these irrelevant insinuations. The Government is ensuring that all of the expenses of Lake Asphalt are met. The Government is providing funding to the company. Just recently, the Cabinet agreed to provide additional funding to the company to meet its monthly expenses including wages and salaries. So there is no crisis.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

**Russian/Ukraine War
(Plan for Increasing Local Food Production)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that the Russian/Ukraine war continues and will continue to impact food prices globally, will the Prime Minister indicate what plans if any the Government has formulated aimed at increasing local food production?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As hon.Members are aware, in this year's budget there is an allocation of \$300million, special allocation for a stimulus programme for the agricultural sector in fiscal 2022. And this \$300million is planned for utilization for a number of incentive programmes within the agricultural sector, improving agricultural infrastructure and various strategies to stimulate food production. More funding will be provided as needed. The Government is also continuing in its drive to make this sector more attractive by ensuring that all aspects of food production become tax free.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Prime Minister, is this 300million in addition to the 500million that was previously appropriated through the Ministry of Finance into the Ministry of Agriculture?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I think that matter was covered in the Standing Finance Committee, properly ventilated, made crystal clear to all concerned including Members opposite. Yes, it is in addition to any other funding provided to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, is it the Minister's plan or the Ministry's plan to set measurable targets in the sector so practitioners can have an idea where the focus is based on the inflationary measures that are coming with the shortages of food and so on? Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I would expect the Minister of Agriculture and his Ministry in planning their work programme for 2022 to do exactly that.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Is the Government involved in any way in the regional food initiative led by Guyana, and which includes Barbados and other Caricom countries?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am advised that there is active consideration of involvement in that programme.

Mr. Charles: Is the Minister prepared to give a policy statement with respect to our involvement or not?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Not at this time, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

**Suspension of Russia from United Nations Human Rights Council
(Reasons for Trinidad and Tobago's Abstention)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister: Will the Prime Minister inform this House of the reason/s, which would have guided Trinidad and Tobago's decision to abstain in the United Nations General Assembly's vote to suspend Russia from the United Nations Human Rights Council?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It must be noted that Trinidad and Tobago joined with other Caricom Member States in supporting the UN resolutions, aggression against Ukraine of the 02 March, 2022, and humanitarian consequence of the aggression against Ukraine on the 24 March, 2022. In fact, Trinidad and Tobago co-sponsored these resolutions. Via our support for those General Assembly resolutions and our clear positions at other international fora, Trinidad and Tobago and fellow Caricom States have strongly condemned the Russian involvement of Ukraine, expressed grave concern about the plight of civilians in Ukraine and called for an immediate ceasefire. Caricom has also issued strong statements against the invasion based on consensus among its membership.

The United Nations Resolution of the 7th of April, 2022, focused on the suspension of the membership rights of Russia at the Human Rights Council. It was discussed among Caricom colleagues but consensus was not achieved within Caricom. Trinidad and Tobago has taken note of the fact that the International

Criminal Court prosecutor is currently conducting an investigation into the situation in Ukraine and that such investigation includes investigation of alleged war crimes and alleged crimes against humanity in all parts of Ukraine. These investigations have not been concluded and as such any definitive and actionable findings have yet to be reported.

It is the considered position of Trinidad and Tobago that the suspension of membership rights at the Human Rights Council would best be considered subsequent to such an actionable independent report. At the time of the Resolution no independent commission of enquiry or impartial report was available.

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

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. Prime Minister, taking into consideration that Trinidad and Tobago co-sponsored resolutions in terms of condemning the Russian invasion into Ukraine, would you consider it a cop out in terms of the position adopted—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—by Trinidad and Tobago in this particular vote?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: No. Not at all. And let me continue, because there was no independent report on this matter available, Trinidad and Tobago abstained on that particular matter. Other Caricom countries, such as Belize, Barbados, Guyana, St. Vincent, St. Kitts and Suriname also abstained. And you would have heard me refer to the fact that there was no consensus in Caricom on this matter.

Madam Speaker, I want to assure all concerned that Trinidad and Tobago continues to be an integral part of the global action to condemn the Russian

invasion and to bring this war to an end. And we will continue to work with fellow Caricom Members and our international partners to achieve that objective.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, given the over 100 days of reports of human rights atrocities and abuses coming out of Ukraine, I think it that it is a hypocritical position—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—adopted by Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Member, are you going to ask a question or are you making a statement?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Speaker: This is for a question? You have almost utilized your 15 seconds.

Mr. Indarsingh: Is it hypocritical to hide behind—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Hit it, hit it.

Mr. Indarsingh:—the veil of an investigation being conducted by the International Criminal Court prosecutor?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to repeat that Trinidad and Tobago joined with other Caricom Member States in supporting UN resolutions regarding aggression against Ukraine and humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine, and Trinidad and Tobago co-sponsored those resolutions. So Trinidad and Tobago's position on this matter is very clear. And with respect to the particular issue raised by the hon. Member, it is the position of

Trinidad and Tobago that we should wait the report from no other person than the court prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Prime Minister, given that there was not a consensus and Trinidad is seen as a leader in Caricom, why were we not able to get a consensual Caricom position on an—in the face of open atrocities by Russia?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I cannot view that as a serious question. The Member is experienced and would know that sometimes it is not very easy to get consensus in Caricom, including on things as simple as West Indies cricket. And therefore the question—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—is inappropriate.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister aware that Eric Williams was able to get a consensus—

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Member, Member. Are you asking a question?

Mr. Charles: Yes, I am. Is the Minister aware that Eric Williams used his leadership position to get a common position on the Cuban embargo in the 1960s?

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I rule that question out of order. You are entitled to a question on this issue if you wish. Member for Couva South.

**Single Point Land Management Authority
(Role and Establishment of)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Will the Prime Minister inform this House precisely the role of the Single Point Land Management Authority and when will it be established?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In October of 2020, Cabinet agreed to the appointment of a committee chaired by Mr. Jerry Hospedales to develop a plan and report to the Cabinet on a single point of authority for the management and administration of state land that is owned or controlled by state agencies. That committee reported to the Cabinet and the Cabinet has agreed that the implementation of the committee's recommendations will be driven by the Office of the Prime Minister working with the Ministries of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and Digital Transformation. The single point of authority is not an entity per se. It is an IT platform for the management and administration of state land using the existing human resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and other agencies of the State. This will enable the State to improve its management of land resources and in particular reviews of rent and collections of rent. The project team which includes iGovTT is at the point of selecting the appropriate software for the IT platform.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, could you inform this House how will this authority differ from its role and responsibilities from the land management division which currently falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: And let me just repeat this part of the answer. Maybe I was not speaking loudly enough. The single point of authority is not an entity per se. It is an IT platform for the management and administration of state land using the existing human resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries—let me stress that—using the existing human resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and other relevant agencies of the State. It is a collaborative effort.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Prime Minister, do you think it is wise to call this an authority when you are really referring to a Web page.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I do not know if there is something wrong with the audio system or maybe Members opposite are just not hearing. But, I said, and even the question, Madam Speaker, refers to a single point of authority, not a single point authority. It is a single point of authority.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, could the Prime Minister inform this House what position within this single point management authority will be offered to the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: He is the good master.

Hon. C. Imbert: I think, Madam Speaker, that matter has been fully ventilated in the public domain. The individual will be responsible for bringing this single point

of authority into being.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, could you inform this House who will determine the terms and condition of employment of the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

Dr. Moonilal: On the single point of authority.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The terms and conditions of personnel associated with the single point of authority for the management and administration of state land will be determined by the Office of the Prime Minister in consultation with the Cabinet.

URGENT QUESTION

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Robert Village Hindu School, Tableland (Commencement of Work on Landslip)

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Works and Transport: In light of recent disruption of the reopening of school at the Robert Village Hindu School in Tableland due to a major landslide adjacent to the school's compound, will the Minister indicate when work will commence to address this landslip

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is a landslip along the road to the Robert Village Hindu School. This roadway is called the Robert Village Trace and falls under the jurisdiction of the Princes Town Regional Corporation. The

Ministry of Works and Transport and the PTRC collaborated to do interim road works to facilitate access to the school. The PTRC, my information continues to work to reinstate a sidewalk and do further road work and landslip repairs. The Ministry of Works and Transport continues to provide materials and technical assistance as far as available. I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, hon. Minister. We are fully aware that the trace falls under the Princes Town Regional Corporation. The question is, can you indicate the timeline in terms of the assistance that will be provided to the Princes Town Regional Corporation as it relates to the magnitude of the landslip that the Princes Town Regional Corporation is unable to address it and needs the urgent assistance of the Ministry of Works and Transport? Could you give us the timeline and the commitment with respect to the materials and supplies?

2.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Education did reach out to the Ministry of Works prior to the reopening of school. The Ministry of Works immediately got in touch with the Princes Town Regional Corporation and we made materials available to them. I understand a further request was made for some additional material which was made available today. The Ministry of Works stands ready immediately to assist the Corporation in solving this problem going forward even if it means on a temporary basis to keep the road passable.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, in light of the answer that you have provided, can you indicate whether or not the Ministry of Works and Transport intends to recommend or have they recommended to the Ministry of

Education that these students go back on online classes until the landslip can be addressed in order to ensure their safety?

Madam Speaker: Member, I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question to the Minister of Works. Leader of the House.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. There are 11 questions for oral answer, we will be answering 10 of those questions and we are asking for a two-week deferral for Question 154. There is one question for written response and we will be answering that question, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

Bamboo Settlements Nos. 2 and 3, Valsayn (Details of Approved Land Use)

141. Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*) asked the hon. Minister of Planning and Development:

Will the Minister provide details of the approved land-use for Bamboo Settlements Nos. 2 and 3, Valsayn, inclusive of boundaries?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South):

Education Facilities Company Limited (Retrenchment of Staff)

154. Could the hon. Minister of Education state:

In light of the decision to wind up the operations of the Education Facilities Company Limited, will the Minister state the number of employees who have been served with retrenchment notices effective from March 03, 2022?

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Reform Hindu School
(Completion of Works on)**

136. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Will the Minister state when works on the Reform Hindu School will be completed?

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Madam Speaker, construction works at the Reform Hindu School commenced in April 2014, however the project was suspended in September 2015 due to outstanding payments owed at that time to the contractor of \$5.37 million and to the consultants of \$600,000. The cost to complete the project was estimated at 6.63 million in 2017.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education is cognizant of the hardships being experienced by the students, parents and staff and every effort will be made to complete this school which is among the 30 such incomplete schools whose construction was commenced by the former Government without any identified source of funding whatsoever. The total cost of completion of these schools for which contracts were signed between 2012 and 2015 without any source of funds is estimated at over \$2 billion.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister indicate what steps are being taken to limit the amount of deterioration taking place in the building because the suspicion is those figures that you quoted have to be increased significantly?

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, I can provide that information at another time. I do not have that information before me in writing.

**Fire Hydrant Systems
(Status of)**

137. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of the fire which occurred at Bamboo Settlement No. 2, Valsayn on February 7, 2022, will the Minister state why the fire service is not resourced with a proper fire hydrant system throughout the country?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. According to the information received from the Chief Fire Officer, on February 07, 2022, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service responded to reports of a fire at Bamboo Settlement No. 2, Valsayn. Once there, several attempts were made to extinguish the blaze which had originated at a warehouse. Assistance was rendered to the TTFS by the Water and Sewerage Authority which deployed resources, including three water trucks, to assist fire-fighting efforts at the site. However, despite rigorous efforts to quell the blaze, several businesses in the area were destroyed before things were brought under control.

At the post incident debrief, it was determined that the efforts on the part of the TTFS proved to be largely ineffective in part due to one, high winds and the existence of combustible items on the compound where the fire had originated, which continued to feed the fire, and two, the inability of the water distribution pipeline systems to the Bamboo area to sustain the extremely high water pressures required by the TTFS for fire-fighting purposes.

As regards the existing fire hydrant system throughout the country, the TTFS informed that in Trinidad and Tobago, there exist two independent fire hydrant systems which are utilized for fire-fighting purposes. These are the salt water distribution system and the fresh water distribution system. The salt water distribution system which consists of approximately 900 fire hydrants provides non-potable water to support fire-fighting efforts in communities from Morvant Junction to Cocorite, inclusive of parts of St. Ann's, Woodbrook, St. James, Sea Lots and Port of Spain. The fresh water distribution system which consists of over 6,600 fire hydrants installed throughout Trinidad and Tobago is connected to WASA's domestic mains.

Madam Speaker, a number of challenges negatively affected the fire hydrant system throughout the country. These included:

1. Non-functioning salt water distribution system.
2. An unauthorized installation of fire hydrants by private developers.
3. A mix of fire hydrant types.

Nevertheless, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service continues to pursue a number of measures to alleviate issues surrounding the lack of an adequate fire hydrant system. These include the following initiatives:

1. Installation of new fire hydrants;
2. Continuous maintenance of existing fire hydrants;
3. Hydrant replacement programme where they continue to partner with WASA; and
4. An interagency collaboration where the TTFS maintains communication with WASA to boost the supply of water in affected areas or communities through existing pipes as well as augment the water supply through the use of truck borne water supplies.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, I accept the arguments, the process arguments. But when will Trinidad and Tobago, based on what you have said, when can we expect a specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely target for the existence of proper fire hydrants in Trinidad and Tobago, whether water or so on?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, as the answer provided, explained, they are going through a process where they are installing new fire hydrants. There is a continuous maintenance of the existing fire hydrants. There is a hydrant replacement programme and there is interagency collaboration. This is all current and taking place as we speak.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister indicate the number of fire hydrants that are being installed?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, that question needs a lot more precision. Being installed when? At this precise point in time? I do not have that information. I am sure when the appropriate question is asked, the answer can be provided as to what is the planned rollout for new fire hydrants.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister indicate how many fire hydrants have been installed during January to March 2022?

Madam Speaker: Member, based on the response to the question, that does not arise. Do you have another question? Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited's Credit Rating 2019

UNREVISED

(Completion and Publication of Statements)

138. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Given the recent downgrade of Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited's international credit rating by Standard and Poor's due to the company's failure to submit its 2019 Audited Financial Statements, will the Minister provide a timeline for completion and publication of these statements?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As was explained weeks ago, the delay in Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited 2019 Audited Financial Statements had to do with the provision of certain information. It was being compiled with respect to Petrotrin, the legacy company. I am happy to say that the 2019 Audited Financial Statements for TPHL have been completed, have been approved by the company's board of directors and have been reviewed by the Ministry of Finance Corporation Sole and they will be published to the public of Trinidad and Tobago within the next two weeks.

**Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited
(Details of Asset Valuation)**

139. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Given the statements attributed to the Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited that one of the reasons for the non-submission of its 2019 financials was an "asset valuation that was not represented in previous audits", will the Minister advise as to the following:

- a) whether an asset valuation has been conducted; and

b) when will it be made public?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. For clarification, the company's statement being referred to in the question, which is TPHL, reference in the question spoke to "asset valuations that were not represented in previous audits" and not a singular "asset valuation" as the question implies. These fixed asset valuations were specific to Petrotrin's 2019 audit, the completion of which was required in order to finalize the TPHL 2019 Audited Financial Statements. This is not an irregularity or unusual when you are dealing with a holding company waiting on the accounts and the audited accounts of a subsidiary company.

To provide more context, in Petrotrin's previous audits as an operating entity, the focus would have been on valuations of more specific and significant operating assets including the refinery, oil producing assets and the likes. In November 2018, Petrotrin vested all of its productive assets to Heritage, Paria and Guaracara, and as such, the 2019 Petrotrin audited financial statements were prepared on a non-going concern basis. As such, there was a requirement for fixed asset valuations on less significant non-productive assets at Petrotrin that had never been required previously, including valuations on certain land and recreational holdings of Petrotrin. The requirement for these additional valuations was one of many nuances arising from the 2018 restructuring that delayed the completion of the 2019 Petrotrin audited financials. The Petrotrin 2019 audited financials and the TPHL 2019 consolidated audited financials, as I just said, have been completed and have been approved and will be published to the public within the space of the next two weeks.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a follow-up question, Minister. The asset valuation, was that done in-house or by an independent consultant?

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, as has to be done for these audits, it would have been provided by valuers independent of the organization and then the auditors would have given their approval of it.

**Expired COVID-19 Vaccines
(Destruction of)**

142. Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Will the Minister advise, for the period March 30, 2021 to February 28, 2022, how many expired COVID-19 vaccines were destroyed, disaggregated by manufacturer?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon to you and good afternoon to all Members of this honourable Chamber. The process for the destruction of expired COVID-19 vaccines requires the approval of the manufacturer in alignment with the terms of the agreement for direct purchase and or by donation. To date, Pfizer Inc. has approved the destruction of its expired stock and the process of destruction for both Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines will start in one month. The process of destruction will be done through incineration. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Minister, what security arrangements are being used to secure these vaccines until they are destroyed?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. These vaccines are being held in central repository locations under the temperature control environments in their chillers and all of our locations have physical and camera security systems.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, what is the cost to upkeep these security facilities?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I really would not have that sort of granular detail at hand.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: When will this process of disposal be finished, Minister?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I indicated—[*Laughter*] You know, Madam Speaker, God has given us two ears to listen. I indicated that the process will start in one month and it will take as long as it takes to complete the process. I cannot give an exact date—

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Interruption*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—by hour, date and time.

Madam Speaker: You know, Member for Couva South, we all want to hear the responses and maybe if you will cooperate with listening, we might all benefit.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Tell him doh be condescending.”

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, the matter is over. Member for Caroni East. Member for Couva South.

**Acting Commissioner of Prisons
(Details of)**

152. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister indicate who is the Acting Commissioner of Prisons, given that the former Commissioner retired compulsorily from the Trinidad and Tobago Prisons Service on March 05, 2022?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Stuart Young): Madam Speaker, my colleague for Couva South has a particular interest in prison I take it. The current Acting Commissioner of Prisons is now Mr. Deopersad Ramoutar who was appointed by the Public Service Commission to act in the office of Commissioner of Prisons following the compulsory retirement of Mr. Dennis Pulchan from the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: The Opposition always has interest in anything affecting the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Could the Minister inform this House why on the 23rd of February, the Prison Service issued a release that Mr. Deopersad Ramoutar would be replacing Mr. Dennis Pulchan on pre-retirement leave as of that day and within hours of having issued this said release, rescinded it?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, as I just said, Mr. Deopersad Ramoutar has been appointed as the Acting Commissioner of Prisons. I can only assume that at the time that that was released, it was a bit premature. Hopefully not by my friend from Couva South.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Could the Minister confirm whether any Member of the Cabinet attempted to veto the recommendation that Mr. Deopersad act as the Commissioner of Prisons based on legal matters that he had pending within the judicial system?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: The answer is, I have no such information presently before me nor am I aware of any such action by any Member of the Cabinet.

**Violence Amongst Secondary School Students
(Measures to Address)**

153. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Given the recent incidents of violence among secondary school students, will the Minister state what measures, if any, are being implemented to address this issue?

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education recognizes the need to implement effective and wide-ranging solutions towards reducing violence in schools. To this end, the Ministry of Education has collected and analyzed data on school indiscipline and violence and has identified schools of focus for targeted intervention, that is, schools with the highest rates of school violence, as well as those exhibiting the following characteristics:

- High percentage of Form 1 students who scored under 30 per cent in the SEA;
- High levels of indiscipline;
- High absenteeism; and
- Low levels of CSEC achievement.

The Ministry has also collaborated and met with the following Ministries and agencies over the last several months to devise a national school infraction rubric: National Security, Youth Development and National Service, Gender and Child Affairs, TTPS Community Police, Social Development and Family Services, Tobago House of Assembly and the Sport and Community Development Ministry.

Arising from these discussions, Madam Speaker, three multidisciplinary teams were set up, each focusing on one of the following:

- School discipline matrix.
- Positive reinforcement.
- Criteria for high-risk schools.

An initial report on these issues is due by the end of April 2022.

Following the receipt of this initial report, a draft national school infraction rubric will be discussed with stakeholders and sent to Cabinet for consideration and approval before implementation. It is expected, Madam Speaker, the final infraction rubric along with the inputs from the Student Support Services Division will result in positive outcomes with respect to student behaviour. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, could the Minister inform this House given the resumption of classes which started with the rotation of classes, how many incidents of school violence have been reported to the Ministry?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information before me but I will gladly provide it in writing.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, are you in a position to confirm whether officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service have been deployed into the public secondary school system in an attempt to curb the prevalence of school violence?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information before me and I will gladly provide that in the future.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Could the Minister give the country some comfort by providing a timeframe by which we can see a measurable reduction in school violence?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, no.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, again, I am asking the Minister to confirm or deny if officers of the Police Service have been deployed.

Madam Speaker: And Member for Couva South, that question has been asked and answered. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**El Socorro South Dilapidated Floodwater Pumps
(Replacement of)**

156. Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister indicate when the dilapidated floodwater pumps in El Socorro South will be replaced?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The El Socorro South forms part of the Caroni wetlands. In the past, the area was converted from agriculture and farming purposes. The flood plains of this area were then protected by the Caroni River north embankment, storm water pumps and floodgates. Over the years, the property owners have been filling the land for commercial development. With the continuous development and the reduction in permeable and storage areas, flooding has become more common and prolonged.

There are two pump sites with a total of six pumps in the El Socorro South area. These pumps are over 20 years old. The sites at the Sadhoo Trace pump site,

three pumps, two functional. William Street pump site, three pumps, two functional. The Drainage Division has embarked on a programme called the upgrade of existing pumps and gate inventory. The programme involves the upgrade of pumps, stations and the replacement and or rehabilitation of sluice gates and flat gates across Trinidad.

The following information is related to each site. Sadhoo Trace pump house location: Works commenced on the upgrade of the Sadhoo Trace pump house in January 2020. The scope of work includes the installation of one additional hydraulic pump and the construction of a new pump house. Works are ongoing and are at 50 per cent completed. The project has been experiencing delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and provision of power to the site. The target for completion is September 2022.

The William Street pump house: The upgrade of the William Street pump house is currently being reviewed by the consultants as part of their initiative under the assistance programme by the CAF, Andean Development Bank of Latin America. The scope of work includes the installation of two new electric pumps. This programme is expected to be launched in January 2023. I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, you have indicated since 2021 that certain electric pumps were being ordered from suppliers and COVID-19 has delayed the suppliers. Can you now confirm that we will get the replacement of the six—well, there are five pumps—we will get the replacement of all of these five pumps within this year because we are on the brink of the rainy season?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, just to indicate to the Member, I just

gave the scope of works. Works commenced on the upgrade of the Sadhoo Trace pump house, the scope of work includes the installation of one new additional pump. There are no plans to replace the five or six pumps in the El Socorro location. We have pumps coming in but that is for throughout Trinidad. What we have now is one pump to be replaced because there are four working pumps in that area. So one pump will be replaced now at one of the sites and at the other site, we are looking at upgrading the pumps. Those pumps will not come in this year because there are working pumps on the site. There are two pumps at each pump house in that area working.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you confirm that those pumps are working? Because our information is and I will invite the Minister to tour especially when those pumps are on that those pumps are barely functional.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, my information and I have visited the site, I visit the site every rainy season and prior to the rainy season. Yes, there are four working pumps in that area. Unfortunately, in other areas like in the Bamboo area, there are some elements for some strange reason, whenever these pumps are working at full capacity, go and vandalize the pumps.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Vandalize the pumps. But my information is that at that location, there are four working pumps, one to be upgraded with a new pump at one of the sites.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption and desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Every Member who wishes to ask a supplemental, once it is relevant and within the allocated number of questions, will be able to ask. Let us

hear the responses. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, in light of your allegation that persons are vandalizing the pumps, what steps have your Ministry taken to secure those pumps including the installation of CCTV cameras?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, it is not an allegation. These pumps have been vandalized. Two of the pumps at the Bamboo site have been burnt. We have spent in excess of a quarter million dollars to replace these pumps. It is just not an allegation, there is proof that these pumps have been vandalized. The Ministry has taken steps to look at the security. We have lost pumps, not only in Bamboo but we have also lost pumps in the Port of Spain area and we are working with the TTPS to try to safeguard these pumps.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, in light of your revelation that the pumps are being vandalized, can you give us the date in which you have reported this matter to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, we have not only reported these pumps to the TTPS on the days that they were vandalized, the TTPS, I understand in one instance, has actually made arrest. This is not something that is just to pumps. Everyone knows that there is a problem with cables being stolen at this point in time. We have lost about four or five pump sites because of the vandals in the area. So if you see a pump house that is down, first thing you need to check to see if somebody went there to vandalize them because the Ministry does have a programme to ensure that every pump house has working pumps in Trinidad and

Tobago and again, we are upgrading all these pumps and all these pump houses and this year, we expect to commission about five new pumps.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Barataria/ San Juan Constituency
(Repair and Replacement of Manhole Covers)**

157. Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister state what steps are being taken to repair or replace the broken and missing manhole covers in the constituency of Barataria/San Juan?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Works and Transport under the manhole cover repair work programme, the Ministry recently conducted a detailed inspection and inventory of the manhole covers within the Barataria/San Juan constituency along Fifth Avenue, El Socorro Road and Aranguez Road. In the interim measures, critical effective manhole covers have been protected by placing temporary covering and or barricades to prevent injury to pedestrians. More comprehensive repairs are scheduled to commence at the beginning of May 2022.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, I just want to confirm that Aranguez Main Road does not fall within the constituency of Barataria/San Juan so I am going to ask you whether or not works are going to be commenced and completed on the El Socorro Main Road because a lot of persons walk along that main road to get to the mosque and other commercial businesses on the road.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: The answer is yes.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: The answer is yes.

Mr. Hosein: When will that commence, Minister?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, as I said, we are programme to start work on or about May 2022. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, are you aware that one person would have— He fell because of a dilapidated manhole cover and suffered severe damages?

Madam Speaker: Member, I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question based on the question originally asked and the answers thus far. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Barataria/San Juan Constituency
(Clearing of Drains and Rivers)**

158. Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister state when the major drains and rivers, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works and Transport will be cleared, in the constituency of Barataria/ San Juan?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. The 2021/2022 desilting programme consists of planned work by district rather than by constituency. For the fiscal year, the north division, 153 projects were planned under the drainage north district and executed based on the availability of funding. To date, a total of 97 projects have been executed over three phases of which 63 have been completed, 21 ongoing and 13 are to commence. Drainage central district, for this fiscal year, there are 106 projects planned under the drainage central district, and executed based on the

availability of funding. To date, the total of 54 projects have been executed over three phases of which 28 have been completed, 24 are ongoing and two are to commence.

2.30 p.m.

The Barataria/San Juan constituency, which falls partly in the north district and partly in the central district, have been included in the list of projects for execution.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, one of the areas in which we have a lot of flooding is the Don Miguel area and this is a result of the drain that runs east and west along the east/west bound lanes of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway into El Socorro south. Can you indicate whether this drain under the highway was in fact part of the work programme and is to be cleaned?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, if the Member of Parliament would just drive along the highway, you would see several excavators at this point in time clearing the drain all the way out to the Caroni River.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, I am not asking about the drains that run parallel to the highway.

Madam Speaker: Just ask the question you want to ask please.

Mr. Hosein: I am asking about the drain that runs at the bottom of the highway, along, perpendicular to the east-west bound.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, may I? Minister, the drain runs from Courts MegaStore to El Socorro south, under the highway. Is that drained to be cleaned?

Because when it backs up, the entire area in Don Miguel and Barataria suffers flooding.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, the answer is yes, and we have gone further than that. We are clearing the drains all the way out to the Caroni River, because if the outflow is not cleared, it makes no sense you are trying to clear just the inside drains. So the answer is yes, those drains, most of which are not cleaned as yet, will be cleaned.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, there is also the drain on the Eastern Main Road from the Croisee to Morvant Junction. Can you confirm that this has been cleaned or is scheduled to be cleaned also?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, again, if the Member would just take a drive through the constituency, you will see the amount of work being done in the Morvant Junction, all the way out to the Malick River, which takes all the water out to the Caroni River. Work actually—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—has been completed in all these areas. As a matter of fact, I did not want to go into constituency, but just to give a fair idea of the amount of work being done in that constituency, and if you just permit me, Madam Speaker, for the Member, for his purpose. The Malick silt strap and desilting upstream; the San Juan River, downstream; the Chattoo drain; collector drain; Williams Street in El Socorro; the Muller Canal, west of the Aranguez; collector drain between Williams Street and Sadhu Trace; drains No. 5 and No. 10 Sadhu Trace. All these have been completed. So the Drainage Division has embarked on a

very ambitious programme there again, over 400 projects, and once funding is available we will be able to execute all 400 projects in this financial year. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, based on all of this work that you have completed, can you give the assurance that the constituents of Barataria/San Juan will not face any flooding for this particular year?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, I can do as much as I can do but I am not God.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: I have always said that flooding has to do with the capacity of the channels and the volume of rainfall. What we can do is to ensure that if there is flooding we will have a very quick runoff because we have cleared the channels. I cannot give you the guarantee. Nobody, I think every country in the world is experiencing flooding at this time because of global warming and Trinidad is not spared from that. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Cannabis Control Bill, 2020 (Adoption of)

Madam Speaker: Members, Members, while I am really delighted to see the camaraderie, let us get serious about the business of the people. Member for San Fernando West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I am to remind you, you have 45 minutes full time.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government and Acting Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name: *Be it resolved* that this House adopt the Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020.

Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to deliver this Motion for consideration by the hon. Members of this House. Madam Speaker, on the 11th of December, 2019, two pieces of law came to this House in the Eleventh Republican Parliament. The first was the amendments to the Dangerous Drugs Act, and then the second was the 2019 version of the legislation which was referred to committee, which has produced in succession this report.

The Dangerous Drugs (Amdt.) Bill, 2019, amended the Dangerous Drugs Act, Chap. 11:25, and effectively we treated with the decriminalization of certain quantities of cannabis as was redefined. The report before us now considered the recommendation of this House that the Cannabis Control Bill, 2019, be referred to a joint select committee. And I am pleased to indicate that that joint select committee in fact was comprised and in the first report of that joint select committee in the Eleventh Republican Parliament we confirmed that we had held two meetings on the January 31, 2020 and on February 28, 2020. At that meeting, Madam Speaker, we called for submissions from 30 different entities ranging from the Law Association, Bankers Association, University of the West Indies, et cetera, et cetera, right through, national bodies, certain Ministries, including the Office of the DPP and the Judiciary.

That committee, and which report was adopted into the body of this report

now before us, received submissions from 30 entities across Trinidad and Tobago. In a subsequent report of the 2019 committee, absorbed by the report before us now, two further meetings were held, one on the 6th of March, 2020, and the second on the 13th of March. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the work of that committee came to an abrupt halt because as is well now the case, on the 16th of March, 2020, we had the advent of Trinidad and Tobago taking note of the global pandemic here locally under our Public Health Regulations.

That committee, Madam Speaker, I had the pleasure of chairing along with Minister Stuart Young, Minister Fitzgerald Hinds, Minister Terrence Deyalsingh, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, Mr. Rushton Paray, Mr. Clarence Rambharat, Mr. Nigel de Freitas, Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon, Mr. Taharqa Obika, Mr. Paul Richards, and then Sen. Ms. Sophia Chote SC.

Madam Speaker, in the Twelfth Republican Parliament coming through the elections of August 2020, a new committee was established and that committee was reformulated again under my chairmanship and that committee considered the 2019 Bill reintroduced as the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020. On Wednesday, the 14th of October, 2020, and on Friday, the 23rd of October, 2020, the House and the Senate referred this matter back to joint select committee and the joint select committee again appointed me as the Chairman of committee along with Ministers Young, Hinds, Deyalsingh, members Paray, Dr. Rai Ragbir, Mr. Clarence Rambharat, Minister Gopee-Scoon, Mr. Paul Richards, Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal, Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial and Mr. Evans Welch.

That committee, Madam Speaker, held 18 meetings and in that committee we went through clause by clause of a matrix of correspondence and submissions presented by the 33 entities, 30 coming in under the 2019 joint select committee and two more submissions coming in from the Association of Psychologists and

the Chief Medical Officer, in total giving us 32 submissions. Madam Speaker, the committee in analyzing the Bill before it, went through the Bill in its granular detail clause by clause and certain amendments were recommended, which are appended to the report, Madam Speaker, as Appendix IV in marked up version.

Very importantly, Madam Speaker, the committee examined the policy considerations which drove this legislation. Now Madam Speaker, permit me a moment to explain that we purposefully separated the issue of decriminalization in the dangerous drugs amendment away from the issue of control of cannabis in its wide part because they were at polar extremes and we did not want to stop the advances that this country could make, in terms of treating with some major issues. So from a policy perspective, Madam Speaker, I would like to put on the record that we considered work at the Ministry of the Attorney General in the Law Reform Commission. I had commissioned a report from the Law Reform Commission. It is entitled *A Policy Document on the Reform of the Laws related to Cannabis Use, Possession and Supply in Trinidad and Tobago*. We had done a decriminalization of marijuana public consultation aspect.

And, Madam Speaker, coming out of that we had a report. I should tell you, Madam Speaker, that that report involved a significant amount of public consultation. Six public consultations with 1,135 persons attending and we took advantage of receiving and publicly discussing Judiciary statistics, forensics statistics, and the Caricom report, which is the third limb of policy being the report of the *Caricom Regional Commission on Marijuana 2018* entitled *Waiting to Exhale—Safeguarding our Future Through Responsible Socio-Legal Policy on Marijuana*. That was chaired by Prof. Rose-Marie Belle Antoine.

Now Madam Speaker, what is material to note is the statistical information underlying this report which the committee has spoken to. And, Madam Speaker,

in looking at the statistics permit me to put on the record the following: Number one, statistics at the Judiciary's position, including prisons information and very importantly, Madam Speaker, statistics coming from the forensics institute.

Now, Madam Speaker, quite interestingly the reason why I am referring to statistics produced in 2019, is that today I have incredible statistics in my hand coming from the Judiciary as at this year. And for the first time in my recollection of parliamentary debates we are able to say we hit the target, and I will tell you how, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the demonstration of statistics which the committee reflected upon and which were posted to the website of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs shows that between the period 2007 to 2018, 84,668 cases came before the Magistracy. Under the Dangerous Drugs Act for possession of marijuana, possession for purposes of trafficking, cultivation of marijuana and gathering; 71,964 of those cases were for possession of marijuana alone.

In the Law Term 2017 to 2018, there were some 9,553 marijuana-related cases, with 8,316 being for possession of marijuana alone. Madam Speaker, in the period 2010 to 2018, we statistically demonstrated approximately 500 persons each year were put into remand. In that entire period 3,429 persons were remanded. We have had, as at today's year, 28 years of the Dangerous Drugs Act. And, Madam Speaker, when we looked at the statistics inside the prisons and we note, Madam Speaker, when you go down to male/female distribution, when you go down as granular as ethnic distribution, a vast majority of our citizens between the ages of 20 to 34 were incarcerated by the thousands in charges as well, 20 to 24 marijuana possession statistics, that age group. In the year we are looking at in the range of years putting the age group 20 to 24, 2,848 people; 25 to 29, 2,783 people. In the

age group 30 to 34, 2,466 people.

Now Madam Speaker, a very interesting statistic, we did a racial disaggregation to demonstrate that it was in our East Indian and African distributions we found that we were significantly in disproportion. And when we did a socio-economic disaggregation we effectively saw that our poorest and most disenfranchised males were being incarcerated.

Now Madam Speaker, one of the driving forces therefore came in a simple submission. In the Magistracy, we were dealing with 144,000 to 146,000 cases per year, and for years this country cried out: We need more courts. We need night court. And we went as a Government and said: We need to disaggregate what is in that court. And we pulled the figure of 8,500 marijuana cases alone per year. And by causing the decriminalization under the dangerous drugs amendments as the companion law to the policy underwriting this report before us, we have seen, Madam Speaker, an important statistic, which I will come to in a second. Because of the 146,000 cases per annum in the Magistrates' Court, we removed 104,000 by applying the U-turn demerit point system, removing motor vehicle and road traffic out and 8,500 cases, we targeted in terms of marijuana.

Now Madam Speaker, permit me to put one more fact on the record before I come to the current statistic. Back in 2019 when this report was being commissioned by the referral to joint select committee, the Forensics Division told us, according to their data, if they looked at the cannabis cases for 2018 and they separated it out, the vast majority of the 753 cases were for possession under 30 grams. But listen to this, it was noted by the centre that once the legislative reform comes into effect, the number of cases before the courts should decrease by 66 per cent and notably will decrease by 74 per cent upon decriminalization under 60 grams. That is a very bold submission to have been made in 2019.

Now, Madam Speaker, we requested information from the Judiciary, and I am very pleased to now inform that as a result of the decriminalization of marijuana, the Judiciary has reported in the statistics in relation to decriminalization of marijuana in a document I obtained from them in February 2022, that there has been a 78 per cent drop in the average number of drug-related matters filed annually at the Magistracy, from 6,600-odd to 1,400-odd; a drop in a monthly total of 551 matters to 114 matters. Now Madam Speaker, what does that mean in the context of the report before us? It shows that with the courage to adopt reform as it relates to decriminalization of marijuana, we have been able to divert the court's attention away from marijuana-related matters. We have dropped the statistical information by 76 per cent, Madam Speaker, on average, and therefore less people are now before the courts in the jeopardy of losing their lives and reputations.

So, Madam Speaker, in this report we come to consider in the published information now before us laid in the House on the 9th of June, 2021, laid in the Senate on the 11th of June, 2021, your committee has had the pleasure of reporting on the legislation proposed. The Cannabis Control Bill, Madam Speaker, is an interesting one because it is the other side of decriminalization. It is the legitimate and lawful exploitation or production or commercial realization, Madam Speaker, separated between medicinal or therapeutic use and religious use. Madam Speaker, what time is full time?

Madam Speaker: 3.21.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to get to the root of this Bill, it is important for us to remember that prior to 1885, cannabis or ganja, as it was referred to, was completely legal. You could use it medicinally, recreationally and industrially. In 1885, we had the Ganja Cultivation Licensing

Ordinance where we licensed cultivators and we put tariffs on goods.

In 1894 we had the licensing of medicinal medical practitioners to keep and sell ganja. In 1899, we had the Ganja Ordinance of that year, which separated prepared ganja for medicine from unprepared or smoking. Now, smoking ganja fell under the Opium Licensing Ordinance of 1879 and you could sell imported ganja for retail or recreational purposes.

Madam Speaker, in 1915 we had the Ganja Ordinance and that allowed cultivation in Trinidad and Tobago. Under the Director of Agriculture there were specific regulations for importation, packaging, sealing, taxing. But in 1928, we had the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, which repealed the Ganja and Opium Ordinances and enter international conventions, the Geneva Convention, its first one, which ensured a licensing regime for importation above 20 pounds. It was after we got to the 1960s, where we had the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs; 1971, the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances; 1972, the protocol that amended the Single Convention; and 1988 the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances that we saw the criminalization of marijuana or ganja as it was referred to.

Madam Speaker, in 1994 we produced our Dangerous Drugs Act, Chap. 11:25. And interestingly in our Customs law we still have reference in Act No. 22 of 1938 to ganja and to how Customs duties, et cetera, were then permitted but then disallowed. What is interesting in our Dangerous Drugs Act, Act No. 38 of 1991, is that under section 4 of the Act, the Minister of Health has the responsibility to make regulations for licensing import/export diversion, sale, manufacture, to issue licences for cultivation, gathering, production, et cetera; to name ports of entry, to deal with packaging, et cetera; to authorize furnishing to masters of ships and to prescribe records. And in section 5 of that law, we have the

disapplication. There is no criminality for certain persons, persons under licences, medical practitioners, dentists, veterinary surgeons, et cetera. So our law, since 1991 has contemplated the legitimate exploitation or cultivation of marijuana, now referred to as cannabis. And Madam Speaker, today the report before us recommends unanimously by all persons in the Joint Select Committee, there is no minority report, we recommend that we create a Cannabis Control Authority.

Madam Speaker, this is no small move. Trinidad and Tobago has the advantage of a very advanced intellectual property system where geo-patenting, where patenting of the DNA of the type of cannabis that we grow is an option. And in looking at the legislative examples that we did, Canada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, we looked at Antigua and Barbuda, we looked at Jamaica, our committee considered and invited persons from these authorities, Barbados, et cetera, to come and speak to the committee. And I wish at this moment to say that as chairman of the two successive committees, the work of the committee was very vigorous and was very interesting. It was certainly a joy to have chaired the committee, Madam Speaker. Because before us is a recommendation for very robust law.

Madam Speaker, if you turn to Appendix IV of the committee's report and we look at in convenient form, the amendments that we propose. Madam Speaker, we are looking at a Bill which is comprised of 68 clauses with nine Parts. I should flag that there are a few minor amendments that we wish to propose at committee stage when the Bill is read a second time for consideration by the House, tiding-up provisions that we had observed at the Attorney General's Office, Madam Speaker. But, Madam Speaker, what we do here is to take the very best example of a statutory authority and put it to work in the context of our law.

Now, from an overarching perspective, Madam Speaker, we are looking at

creation of an authority; we are looking at certain conditions, its management, its ability to borrow, its financial arrangements, its reporting structures to Parliament and otherwise. But when we get, Madam Speaker, to the licensing aspect, it is important to note that the committee recommends that we have two categories of licences: licences for medicinal purposes, which are eight in number, and licences for religious purposes. And that is to be found in clause 29 of the Bill.

When we look at the type of licences for medicinal, therapeutic or scientific purposes, it is important to note we have a cultivator's licence, a research and development licence, a laboratory licence, a processor licence, a retail distributor licence, an import licence, an export licence, and transport licence. That category of licences proposed in clause 29 applies to the medicinal, therapeutic or scientific purposes. It is defined. Medicinal purposes are defined in the interpretation section. It is tied in to Part V of the Bill, beginning at clause 42 of the Bill, that is the medicinal aspect, and separate from that, the different packages of licences available for religious purposes, which is to be found at Part VI of the Bill, beginning at clause 47. The religious licences are five in number: a cultivator religious licence, a dispensary religious licence, an import religious licence, an export religious licence, and a transport religious licence. And then the Bill purposes that in this licensing regime that there are certain types of licences that flow with the grant of a particular licence, for instance, the transportation and other forms of licences that flow with it.

Very importantly, Madam Speaker, the Bill proposes who can receive a licence. And if we look to clause 30 and we look to the eligibility for a licence we specify you must be an adult, because this Bill, recommended by the committee, proposes that children must be strictly protected.

3.00 p.m.

I remind, Madam Speaker, that our Children Act, No.12 of 2012 is in operation, that section 35 of that Act, exposing a child to dangerous drug applies strictly; that section 36, giving a child a dangerous drug, applies strictly; that section 37 of that Act, that is where a child is used to buy or sell or deliver a drug, applies strictly and that there is parental responsibility for the child.

And, Madam Speaker, when we look to the persons, you must be an adult in eligibility—

“...a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago;

...a permanent resident of Trinidad and Tobago; or

...a citizen of the CARICOM Member State, other than Trinidad and Tobago;”

And lastly, you can be:

“...a company, firm, partnership, or co-operative society...”

Let me explain this. We are in the realm of the CSME. Our neighbours in the Caricom are ahead of us in the game because quite frankly, prior to this Government, no one had the courage to treat with the decriminalization and legitimate exploitation of cannabis. When we contemplate the CSME run, we have to look at the fact that Barbados and Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines are already in full production. They are exporting, they are now meeting the world with the ingenious products that are very carefully managed. When we looked to the fact of Caricom citizenship, therefore, in eligibility in clause 30, it is an important requirement. When we get to a company, firm, partnership or cooperative society or a religious organization, which must be registered under the Non-Profit Organisations Act, we mandate that you must have a 30 per cent local content.

Now, Madam Speaker, the All Mansions of Rastafari entity came to us and we looked at the push in Jamaica where those who had fought for the decriminalization of marijuana for years complained that they were put out of the industry, that they were denied the opportunity to form cooperative societies and to benefit from “the herb”. Madam Speaker, in looking at the economic opportunity for our own citizens, including cooperative societies, we found it prudent to put a mandatory local content factor. Why? The mind and management of the best in class for cannabis production in the safest environment, we must accept, comes from foreign jurisdictions. But, Madam Speaker, our people, the All Mansions of Rastafari, people who have persevered in calling as advocates for decriminalization and legitimate exploitation, they too must have a voice. And the Government has been with great pleasure put in the position of standing as an advocate for equal opportunity and fair chance for those who encouraged us to have the courage to do this in a responsible way.

Madam Speaker, in terms of the other side of the coin, because this is a very heartfelt issue, there are people that feel that we should never decriminalize cannabis. What we looked at when we looked at the prisons’ data, when we looked at the courts’ data, we saw that our citizens were being locked up, thrown away and lives ended. And what was by far a better opportunity for us as a policy consideration in this report was to ensure that we control the management of it, children must be protected, use and smoking in a public place is not permitted, religious purpose is strictly organized, and it is strictly organized, Madam Speaker, under the Non-Profit Organisations Act, by the fact that you must file an AML/CFT/PF questionnaire, an Anti-Money Laundering/Countering Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation Financing, you must have full financial disclosure. We

protect the financial disclosure aspects by creating a public register for things that can be inspected and a private register for the sensitive personal information.

Madam Speaker, we ensure protection for our children and those vulnerable in society by ensuring that there is a rigorous inspection regime. First of all, Madam Speaker, as a material point, the Committee points you to the fact that you have to, as a term and condition of licence, if you looked at clause 35, you must be registered; you cannot have a licence for a dwelling home, it must be in a commercial aspect; you have to obey the terms and conditions of licences, but you must strictly consent to the entry of inspectors on any premises specified in the licence.

And then, when you get to the “Inspection Programme”, Madam Speaker, you get to Part VIII of the Bill under “Inspections”, you get to clause 59 of the Bill, right through, Madam Speaker, to clause 64, you will see that there is a regime for inspection that allows full access inspection. In other words, if you do not want to consent to rigorous scrutiny, do not apply for a licence.

We, of course, take in aid the use of access to premises via inspectors because you have consented, as a condition of your licence, clause 35 and clause 59 onward added together but we preserve very strictly, in clause 64, the ability for a magistrate being:

“...satisfied by information on oath...that there are reasonable grounds for...”—the grant of a warrant, Madam Speaker.

And therefore, we are not in any form or fashion abandoning what works for us. In fact, we are doing the opposite, we are bringing it to life in the structures of taking conscious reflection in the law in clause 64 of the use of a warrant for entry and for purposes.

Madam Speaker, when you get to the concept of medicinal versus religious use, I would like to take you, Madam Speaker, to Part V of the Bill, at Appendix IV of the report, beginning with clause 42, “Medicinal Cannabis”. And you will see, Madam Speaker, that we have very strict conditions on parental involvement, persons with responsibility for the child involvement. We ensure that the circumstances are such that if you are to be at all a user of cannabis, under the cannabis control position, you must comply with the medicinal cannabis provisions.

“A person who uses medicinal cannabis...”—and that is defined in the interpretation section—“without being authorised to use medicinal cannabis by a prescription or recommendation from a medical practitioner commits an offence...”

That is both summary and indictable.

A—“...parent or guardian of, or person with responsibility for a patient who is a child.”—stick a pin, there is an amendment going to be proposed there—“shall obtain a certificate in writing from a medical practitioner certifying that the use of the medicinal cannabis is necessary in the case of that child, and the parent or guardian shall consent in writing to the use of the medicinal cannabis by the child.”

And then there are very strict limitations on dosages. You cannot have a recommendation or prescription which involves filling over 30 days. There must be a constant cycle. The medical practitioners are obliged to keep very strict records. Those records are subject to call. They must be submitted. They can be anonymized in certain circumstances so that the private information of patient confidentiality is preserved.

Madam Speaker, we have very strict provisions, if you look at clause 45, with respect to caregivers. Because, Madam Speaker, as I reflected, when I piloted the Dangerous Drugs (Amdt.) Bill in 2019, I recall vividly the experience of that dearly beloved Senator then, Corinne Baptiste-McKnight, as she wrestled with cancer, God rest her beautiful soul, and as I visited her at Vitas House, telling me openly, pursuant to medical prescription, that the only thing that eased her pain was a smoke of marijuana. It dawned upon my mind, as a non-user of marijuana, a non-user of cannabis, that the relief factors brought about by this have very, very immediate concerns. But, Madam Speaker, equally so, we have tales of people who have committed suicide under drug use, who have lost their lives to uncontrolled and unsupervised cannabis and finding the balance here requires us, as this law has proposed, to have dose limitations, caregiver limitations, strict rules for medical practitioners.

Madam Speaker, if you go to the “Dispensing of medical cannabis”, it is where you will find in clause 46 what I am referring to, the strict record keeping, the prescriptive positions that are given by law, the register to be kept. Then we go—if you look at Part VI to “Cannabis for Religious Purposes”, it is here that we are very strict about sacramental dispensary, an absolute prohibition against any form of profitable engagement for sacramental dispensary. Children cannot be exposed in the sacramental dispensary aspects. If you are going to create a religious organization—because what is the freedom of religion in this country as recognized in the Constitution? It is a very amorphous thing. It is not defined what a religion actually is. What is Christianity in law? It may be a natural law, it may be a canon law but it is not certainly described in the laws in any books of a country, in any prescriptive way, other than in marriage Acts, et cetera. It is the

same thing for Islamic law, Sharia law; it is the same thing for the canons of any other faith and prescription.

So what we did here in the religious purposes, Part VI, we mandated that you had to be registered under the Non-Profit Organisations Act, and there are very strict requirements for that, Madam Speaker. That is a dynamic piece of law which I, as representative in the Attorney General's Office, had the pleasure of passing. And that we have now seen in full operation, in the statistical outlay, with some 11,000 non-profit organizations being registered between the old provisions of law and the new provisions of law.

Madam Speaker, when we look to the "Registers", it is what I was referring to earlier in Part VII. And in the registers, we are referring to the need for a private register to deal with the sensitive personal information. It is available to law enforcement. It is available to the supervisory authority of the Financial Intelligence Unit or other entities. It is available on the court order. But it is not available to the public because it involves sensitive, personal information within the data protection principles recognized by our laws. On the other hand, the public register is available and the public register includes the type of registries for the type of licences that we have.

Madam Speaker, when we get to the manner in which the law is administered, we looked to the approval of the licence, the variation of the licence, the suspension of the licence, the revocation of the licence. There is a neat logical distribution in the Bill, which is annexed as Appendix IV to the report, which says how much time is required in consideration, the fact that you must give public notice in respect of applications, you are to invite objections to applications, you are to consider those objections, you are to rule upon it, you are to ensure that a fair opportunity is given to the applicant to respond to objections. And in the event that

the Authority should decide to reject an application or in any event where there is a disagreement from the applicant's perspective, Madam Speaker, I would like to point you to clause 67, which entrenches that:

“A person who is aggrieved by a decision have the Authority under this Act, to refuse to grant or renew a licence, to suspend or revoke a licence, or to impose a civil fine, may, within thirty days of being informed of that decision, appealed to the High Court.”

So, we have preserved due process moving from the quasi-judicial entity, which is the Authority, into the High Court, preserving due process.

Very importantly, Madam Speaker, we allow for administrative fines to apply. And I signal that when we get to clause 65, there is an amendment we propose which will harmonize what we did most recently in the special economic zones legislation with this particular law. This law was drafted before we settled the special economic zones law. So, there is an amendment that we propose to circulate at committee stage on the second reading of the Bill itself but in the administrative fine position, we are taking advantage of what we call Recommendation 35 of the Financial Action Task Force which says that you ought to have an alternative to simple locking up people or charges.

We also propose, in harmonizing this section, to remove the reference to the mandatory consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions, to bring it in line with what we passed as a Parliament in the special economic zones legislation.

Madam Speaker, if you jump backwards now into Appendix IV and we go to the Authority itself—very important to note that the Authority is in Part II. It is to be called the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority. It has very broad functions, Madam Speaker, advising the Ministry—

“...grant, amend, suspend, revoke or cancel licences and set terms and conditions...

...inspect, monitor, access the handling of cannabis pursuant to licences...

...take enforcement measures...

...establish and maintain...”—registers.

“...establish and maintain an electronic database...”—and other— “tracking of the handling of cannabis matters...”—electronically.

“...establish and maintain an electronic register of medical practitioners, patients and caregivers...

...establish and maintain...other registers and databases as may be prescribed;

...assist with the provision of analytical services;”

Establish programmes—“...for the distribution of educational materials...training programmes...”—et cetera.

“...ensure...proper disposal requirements...

“...enter into...”—agreements and arrangements.

“...perform such other functions...”

In doing this, Madam Speaker, we are ensuring that there is a vertical and horizontal integration of services.

Very importantly, the Authority when it is comprised, will have the task of bringing to life, regulations. I refer you to clause 68, where:

“The Authority may, with the approval of the Minister”—that is the Minister of Health—“make Regulations generally for carrying this Act into effect...”

And it is those regulations that will be the binding glue—by the way, the regulations are proposed to be done under affirmative resolution, under clause 68(3). Why? It is so serious a matter that we are treating with a scheduled

dangerous drug under the Dangerous Drugs Act in a different way, we want to make sure that the full attention of the Parliament is brought to bear in the regulations that are to ensue.

Madam Speaker, the board itself is comprised of nine persons. There is a CEO that is an ex officio participant but has no voting rights. We asked for the fields of:

“...law;
...management;
...finance or accounting;
...medicine;
...scientific research;
...agriculture;
...law enforcement;
...education”—and—
“...drug rehabilitation;”

Stick a pin. Madam Speaker, this Government birthed—in the legislative amendments we did in the criminal proceedings route and the Children Court, we birthed a drug rehabilitation court which the Judiciary has very successfully operationalized. And that is something to take our citizens or persons who come before the court and, very importantly, our children out of conflict with the law, not just by locking them up by the thousands, as the data demonstrates, but instead by rehabilitating persons, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the board has the flexibility of meetings, et cetera. In the usual conditions, it has staff that it can employ, it has committees that it can employ, it has experts that it can employ. Madam Speaker, we have a strict obligation of confidentiality and we have a strict obligation in respect of conflicts

of interest. Because in drafting the provisions, we needed to make sure that you could not participate, either as an employee or as a member of the board of directors, if you have a commercial or other pecuniary or contingent interest in the handling of cannabis; handling not including the lawful medicinal use of cannabis which can be done by prescription. If you have a conflict of interest, you must declare it. There must be annual declarations to underwrite the confidentiality provisions and the conflict of interest provisions.

Madam Speaker, accounts are to be produced, reports to Parliament are to be produced. Parliament is to receive those things within prescribed time frames. And, Madam Speaker, in a nutshell, therefore, we have taken the law in relation to dangerous drugs. In 2019, we had the courage to decriminalize cannabis. In 2022, I can stand before you now and say there has been an over 70 per cent drop in matters coming before the Magistrates' Court. That is no small achievement.

Madam Speaker, many of my constituents tell me of the relief that they feel in knowing that they do not have to look over their shoulder to be arrested. Madam Speaker, we are in that end of the equation today capable of speaking to absolute success, which is still ongoing, but today we are saying to the nation, let us do like the rest of the world has, let us carefully manage the lawful exploitation of cannabis, cultivation, production, et cetera, under the licence; let us look after the most vulnerable, our children, et cetera; let us categorize it into medicinal use and religious use; let us come up with eight licences on the medicinal side, five on the religious side; let us introduce law enforcement; let us have a rigorous system of inspection; let us have consent, and let us allow the international narcotics control agencies who have already looked at our position and have told us that we are not offending any of the international rules in the conventions; let us look at giving Trinidad and Tobago a fair opportunity.

Madam Speaker, as the Chairman of this Committee, I wish to say that it was a sincere pleasure to produce work of this kind. I wish to thank the Legislative Drafting Department at the Attorney General's Office and the Secretariat of the Parliament for the very hard work that was put into this, including, in particular, Madam Speaker, the work that the CPC himself lent to this exercise as he sat in the Committee with us. We have had a good product, now tabled by way of report and, Madam Speaker, promptly at an end now, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, you are reminded you have 45 minutes full time.

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this historic and overdue legislation. Madam Speaker, the Government is seeking, through this Bill, to bring Trinidad and Tobago up to speed with the rest of the region and other countries with respect to cannabis law reform. Through this legislative measure, Madam Speaker, an innovative green industry will gain official recognition in Trinidad and Tobago and it would spawn a massive processing trade.

The Cannabis Control Bill would also establish an institution to regulate that industry and would demark who could participate and who could benefit commercially. The legislation, Madam Speaker, would also have the result of removing the long-standing stigma that has been associated with cannabis cultivation and its associated use. But, Madam Speaker, cannabis is nothing new to Trinidad and Tobago and it must not be dealt with in such a manner either, to do so, Madam Speaker, with dishonor and disregard to our past.

The “herb”, as the Attorney General referred to it, was brought to the West Indies, especially Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Jamaica, during the Indian labour indentureship. It was smoked in what they refer to as chillums by the masses and used for purposes of therapy, worship and relaxation. But it was indicated by the Attorney General, sometime around 1915/1916, the colonial authorities assented to a ganja ordinance which prohibited the cultivation of the plant. A more prohibitive law was enacted in 1928 as well.

But cannabis, which was also called “Indian hemp”, was used freely for years until it was deemed by the authorities to be a cause of immense social problems. Punishments were imposed, even though illegal plantations flourished in rural forested areas, and there was a thriving underworld market. Those fields, Madam Speaker, serviced cannabis users and lifted many a farmer in rural communities and their families out of a life of poverty. This split approach, Madam Speaker, to cannabis is one of stark contradictions of life in Trinidad and Tobago. For many years, our country was held prisoner to backward thinking and repressive colonial laws.

It is regrettable, Madam Speaker, that there could be no removal of the blemish records of thousands of people who over the years utilized cannabis for medical ailments or for simple pleasure and relaxations. Many of those people served rough prison terms or paid major fines for a herb whose use goes back centuries in various civilizations around the world. Some of those convicts, especially impressionable youth, later embarked on lives of serious crimes. They destroyed people’s lives, Madam Speaker, and they wrecked their own lives as well. In many cases, they were indoctrinated into the criminal lifestyle while they were behind bars.

Today, Madam Speaker, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is debating a legislative measure that generally conforms to modern scientific, legal, social and economic research and an associated accepted wisdom in the industry. But the hon. Minister and the Government should not be so quick to take a lap of honour for the proposed reform that is before us. Now, Madam Speaker, the Opposition appreciates the momentous achievement that has been made in this Parliament today. Let me be clear from the outset, the Opposition Bench is fully supportive of the establishment of this burgeoning industry as long as the legislation, which protects the interests and rights of the citizens, is closely monitored, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, based on that, we do have some valid concerns which we would express during this debate. Those concerns relate broadly to the legal, administrative, some medicinal, sacramental and other core aspects of the Bill that is before—that was before the Joint Select Committee as well, Madam Speaker.

We are also very apprehensive about who would benefit from the major industry that would emerge. Permit me, Madam Speaker, to congratulate my colleagues, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, Dr. Rai Ragbir, and Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial of the other place for their insightful contributions to the Joint Select Committee.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, the current re-examination of cannabis laws in the region follows the establishment of the Caricom Regional Commission on Marijuana in 2014 in St. Vincent. The hon. Member for Siparia as Prime Minister was pivotal, along with her fellow leaders, in the establishment of that very same commission, Madam Speaker. The commission was mandated to review the legal regimes regulating cannabis in light of the fast-evolving global trends at that time.

Caricom leaders recognized that the region would benefit—would be left behind unless there was an urgent and relevant re-examination of existing laws.

Madam Speaker, the commission reported in June of 2018, since then, as you would be well aware, Madam Speaker, several Caricom countries have moved forward with appropriate new legislation. Unfortunately, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is among the last off the blocks with respect to major cannabis legislative reform. Antigua and Barbuda was amongst the first in 2018 with the Misuse of Drugs (Amdt.) Bill, which permitted limited personal use of cannabis. Our Government later brought legislation to decriminalize limited personal use of cannabis. St. Vincent and the Grenadines not only modernized its applicable legislation but, Madam Speaker, they created a massive and a progressive cultivation industry on those islands. That country's government, Madam Speaker, maximized the use of its suitable terrain, its location and its valuable small farmers. Jamaica, Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis and other Caricom neighbours have also legalized and regulated cannabis use.

3.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, there is a wind of change in the cannabis industry that is sweeping this region. You see, Madam Speaker, the global cannabis industry is being projected to be worth US \$197 billion in six years' time. That forecast, Madam Speaker, was made in January of this year, by the respected *Fortune Business Insights*. There have been various projections by different institutions but it is obvious to all that the cannabis industry is a flourishing business and we ought not to get left behind.

The stunning forecasts, financially, are being attributed due to several factors, Madam Speaker. The most crucial reason is the increasing awareness about the therapeutic and medicinal benefits of cannabis as an organic product. As we all

know, cannabis is used to treat a number of ailments, Madam Speaker, including Alzheimer, cancer and several neurological disorders. *Fortune* described the global cannabis market as unprecedented and staggering.

A recent report of a London-based organization named Cannabis Business Plans said the prospective markets in Latin America and the Caribbean would be worth US \$800 million by 2026, Madam Speaker. That is just four years down the road from today. That latter report said that the region would benefit from labour costs that are 80 per cent lower than what is found in North America, Madam Speaker.

So, even while the Government is hailing this legislation before us today, we must appreciate that Trinidad and Tobago, under this administration, is already behind most of the progressive nations in this industry and international timelines confirm this fact, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is and it can be a stark commentary on our country's leadership, which we must address. After all, most people today can testify of the overly need to diversify our stagnant economy, secure new sources of foreign exchange, establish downstream activities and create employment. Madam Speaker, this situation exists despite the fact that Trinidad and Tobago has a long familiarity with cannabis with our skilled farmers and appropriate weather.

We have the capacity here in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, to set up the appropriate processing industries, utilize export chains and market our brand Trinidad and Tobago. We could benefit from a transfer of technology in a fast-growing sector. We could boost the tourism sector in the manner that Jamaica and other forward-thinking Caricom nations are doing. This is a real opportunity, Madam Speaker, to set up a green economy. It will not come greener than this, Madam Speaker. There are lucrative openings for a wide range of participants from

low-skilled players to major high-tech investors. This is welcome in a post-pandemic era saddled with extremely high unemployment across the streams in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, there will be opportunities for the common man to the sophisticated entrepreneur and, yet, Madam Speaker, taking this into consideration, this legislation is only now before our Parliament. We should note, Madam Speaker that the law which is before us today, will not get a life until the Cannabis Licensing Authority is established and the applicable regulations are introduced. Madam Speaker, all of this could take several more months or years with the pace of this Government's performance in recent times, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, let us, therefore, appreciate that Trinidad and Tobago is playing catch-up with the rest of the world in facilitating the establishment of a structured cannabis industry.

Madam Speaker, allow me to comment a bit on the regulations which ought to be followed up by the Cannabis Authority once put together. Madam Speaker, I feel a bit uneasy because I recalled a manner in which the Government made some errors with the simple matter of the COVID-19 face mask regulations. This entire Parliament, if you would recall, Madam Speaker, became a bit of a laughing stock of the entire country, when there was undebated regulations, the country saw it as a bit pathetic and unreasonable by the majority of citizens at that time. I can only hope that the Government improves its efficiency on this matter and brings regulations for full scrutiny and debate in the shortest time frame as soon as the Authority is assembled and they start their work.

I also expect the Government would prevail upon the Authority at that time to treat the creation of regulations with the urgent priority that it deserves. In all of this, Madam Speaker, the Authority would require relevant human and technical

resources to undertake its functions in a competent manner. We are all aware, Madam Speaker, that various institutions, including in most recent times, the Judiciary, the DPP's Office, often cry out about the absence of requisite support systems. As recently in January this year, Madam Speaker, the Procurement Regulator said that there were about 18 companies that had questionable practices, but he too did not have the resources to carry out certain investigations. That was said before a Public Accounts Committee, most recently, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we must make sure that there should be no situation like this with the Cannabis Licensing Authority. Any red tape would only set back Trinidad and Tobago's involvement in this mushrooming industry.

Clause 20 indicates, Madam Speaker, that funding would come from the Consolidated Fund and other sources. It is critical that the Government makes appropriate annual provisions to the Consolidated Fund as to avoid these very same issues that are hampering these other state agencies. We do not want the Authority to be hampered by lack of funds, because we will continue to remain left behind the rest of the region and the world, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to this end, I would like in the wind up that if the hon. Acting Attorney General could provide us a firm guarantee that this would be the case and the funds will be provided.

Madam Speaker, with respect to board memberships, members should not only meet the stipulated qualifications, but must be seen to be independent, upstanding and well-respected, Madam Speaker. We must be very careful that the public does not see these directors as surrogates of politicians who are looking to invest in the industry. There must be scrupulous selection of these directors as a matter of great urgency.

Madam Speaker, my medical colleagues will develop the point but I wish to

recommend that clause 6(2) be amended to stipulate the appointment of a director with qualifications and experience in psychiatry. Comparative authorities in other countries, Madam Speaker, have included such a director, because of the psychotropic effects on the use of cannabis. So, we feel having someone there with the requisite skill will lead to proper drafting of regulations, policing, monitoring and so on.

I also recommend that clause 15(1) be amended to add knowledge in agriculture—I just heard the hon. Attorney General make mention of that as well—but as one of the critical qualifications required for the Chief Executive Officer. After all, Madam Speaker, cannabis is first and foremost an agricultural endeavour, so some knowledge from the eyes of the CEO would be very critical to the success of the Authority. Madam Speaker, with respect to confidentiality which the hon. Acting Attorney General just spoke of, which is dealt somewhere in clause 18, there should also be enshrined provisions for whistleblowing as well as one of the key considerations. This should relate to directors, all employees of the Authority as well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to comment on the matter of licensing which is a huge part of the function of the Cannabis Authority, and which is also crucial and really involves the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the most fundamental aspect of this legislation, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, if I were to draw your attention to Jamaica, as a regional leader in the industry, they could provide much guidance and support to our budding operations. The organization BMC Globalization and Health, in 2021, in a study, they described Jamaica as being at the forefront of cannabis law reform in the developing world. Madam Speaker, as said by the Attorney General Acting, the Jamaican authorities were very helpful in assisting the joint select committee, but I wish to recommend that

they should be tapped for further support with respect to ownership of companies entering the industry. And, Madam Speaker, that is an area that, you know, we have most concerns in terms of ownership and I will explain why ownership is critical in terms of the national interest.

Jamaica, Madam Speaker, has utilized its commercial licensing regime to facilitate foreign investments while safeguarding its domestic industry. Foreign partnerships have assisted in financial investments and the transfer of technical knowledge. But we must utilize the skill and knowledge of others to enhance our upcoming industry. Jamaica has engaged in research and development which is essential to an evolving industry. But, Madam Speaker, the Jamaican authorities have guarded against predatory shareholder arrangements and domestic political interference. The Jamaican legislation, Madam Speaker, was very clear and concise on these regulatory matters which we hope that the Cannabis Authority will take into consideration when drafting their regulations.

Madam Speaker, in Jamaica, there is 51 per cent local ownership and control in international partners. That is very significant, Madam Speaker, because I would want that the local company must have a say on issues around employment numbers, you know, things that are critical to the nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. If we do otherwise, we will give a foreign partner the opportunity to dictate the pace which at some point in time, could work against our local people here, Madam Speaker.

Barbados and other regional states have legislated 70:30 agreements in favour of domestic players. The hon. Attorney General acting, just indicated that in our legislation, we are looking at 30 per cent local ownership, Madam Speaker. That is something that we would like the Attorney General to revisit, have the regulators when the Authority is put together to review that, taking into

consideration what is happening in the region in terms of ownership or shareholding of these companies, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, early on, Jamaica and other islands realized that effective legislation was required in transitioning from illegal to legal cannabis markets, and in supporting small-scale cultivators and this is where it is very, very important and critical, Madam Speaker. In Jamaica, taking note of the amount of small farmers, they went ahead and they established a tier-based system to develop these small farmers. So, in Jamaica, they softened the entry requirements by issuing what they called a Cultivator's (Transitional) Special Permit which gave the small farmers 30 months to graduate into a full-scale operator. So, in that way, they formed a type of incubator to make sure that our small farmers become part of the burgeoning and developing industry and they were not pushed away because of their size, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in Jamaica, that measure was called the Alternative Development Programme. The programme was well received by all indications, Madam Speaker, and it has been very, very successful in its purpose. We commend it back to the Attorney General for his consideration at the committee stage.

But, Madam Speaker, sadly to say, that in our legislation, as it is drafted, there is very little or no provisions outside of what is going to come in the regulations that is going to protect our small farmers. I have not seen it, none of my colleagues who were at the committee were able to sift through what was being proposed. And I can tell you, the Attorney General, at that time, was very, very clear that most of these matters that were raised advised that it was dealt with at the regulation stage. So, we want to put it on the record that we look forward to see this being dealt with or, at least, have a conversation at the regulation stage, Madam Speaker. But I will leave much of that discussion to my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland, who will have much more to say on

the matters of small farmers, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, if I would just draw your attention quickly again to Barbados and other territories that have created mechanisms for quality control, for example, licensees must have quality testing before trading. Effective quality control would put justified pressure on fly-by-night operators and ensure safe products are dispensed to the public. Again, these things should be captured in the regulations, so we are putting it on the record for consideration.

Madam Speaker, if I were to draw your attention to Part IV of the Bill which provides for licensing of applicants, it makes no stipulations for the effective protection of local investors. That is something that is part of a lot of other legislation in other jurisdictions. What is missing, Madam Speaker, is that the legislation does not have what I would describe as a philosophical outlook as to what this new industry is aimed at achieving, and who are to be the major financial beneficiaries. In reading the legislation, one has to look very, very carefully and closely to see where the legislation is going and who will eventually be the primary beneficiaries of this new industry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in our liberalized environment, therefore, we could find exploitative investors setting up predatory joint venture arrangements. There are several such models around the world, Madam Speaker, and what is happening, you have what you call big cannabis is developing in some jurisdictions, similar to big tobacco and big pharma in the pharmaceutical industry. Trinidad and Tobago, through this legislation through this Parliament, we must guard against becoming a sardine swimming in a world of ferocious cannabis sharks, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the well regarded *Forbes Magazine* reported in its edition of December 31, 2021, that large corporations are challenging certain states in the United States on this very same matter. Those states are right now, Madam

Speaker, writing laws to preserve control for their domestic companies. But the big operators are hiring top lawyers, Madam Speaker and they are going to court to fight this legislation that is coming. So, Madam Speaker, businesses with deep pockets are going to fight to get the lion's share of this industry. The Government must be decisive in insisting that the liberalized cannabis industry must, and at all times, bring the greatest benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray: And the Government must be proactive in doing so as well, Madam Speaker. That means there must be relevant stipulations in the Bill that is before us. For example, Madam Speaker, the hon. Attorney General spoke to the Rastafarian community which utilizes cannabis for sacramental purposes, and they are allowed to do so under this Bill to dispense under the non-profit organizations system. But, Madam Speaker, this community is already allowed to cultivate and consume for purposes in private spaces. Why not let us address the issue of allowing youth unlimited cultivation in the public space that as a registered place of worship, amendments to the Dangerous Drugs Act, and allow that community to perhaps look at a commercial operation, because as the Attorney General said, they were pivotal in driving this whole conversation about the removal from the Dangerous Drugs Act and so on. So, perhaps, we should have legislation to ensure that communities like those, not only are left as consumers, but can get into the commercial operation as well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, they must have a meaningful and sustainable stake in this emerging industry as well. In the absence of that type of affirmative action by the Government, Madam Speaker, our cannabis industry could become a modern-day version of investment by invitation. Madam Speaker, you would recall that Sir Arthur Lewis, the Nobel Laureate, had advocated for this model many, many years

ago, but that investment approach was appropriate for the period when this post-colonial Caribbean country was seeking to rebuild a one-track plantation economy. But Trinidad and Tobago now has resources and experience in charting our own economic future, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we do have experts in Trinidad and Tobago, advisors in the industry, who have written for several of the local and regional territories and, I mean, we do have the resources that can be put in place to ensure that we get the best possible legislation for the best possible outcome to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I strongly urge the Government to introduce a clause under Part IV to stipulate majority, consider it, majority local ownership in all organizations seeking licences. This could be fashioned, clearly, after the legislations of other Caricom territories.

Madam Speaker, licensing for medical, therapeutic and scientific purposes must bring the greatest rewards to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. We must be aware that potential big operators would come beating down our doors. This has been the experience in Jamaica and while I am saddened that we are last off the block, but we have the benefit for the most amount of experience, learning from those other territories, Madam Speaker .

Madam Speaker, companies may want to invest in medical capsules, balms, roll-ons and other products, edibles, cannabis-infused water and other items commercially, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Jamaica has a company called JACANA which has been certified to export medical cannabis as a natural relief for chronic pain through its alliance with a pharmaceutical company. So, Madam Speaker, these are the types of opportunities that lay before us when this Bill is passed and regulations made and it is done in the right way. Madam Speaker, that

subset in the medical cannabis industry is worth tens of millions of dollars, and people around the world, as you would know, they are seeking out natural organic solutions for most medical problems today. They are losing their reliance on chemical medicine and looking for organic options, Madam Speaker.

But, Madam Speaker, again, we have a very low ranking on the ease of doing business matrices and it is a deterrent to investment. We must address this deficiency now. If we want to attract these companies who have the technology, who may have the financing to drive the industry, we cannot bog them down with issues in the ease of doing business that will deter them and turn them away and send them away to other regional players, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this Cannabis Authority that is going to be formed out of this legislation today, will have a tremendous sway with respect to growing cannabis and manufacturing, transporting, research and the exporting of all associated products. Madam Speaker, literally, this Authority is going to be really an economic powerhouse that our legislation and our regulation must manage and must manage carefully, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago, we would stand alone in Caricom if we refuse to explicitly legislate on this matter of company ownership and the awarding of licences, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there was another concern that was brought up at the committee stage and, again, the hon. Attorney General, at that time, advised that regulations would take care of it. The cultivator licence, as it stands now, Madam Speaker, does not indicate how much land can be utilized, size, geographic location, proximity to schools, hospitals and so on. Madam Speaker, we felt that like the Jamaican legislation, this thing should be spelt out clearly in the parent law and then the regulations can deal with the item specifics going forward.

Madam Speaker, if I were to draw your attention to the retail distributor

licence as well, in the legislation as it is written, there is very little or no tie-in to pharmacies and no reference to the Pharmacy Act or the Pharmacy Board. There is the matter of intellectual property. As the Attorney General, you know, indicated as well, that IP has an inherent value outside of the physical product as well. Just the method of processing and creating the brand and so on has an IP system as well, Madam Speaker. Although we are lagging a bit behind, we must foresee a day when licensed cultivation facilities, processing operations, retail dispensaries, mass transportation arrangements, wellness spas, export markets; this is going to be something that will carry our brand and we have an opportunity to earn precious foreign income from that as well.

Madam Speaker, I just want to draw your attention very quickly to the Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Dr. Timothy Harris. He told his Parliament that the interest of locals, particularly the Rastafarians would be protected. So, in May 2019, he addressed his National Assembly and he said, and I quote him:

Non-nationals would not be permitted to secure an advantage over nationals as we set out to build our marijuana industry.

And he was very, very clear on that, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as you would know, Saint Kitts and Nevis is one of the smallest independent nations in the western world, but its Prime Minister said he was determined to make it amongst the most advanced and forward-looking countries in the world. Madam Speaker, I strongly urge that the Government revisits this during the committee stage.

I now just turn quickly to provisions in Part V of the Bill which deals with medicinal cannabis. My colleague for Cumuto/Manzanilla and others will expand on these issues but it is our view that clauses 42 to 46 should capture that cannabis use in children and adolescents must be prescribed by a specialist paediatrician.

The Bill provides for the issuance of both a medical prescription and a medical recommendation and provides for medicinal cannabis to be dispensed from both a registered pharmacy and a dispensary. But, Madam Speaker, it does not provide any differentiation on the medical cannabis products issued by prescription or recommendation or sold at a pharmacy or dispensary. The Bill is missing a large part to make the access to medicinal cannabis functional in our respective view, which is the separation of medicinal cannabis into prescribable and non-prescribable medicinal cannabis which would make the provision before us a bit more sensible, Madam Speaker. My colleagues when they take the lectern later on, Madam Speaker, will get into some more details on that medical component.

Madam Speaker, clause 45(3) and (4) provides a role for a caregiver, but such a person is not defined clearly in the legislation itself. I hope this is done in the regulations because ambiguity, at this stage, Madam Speaker, could have serious negative consequences where you may have people assigning themselves as caregiver roles and they are the users, they become abusers of the drug as well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to spend the last couple of minutes I have, dealing very briefly on the issue of the cannabis for sacramental usages. This is such a critical and extensive matter in Jamaica that they saw it fit to put it under the remit of the Ministry of Justice so as to be separated from the administration of the medical use of cannabis.

Madam Speaker, my primary concern, in this case, is that religious organizations can be subverted by criminals for illegal financial activities and, in particular, money laundering. I was very vocal on this matter during the Joint Select Committee, Madam Speaker. Again, the hon. Attorney General, at that time, advised that he felt comfortable and confident that the NPO legislation would

protect at that point in time. But this is not to suggest that any religious organization is involved in illicit underworld functions, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, but we remain troubled. With all of that, we remain troubled about the possible abuse of clause 47 which directs the prohibition of commercial use for religious purposes.

Madam Speaker, what happens if a legitimate religious organization is infiltrated and undermined by nefarious operators? What if such an organization then becomes the conduit for illegal financial dealings? Member for San Fernando West has repeatedly spoken in this House about the proliferation of money laundering activities in this country, Madam Speaker, and he too has acknowledged that there is financial crookedness in this country, Madam Speaker.

4.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, such operators have a reputation for being cunning and conniving and manipulative that we must guard against, Madam Speaker. We do not want religious bodies to become the subject of abuse. And as the Attorney General said, there is no law, there is no constitutional design of what a religious organization is. So there is opportunity for some abuse inside there that our regulations and legislation should pay mindful eye to. Madam Speaker, in addition to that there must be clarity on how these dispensaries in the sacramental locations would operate. Would they operate or be modelled after, like the CDAP operations? If that is not the case what will be the business plan?

Madam Speaker, the Bill also is lacking a bit in addressing something very important, tracking and monitoring systems used in every country with regulated cannabis to track inventory, financial transactions, and this is to prevent the diversion of product and, most importantly, the evasion of taxes and to allow for product recall in the event there is a problem with a batch. And obviously, most

importantly, the promotion and good anti-money laundering principles. Again, we speak to a register system but again we want to ensure that at the time of the provision of the regulations this area is focused clearly, clearly and precisely, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, clause 48(1)(c) provides for 30 grams of cannabis to be dispensed to each religious adherent; the question is, how often is this permissible, once a week, once a month, five times a day? This could put a certain inherent danger in the sacramental component of dispensing of this highly dangerous substance, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in the last minute that I have, couple of minutes, I want to refer to clause 60 which provides for compliance inspections with or without notice. Member for Chaguanas West will speak some more in terms of a lot of the key legal areas where we do find some challenges in the existing legislation, Madam Speaker. But suffice it to say that an inspector is only required to produce a certificate of appointment before he enters the relevant premises. We would want to know if this procedure is consistent with other laws and our constitutional rights and privileges, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, banking issues, commercial banking issues, that has not been addressed in the legislation in any meaningful way. Would locals have to face international banking issues considering that the cannabis trade is illegal in certain jurisdictions? The matter of commercial banking must be comprehensively addressed. The Bill does not treat with this issue, Madam Speaker, and we look forward to seeing some amendments in those areas. Madam Speaker, should there be specially designated medical cannabis consumption lounges? That is something that we raised during the committee stage because consumers may run the risk of a breach of the law if they decide to use their medicine within 500 feet of a school or

if they live in tenanted apartments which prohibits the smoking of marijuana inside there. So, Madam Speaker, it is important that we decide how we are going to deal with this in terms of our tourism and so on.

Madam Speaker, there are several matters that will come up during the debate today and I know my colleagues will continue to bring them up, but suffice it to say we are at a new frontier with an old industry. Cannabis is coming out of the woodwork, Madam Speaker. The Government has to be judicious and responsible on how it moves forward. Most of all, this legislation has to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, with those few words, I want to thank you for the opportunity of sharing my views. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, you are reminded you have 30 minutes full time.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me and I want to thank the good people of St. Joseph on whose behalf I offer this contribution for having me as their Member of Parliament. I would also like to open by thanking the chairman of this committee, Mr. Faris Al-Rawi, and I want to depart a little bit from my friend who spoke before me who thanked the UNC Members. I think I want to thank all Members on both sides who contributed to this joint select. Let us be magnanimous for once. I want to thank all Members.

Madam Speaker, it is a bit unfortunate that the speaker who spoke before me did not indicate that he owns a pharmacy and that, you know, he stands to benefit from this because he spoke a lot about products. It is just good habit to declare yourself that you stand to benefit from this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Members—

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker—yes.

Madam Speaker: Member, it is not just good habit, it is required by our Standing Orders. And we are warning all Members going forward, if there is a matter that one has a beneficial financial interest that one declares that interest. Okay?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is also unfortunate, my colleague who spoke before me, I now have to question everything he said because coming to the end of his contribution, he raised the fact that there was no reference to the Pharmacy Board Act of Trinidad and Tobago in this proposed legislation and that as a Member of the Joint Select Committee—and again, he owns a pharmacy. If he had gone to the definition section of the consolidated Bill, he would see that:

“‘pharmacist’ has a meaning assigned to it by section 2 of the Pharmacy Board Act...”—of Trinidad and Tobago.

He would also see that:

“‘pharmacy’ means a place registered as a pharmacy under the Pharmacy Board Act...”—of Trinidad and Tobago.

Then he would also see that a dispensary refers to section 29(1)(e) of the Pharmacy Board Act of Trinidad and Tobago. Why would my colleague seek to inadvertently—and I am being generous—mislead the public? It is just not good form again and he owns a pharmacy and the Pharmacy Board Act is mentioned three times.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please.

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the matter before us, there are many angles one can take. The Hon. Faris Al-Rawi,

Minister of Rural Development and Local Government—

Madam Speaker: Member, remember we call Members either by their constituency or by their office. I know it might be a bit misleading if you are looking at the report.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Right. In the committees we are Mister and Miss. All right? Please.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Did an excellent job in giving an overview of what the Bill purports and the speaker before me focused on the agricultural aspects and the economic aspects.

It is my duty as the Minister of Health, in the time that I have, the 27 minutes that I have to focus a lot on the medical aspects, the training aspects because this consumed a lot of time at the Joint Select Committee. The Joint Select Committee wanted a lot of technical detail as to what is cannabis, what are the medical uses and so on. So, Madam Speaker, I will be focusing a lot on that. So this Joint Select Committee was called to discussion a herb, a plant of the genus cannabis belonging to the family, Cannabaceae. And it is called cannabis sativa, and “sativa” means simply things that are cultivated.

Madam Speaker, if one looks at the Minutes of the meeting of February 11, 2021, you would see that the following entities were called to give their comments: the Ministry of Health, the Chief Medical Officer in particular, the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychiatrists, and the Paediatric Society represented by Dr. V. Singh. What they wanted—what the committee wanted as laypersons sitting on this committee, from these medical experts, was some sort of explanation as to what is cannabis. So here we are talking, what is cannabis or what is marijuana? It is this plant that contains about 500 chemical components, each of them—and this

is what the Joint Select Committee wanted to find out—called cannabinoids. Of those cannabinoids we are interested for medical marijuana in two of them, THC and CBD. The main difference between the two being the psychoactive nature of them.

THC being the psychoactive cannabinoid, which is smoked, and as my colleague said before you could find in oils, tinctures, capsules, roll-ons. One of the distinctive features between THC and CBD is that THC is received by brain receptors therefore giving you that psychoactive effect, whereas CBD is non-psychoactive. You get no high. It works with other elements in the body. But what the Joint Select Committee could not figure out was why you have this difference, especially when one considers that both THC and CBD have the same molecular structure. The difference is the way the atoms are differently arranged.

Madam Speaker, this Act and this Joint Select Committee speaks at length about medical cannabis. The National Institute on Drug Abuse defines medical cannabis as:

“...using the whole, unprocessed marijuana plant or its basic extracts to treat symptoms of illness and other conditions.”

Cannabis is included under sections 1 and 4 of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, and you would also find this in the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), 2018.

THC, and this is where the Joint Select Committee, again, as a lot of laypeople had to ask the experts, you know, what is the difference? So schedule one of the Dangerous Drugs Act speaks about this. THC is included under schedule two of the Dangerous Drugs Act because of its psychoactive nature; its tendency to be more addictive. So this is what some of the differences we had to look at. Madam Speaker, in delving further into the issue of how medical

marijuana is to be used and the submissions made by the Ministry of Health, Chief Medical Officer, the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychiatrists, the Paediatric Society, we had to decipher all of these things. One of the particular concerns of the Joint Select Committee had to do with how medical marijuana can be used profitably, and I do not use the word “profitably” in terms of money, but in terms of its profit for persons suffering from conditions that they can benefit from in the use of medical marijuana and its therapeutic use. And its therapeutic use is considered as a definition in the definition section and under the proposed Bill.

Madam Speaker, just by means of context—and I think it is important, especially for parents of children suffering from epilepsy—one of the modern, Madam Speaker, impetus for the use of medical marijuana was derived from the seizures being experienced by a child called Charlotte Figi, and this gave rise to the modern use of medical marijuana. But I want to make the caution that medical marijuana is not a cure-all for the estimated 40,000 persons living with seizures in Trinidad and Tobago.

That is an estimate given by Dr. Wendell Bobb speaking at a function for the society, Seizure Awareness Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago, in 2018. And the point needed to be made and it was made at the Joint Select Committee, Madam Speaker, and I think Dr. Singh of the Paediatric Society and others would have made this point, that medical marijuana for those suffering from seizures is not for all epileptics but it is useful for some uncontrolled seizures. And I want to really applaud the work done by the Seizure Awareness Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Darlene Harris, and all others. Madam Speaker, the speaker who went before me spoke about some of the medical benefits of medical marijuana, I would like to focus, if you would permit me, on just a small subpopulation of children who may benefit from the therapeutic use of medical marijuana. And I just want to

caution those parents of children and those persons suffering from seizures, this is not a one-size-fits-all.

There are two forms of seizures that medical marijuana can have a beneficial effect on, one called Dravet syndrome which starts in children from one year, and one called Lennox-Gastaut syndrome which starts a little later in life from three to five years. They are both severe forms of epilepsy and that is what Charlotte Figi was suffering from. In Trinidad and Tobago, we estimate at our Registry at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, where all these kids are referred to that we may have about five children suffering from Dravet syndrome and between eight to 10 children suffering from Lennox-Gastaut syndrome. One of the derivatives of medical marijuana is a drug called Epidiolex which has received FDA approval in June of 2018, and we look forward to having that drug coming to Trinidad and Tobago, hopefully to treat those five children with Dravet syndrome and hopefully for Lennox-Gastaut syndrome. I really look forward to it.

Madam Speaker, I now move on to some of the other issues raised at the Joint Select Committee. One of the issues raised is whether medical marijuana or whether marijuana is a gateway drug to other harder drugs, more addictive drugs. Antigua and Barbuda put forward the position that there was insufficient research done, however it can be abused like any other substance. It can be abused like any other drug. Barbados offered the perspective that other prescribed drugs that are far more dangerous than medical cannabis but that within the correct framework the threat of it being a gateway drug is no greater than any other. Myth or truth, we look forward to more robust debate at a societal level with this. This also came up in some of the public consultations that the then Attorney General had at different locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, one of the issues that was raised—and I think this is

something that as Minister of Health that we would have to champion at the Ministry in conjunction with other entities, and that had to do with the training of nurses, doctors and pharmacists in the prescribing, storage and dispensing of medical marijuana. It came out in the joint select report, if we read it, that Jamaica has a rich database for online training and this now provides a golden opportunity for our agencies and bodies in Trinidad and Tobago, like the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association, to get involved with the training of doctors, the Pharmacy Board. And in speaking to the Dean at the University of the West Indies, Prof. Terence Seemungal, the Dean for the Faculty of Medical Sciences, he has informed me that at the MBBS programme there is training for the prescribing of medical marijuana for his med students and it is also taught at the pharmacy programme as far as the dispensing is concerned. So these are some of the major issues that we have to deal with.

Madam Speaker, the speaker before me wanted to know about the dispensary and where these medical marijuana products will be stored. There is a clear distinction under the Pharmacy Board Act, again, that says where a dispensary is located in a pharmacy. So there is no confusion, it will be stored under the same conditions that other dangerous drugs are stored in a pharmacy under the control and management of the responsible pharmacy of the day or the pharmacist registered with the Pharmacy Board. So that should not detain us too much.

The Member wanted to know what was a “sacramental dispensary”, and again, if the Member had taken the time to look at the consolidated version of the Bill, and I could guide him to it under the definition section:

“‘sacramental dispensary’ means any premises on which the dispensing or provision of cannabis for religious purposes is permitted under a Dispensary (Religious) Licence;”

So you just have to read the Bill and find out how a religious entity can apply for a religious licence and therefore what becomes a sacramental dispensary.

Just to go back to some of the definitions because I think the Member did not read the definition section of the proposed legislation and that may have really confused him. Cannabis. What is cannabis?

“‘cannabis’ means all parts of any plant of the genus cannabis...”—
 which I alluded to earlier:

“...including any resin obtained from the plant;”

And:

“‘Cannabis material’...”

Because this is what we are going to be dispensing; this is what we are going to be hopefully building the industry around:

“‘Cannabis material’ means—

- (a) cannabis;
- (b) cannabis resin...
- (c) any other raw material derived from the cannabis plant;”

And what is “cannabis resin”, one has to go into the details:

“‘cannabis resin’ means the separated resin, whether crude or purified, obtained from any plant of the genus cannabis;”

Cannabidiol or CBD, there is a lot of confusion over what is THC and CBD. CBD or Cannabidiol:

“...means a substance found in the cannabis plant which reacts with specific receptors in the human brain and body to give a therapeutic effect;”

And that is where a lot of the medical cannabis comes from as opposed to THC which gives the psychoactive effect; not to say that THC has no therapeutic benefit. And we need to recognize that the issue of medical cannabis is one that is longstanding in the treatment of pain because THC gets into your brain; it goes to those receptors. It has very good use, Madam Speaker, for those who are on chemotherapy to provide that antiemetic or anti-nauseant effect.

So we are very glad that at this point in time from a medical perspective, from a pharmaceutical perspective, from a clinical perspective that we will have one more option for people on chemotherapy. The Member for San Fernando West had mentioned his visitation to former Senator Corinne Baptiste-McKnight. I also visited her at Vitas House and I could attest. I also go to some of the palliative care wards. I could attest to the fact this will be a welcome addition to the armory of pharmaceuticals for those on chemotherapy to make chemotherapy much more tolerable. Other Acts mentioned will be the Medical Board Act because the definition for a medical practitioner comes under it, section 2 of the Medical Board Act.

“‘medicinal cannabis’ means cannabis that is handled under a licence issued...”

Again, because the Member who spoke before me said that the Pharmacy Board Act was mentioned, but:

“‘medicinal cannabis’ means cannabis that is handled under a licence issued under section 29(1)...”

—which means a dispensary.

Madam Speaker, going forward in building this industry, the industry not only envisages an economic activity, it not only envisages the dispensing, it not only envisages the clinical use, but one thing that we should be looking forward to,

which has not been mentioned a lot, is the scientific purpose; the scientific research purpose. As indicated, cannabis has over 500 compounds but to date only a handful of those compounds have been researched. Who knows what gems are waiting to be discovered in those other 498 compounds and this is where the medicinal, therapeutic or scientific purposes come in and it talks about scientific research, research trials, clinical trials, therapy and treatment and the manufacture of nutraceuticals and pharmaceuticals.

I think with the whole issue of COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines, the average layperson is now aware of clinical trials. So maybe for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago we can have serious clinical trials coming out of cannabis research. But who can benefit from medical cannabis? The patient. But who is this patient? Who is this child suffering from Dravet syndrome or Lennox-Gastaut syndrome? Who is this adult that needs it for a chemotherapy so he does not have bouts of throwing up? Who needs it for pain management? Who needs it for glaucoma? The patient, but we have to define who that patient is and this is defined:

“‘patient’ means a person who suffers from a medical condition which may be treated with medicinal cannabis prescribed or recommended pursuant to this Act;”

So it is not a “free-for-all”. It is not a “free-for-all”. And I think that is important to give the public some comfort that the floodgates are not going to be opened that he can simply walk into a pharmacy and get medical cannabis. It has to be prescribed, and I indicated that the University of the West Indies is training its students in the MBBS programme and the pharmacy programme, and I hope the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association picks up the baton to do some continuing medical education sessions with doctors already in the system.

So if you are a glaucoma patient and the drug comes, you can qualify for it, and that is what we hope. It is not going to be this “free-for-all” coming in there, and it will be prescribed by a medical practitioner under the Medical Board Act and dispensed by a pharmacy or a pharmacist under section 2 of the Pharmacy Board Act.

So, Madam Speaker, I think I have covered what I intended to cover and I want to really thank the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West for his sterling work in piloting this through the Joint Select Committee. I want to be magnanimous and thank all Members, UNC Members, PNM members, and the Independent Senators for their hours and hours of work. It was a lot of work, I know, because I was the Deputy Chairman for many of these sessions. And I just want to say that in my last rebuttal to my former colleague who said we were slow and slothful, the question is, what did you do for five years? Nothing. Nothing. We are doing this. We did it. The PNM did it together with the help of the UNC and the Independent Senators. And, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Rai Ragbir (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Blessed afternoon to all and one.

Madam Speaker, let me put it on the table at the onset, an adoption of the cannabis policy is good with regard to either medicinal use or religious use. This is a thriving industry with hundreds of millions of dollars, and it is important that we now here in this Parliament understand cannabis as it is. If you are going to spend that type of money, you must understand what is the final product. It is a high-

grade cannabis flower, and I am going to bring you from the seed to the flower and show you what needs to be done, so that we can be competitive in the market. We can fetch a high price, although we may have started later than our Caribbean neighbours.

So with that said—[*Interruption*] I am seeing that you all are changing. Okay, I will continue. So, Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand before you in this august Chamber to speak on what this is here in the House.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

As we debate the report on the Joint Select Committee—yes, Joint Select Committee, that is a bit of a pun when we talk about cannabis—on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020. I want to say it was an honour to sit on this Joint Select Committee along with my colleague, the Member for Mayaro, and Sen. Lutchmedial. It has been a tremendous work in progress, and it was heralded by the AG, the Member for San Fernando West.

But let me start from the onset and say that I was reminded of growing up as a young boy, when we think about marijuana, ganja, weed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we got the notion then that this thing was bad, these are boys liming on the block. But we have come full circle in modern times, where the rich and famous have made the cannabis joint fashionable. Well, this is an FYI, for those of you who may know, I did my undergraduate medical studies in Jamaica, so I have had some experience, not in use, on seeing people using cannabis.

So on the 2nd of December, 2020, the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs, they call them CND, the drug policymaking body of the United Nations, reclassified cannabis and cannabis resins under an international listing that recognizes its medicinal value. Now, the CND voted on recommendations made by the World Health Organization, the 41st Expert Committee on Drug

Dependence, we call that ECDD, which suggested cannabis and cannabis resins should be reclassified from its current listing alongside heroin, fentanyl and its analogues, and other opioids, caused to be exceptionally harmful to public health.

The ECDD advises that certain cannabis-derived medicines from cannabidiol, it is CBD, have no potential to be abused or cause dependence. So what we need to understand here in the Lower House is what about this cannabis plant that is so important, what is this industry that is going to bring in a lot of money, create employment for people.

So the anatomy of the cannabis plant is similar to any flowering plant, such as the roots, the stems, the leaves and a few additional parts. The leaves can either be twofold, sugar leaves or fan leaves. The flowers from the female plant contain resin glands. The sex of the cannabis plant can be discovered in a pre-flowering stage about six weeks before it begins to grow.

So you may have a cannabis farmer, and all his plants most of them end up being male—no good. He wants the female plants, the flowering plants. So female plants contain the cannabis buds of flowers covered in the resinous trichrome which is a source of the most cannabinoids and terpenes, the psychoactive and medical components. The female plants are also necessary for the seeds, which happens when the female reproductive organs of the plant are pollinated by the male plants.

So besides the flowers, the sugar leaves also contain these cannabinoids. They are less in value of the CBD but people still use it to make weed brownies, cannabis tea and coffee, cannabis oil, cannabis butter, and the other set people use to make paste, smoothies, even salad dressings. Some even boil it in milk, because people have been using cannabis for a long period of time. It has been used in traditional herbal medicine. In fact, the dry roots of the cannabis is used for

inflammatory conditions like gout.

So here it is now, you have a plant, we want the joint, as you say. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the joint was here looked after. So we throw away the leaves, we throw away the stems, we throw away the roots. Now people realize, but wait a minute, that is just as important, so that has medicinal properties as well. So now the entire cannabis plant is used, and is used for financial gains.

So the question is, how do you grow this plant? There must be ideal temperature, a PH, humidity, light, nutrients. So all this legislation we are talking about to produce cannabis, we have to be reminded that these things must come first, because what was said by the Member for San Fernando West in terms of legislation and licences, to give people these licences, they have to get a good product. We have to give them the information. We ourselves need to understand that. But I would tell you colleagues, there is a most common disease than can destroy any cannabis plant any part of the world, it is a fungus. It is called bud rot, also called botrytis. This is a fungus known to devour the marijuana plant, after you spend millions of dollars, from the inside out. Now, this fungus is hard to detect, since it starts from the inside of the plant, and the first time you will notice it is when the fungus has started growing and your crop has been destroyed.

So my friends, how does CBD work, cannabidiol? The answer is quite complicated, but here is a simple version on many fronts. Firstly, the main effect of CBD is that it stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, and for the non-clinician, that is the part responsible for rest, healing, rejuvenating and regenerating. So you see, as alluded to by the Member for St. Joseph, there are parts there that are needed, and the other aspect of that is inhibition of the sympathetic nervous system which is responsible for eliciting responses to stress, triggering the flight or fight mechanism.

There is something—and you would be shocked to hear this—in the whole cannabinoid system called the ECS, and that says, and I will say it slowly, the endocannabinoid system plays a role in regulating a range of functions such as sleep, mood, appetite, memory, reproduction and fertility. Yes folks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the ECS exists and is active in the human body, even if you do not use cannabis.

So this is where the science comes in now, and all the chemicals, the 4/500 chemicals that are in the plants, as science and technology improve, you will find there will be more and more uses. So the industry is not only for medicine, we will find more things to be used with time to come. So as I said, we are late in the game, but we will continue. I will not continue in terms of more medical uses, because I have my medical colleagues who are here, but at the same time the narrative is the CBD benefits outweigh the risk of all the scientific background information, with minimal effects. So the question is: Why do we not all use CBD oil for all our ailments? Ah, that is a good question to be answered, because we are just beginning to unravel the extent of the compound therapeutic properties.

So, now that I have said all of that and with the science, how do we ensure a quality product? I will tell you by lab testing at different stages, because this industry is worth hundreds of millions of dollars. So to get a good strain, we need up-to-date ISO equipment and competent qualified persons to operate these machines. They must have a constant supply chain of test kits, and you know in the world now we have a problem with supply chains.

So these are normal instruments for quality control, and I will just list out one or two. One, gas chromatography determines cannabinoid classification. It also detects the presence of residual solvents. Number two, liquid chromatography is called in abbreviation HPLC, which specializes in the potency readings capable of

measuring the level of THC and CBD. Thirdly, mass spectrometry, which is capable of detecting toxins such as pesticides and other chemicals. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we do not test with these things, we will not get a good strain, and we would other people buying their product and they would not buy our product. Four, PH monitors measure the acidity and alkalinity of the water used for irrigation or watering the plants. The ideal level of PH is 6.15.

So these equipment are expensive, quite costly, high-tech and digital technology. In fact, they use a lot of artificial technology. So when you talk about the cultivators licence, and you have the plants growing in a greenhouse or outdoors, how do you monitor that? You use digital technology. You have drones. You tag the plants and that will continue when you harvest your goods, how do you transport it. Again, digital technology. So the science is there.

I just want to say, you will hear another word in the cannabis industry called hemp. A lot of people in Trinidad smoke hemp. Hemp is defined as a tetrahydrocannabinol, THC, which with definition is less than or equal to .3 per cent of dry weight, or the variety of the cannabis plant, sativa. Because the THC level is so low, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very unlikely to get you high, but I must tell you through the words, hemp, cannabis and marijuana have often been confused. Sometimes the words have been used interchangeably. Hemp has been industrially used to make ropes, canvas, paper, clothing, building products, and even animal feed, and plastics. The hemp plant is very resilient. It can grow very tall and in disease conditions with soils. We should address hemp in the Bill, especially now it is legal in the United States, although not here, but it is a form of bringing income into the country.

So I will come now, because I know my time is going very fast, tracking and monitoring, registers and recordkeeping. The international drug treaties mandate

that the government agency gives oversight of the industry that must purchase all cannabis—as is in the joint select—from licensed producers and conduct the transactions to processors or distributors, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This was put in place to counteract any diversion of any product to the illicit market or outside of the regulated system.

During the implementation of international drug treaties, the technology was not anywhere close to where it is today. So we must tag the seed to the sale, so that we will know where our plants are. We must know how many flowers are in each cannabis plant because that is where the money is. So all stages of cultivation, processing and distribution and the Licensing Authority they must be engaged in real-time monitoring of the licensed cannabis business operations, because it is a business.

The system represents the backbone of every regulated cannabis system around the world, and enables full monitoring and recording of all financial transactions of the licensed business' operations, preventing diversion of finances unless recorded. The system even tracks patient purchases, and is able to alert the Cannabis Authority. So if a patient is purchasing an excessive amount within a specified period, it would warrant an investigation, a red flag will be raised. So while that red flag is being raised, you know things are going to happen to that person.

Provisions are made to address the tracking and monitoring of all regulated cannabis material inventory, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Use plant tagging and batch numbers with unique identifiers to ensure product traceability, and the ability to engage in product recall or withdrawal where necessary. I will repeat. What we need, the goal is an ideal strain so we are competitive in the market out there, and fetch a high price.

Provisions are also made to address video monitoring of cannabis operations, to prevent diversion of products. Provisions address tracking of both inventory and finances. Requirements for weighing devices, reconciliation and chain of command, disaster relief from reporting and system training requirements. Provisions are also made for the establishment and maintenance of registers by the Authority in respect of each type of licence, as was mentioned before, a type of licence.

Provisions also address recordkeeping and retention by licences, and requirements in respect of this. Notification of theft, loss or diversion of product, inspections or audits, and staff records are provided for in the legislation. These typical provisions are usually found in the subsidiary legislation but are supposed to be reflected upon within the Act. I therefore have to ask the question: Why are there no provisions addressing this system in the Bill presented here today?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, having edified this House, I will move on to the Joint Select Committee Report on the Bill. Further to this, conversation needs to be had regarding the need for cogency in the medical fraternity and would allow for continued medical training. Due to the contemporaneous development of the use and decriminalization of cannabis, the current medical curriculum does not cover a sufficient detail how to detect abuse, dependency with respect to cannabis.

There is a need for proper training of all health care professional in the treatment and detection of diseases, abuse and dependency. Borrowing from our neighbours across the pond in Barbados, they have put it in the curriculum in UWI and have allowed special courses that could train and certify health care professionals to handle these sorts of situations. In this country, Trinidad and Tobago, we need to legislate for CME, continued medical education, so that our doctors who are certified to prescribe, they have the certificates in the back and

they can actually continue the certification which is very important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I turn to clause 44 of the Bill whereby you would require a medical practitioner to keep records of every patient who he or she has prescribed. What is important, sometimes the doctors may go on vacation, they may die, they may migrate or whatever it may be, so the information must be tracked and must be kept. At the same time, what was brought in the Joint Select Committee by the Member for San Fernando West, if for instance I had one of my patients in Biche and they moved to Point Fortin or Tobago, what happens now? Do they have to come back for another prescription? This means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the whole legislation of electronic prescription has to come into play. So that the persons can get the 30 grams of cannabis when that time is due, when it is medically indicated.

I just want to share a few words again. Mr. Deputy Speaker, how much time do I have again?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You just have about approximately three minutes.

Dr. R. Ragbir: Three minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, 13 minutes, sorry.

Dr. R. Ragbir: Thank you very much. The training—Mr. Deputy Speaker, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians need to undergo this training. Now, the training must be ongoing, as I said earlier, and persons need to be certified in the discipline. This will include on cannabis dosage, able to recognize adverse effects and how to manage. One of the things I just want to stick a pin in here, you know doctors are famous for not writing legibly. So this is where that the prescription pads are tagged, they are triplicated and dosage and duration must be there. So it is already written there. So it is to tick off, so that the pharmacists can do a job, counsel and give out the medication accordingly.

The doctors are able to recognize addiction and its management. They could also recognize drug interaction. They also must be aware of the facilities of blood and urine testing for cannabis, and all these facilities must be ISO certified. There are so many avenues for investment for people in this industry, and this is why that I took my time to actually bring it from the onset right down to the end. Just to let you know that before, you know they were using the flower just to put the joint, and they were throwing away the leaves, the stems, the roots, and now the entire planet has found out that these parts also have medicinal uses as well.

Another aspect to look at, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the medico/legal aspects in the work place. For me as a practitioner, for most not a legal person, so clinicians, not only doctors, but pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, they need to be trained on short courses on the medico/legal aspects of cannabis and its implications.

Confidentiality and access to medical records—we have our medical records, but when it comes to cannabis, I gather the medical record must be different, we could stand up in a court of law. So we need to be guided in such.

The medical personnel needs to also be trained in how do you store these records, the security, and the pharmacists must be trained as well. My colleague from Mayaro had mentioned something about the cannabis for a child. Now, in Jamaica in the Joint Select Committee, the GP was allowed to prescribe for a child that was indicated for cannabis use. My thinking is that our culture of our people is different. You had a specialized pediatrician that was alluded to by the Member for Mayaro, but the GP now takes over that responsibility and sends the report two to three months afterwards, so that that pediatrician can actually monitor that child from long distance, and we have FaceTime, we have all sorts of technology. So at the end of the day, it is to protect our little ones.

Further to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the CBD administration must be ensured it is approved by the Ministry of Health and the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago. What that means is that the clinical indications for whatever use, medical use for cannabis, you do not want every Monday morning that Dr. X or Dr. Y says, “Ay, there is a new indication for cannabis”. So it must be enshrined by the Ministry of Health, these are the registered licensed uses for cannabis, et cetera, et cetera, and then you have the Pharmacy Board, you have the Medical Board, you have the Ministry of Health and so forth and so on.

The Government should consider whether additional specific requirements are to be defined in the subsequent regulations and the Dangerous Drugs Act. The Dangerous Drugs Act may have to be amended with the coming of this Authority and, in fact, this is raised in the report via page 62. I know my time is running out, so I am just going to continue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, clause 37 which makes provisions for an application for a licence should be made to the Authority in the approved form, and be accompanied by a declaration in the prescribed form, that if the licence is granted, the licensee would consent to the entry of inspectors on any premises specified in the licence.

I turn to Part IV of the Bill that deals with the licensing provisions that I alluded to earlier. Clause 29 deals with the types of licences. Concerning cultivator licences, I have to raise a question here and there. Where would a company be acquiring the lands to cultivate so much cannabis to make it profitable? Would it be a case of land grabbing? Would it be giving out lands to people who do not have lands and people just giving out lands to their friends?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I turn to clause 32, which deals with transport licences. I wish to state that a record should be kept as to the amount and the geography of

where the transport is taking place, because you have very rural transport and that anyone can actually hijack a vehicle and get all that high-grade cannabis that was produced by the farmer.

I turn to Part VI of cannabis for religious purposes. Now, you may have a lot of people coming forward to open up different types for religious purposes for the use or abuse of cannabis. Now, if the Non-Profit Organisations Act is operating as it should, because someone who is not a legitimate religious organization can infiltrate the system as an NPO in order to qualify for a licence. Now, the thing is, who prescribes and who dispenses? The doctor prescribes, the pharmacist dispenses, so there will be not enough doctors and pharmacists to do such. So at this point what has to be enshrined is that you have to have a group of religious organizations twinned to doctor and pharmacy, so we could make it fruitful, so it would be easier. So that when it is prescribed for religious purposes, the monitoring systems would be there. So religious organizations ought to be bona fide organizations, as many organizations now look to be formed just with the intent, and apply for licences. We are here in Parliament, and I am sure people are thinking about should I just get a licence now.

I will close off by saying, clause 18 of the Bill deals with confidentiality. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not a lawyer. With one issue raised with speaking with lawyers, they are concerned about breach of confidentiality being regarded as a summary offence. The amount in the penalties is very high, and may not apply under the summary offences. This needs to be revised. It needs to be revisited. It may be prudent to seek the counsel of persons experienced in this field to determine the legality and potential ramifications of this.

I strongly recommend that Government consider what is being recommended here today and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these few words, I thank

you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Hon. Member, you have 30 minutes.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I enter this debate this afternoon, and I was reflecting prior to entering this debate, on a number of things, listening to the former speakers, noting what it was their contributions focused on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker this Bill that the Joint Select Committee's Report is on, can accurately be described as part two of the Government's decision to decriminalize and to regulate the use and controlled sale of cannabis. I think it is a monumental occasion, even though the first speaker for the Opposition tried to paint a picture that Trinidad and Tobago was lagging behind and, I mean, a most disparaging contribution which was surprising having regard to the fact that that Member for Mayaro participated in the Joint Select Committees on this Bill, and also fortunately is one of the signatories to the report that we presented to the House here this afternoon.

Cannabis in local parlance and throughout the world, is better described and also known as weed, ganja, marijuana, kush, a number of these things. As I was listening to the previous speaker, the Member of Parliament for Cumuto/Manzanilla, and him talking about his days in Jamaica and that is where he witnessed persons utilizing or using cannabis, weed, ganja, it reminded me that the first time that I saw weed— I always had a vision of what weed would be— was when I too was at university in England and persons at the halls of residence broke out what to me looked to be like a block of dark chocolate. They said, "You know what this is? You should know what this is."

I had no clue what it was, and then they started to shave it into a cigarette, and it is only when they lit it up and started to smoke it, I recognized the scent, because anybody who has grown up in Trinidadian culture and would have gone in the bleachers of football matches, it is inevitable that you would not smell this pungent scent, and come to realize that is weed, ganja, et cetera. Mr. Deputy Speaker is smiling because he knows exactly what I am talking about.

I have to say and put on the record that 10 years ago, maybe five years ago, there is no way I could have predicted that we would have taken these steps as a society to first of all, decriminalize the personal use of cannabis, and now here today to come and to try and regulate and to put before the House legislation which seeks to regulate under an authority the growing, the cultivation, the dispensing, the transportation of this cannabis.

5.00 p.m.

And I want—I would like to use my opportunity to contribute as the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and as a concerned citizen to put a few thoughts on the record here in the House this afternoon. And I want to start first of all by placing on record to be captured by the *Hansard* reporters my concerns and my caution to Trinidad and Tobago and to the people. Because, ultimately, cannabis, marijuana, ganja, weed, whatever we want to call it, is still recognized as an addictive drug and I think it is important that be placed on the record. And it is certainly my view that addictions are always to be approached very cautiously and very carefully.

The Government took a decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to decriminalize the personal use of cannabis and to permit persons of majority age to grow a certain specific amount of cannabis for personal use. At the time, initially, I was a little hesitant to support this venture, that leap, but then I saw the merit in the

personalized—the decriminalization of personal use of cannabis and the acceptance of personal use because it was certainly counterproductive to incarcerate multitudes of individual for personal use of marijuana. That was the first big point for me having witnessed and seen in the Magistrates' Court, as the former Minister of National Security going into the remand prison yards here in Port of Spain, at Golden Grove, and seeing how many of our young people and sometimes not so young people were being incarcerated for small amounts of marijuana, cannabis. So, I saw the merit in that move and supported it fully.

It also had potential effects of easing up on the criminal justice system and on our prison system in particular. And again, as the former Minister of National Security, seeing the conditions at Remand Yard—and I am happy that we were able as a Government to take that important step that no other governments prior to us had done, to improve the conditions at Remand Yard. But we needed to get out of the Remand Yard space, persons who were convicted or incarcerated, awaiting trials for these small personal amounts. And that is what I saw as the first step in decriminalizing the use of cannabis, marijuana.

Today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are considering another step and it is a big step, in my humble submission, and that is providing for the commercialization of weed. And I listened and I smiled at the first speaker for the Opposition, and I will come to that in the while. You see, I am not the least bit surprised that this is one of the only pieces of legislation in seven years that I have sat as an elected Member of Parliament that the UNC Opposition is prepared to support off of the bat. And I ask the country to take careful note of that. So, it comes down to the legalizing and the commercializing of cannabis and marijuana for those on the opposite side to unanimously say, this is something that they would support. None of the previous important legislation, anti-gang, this and that or the other.

And I now want to use the opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to just reflect briefly on some of the language carefully used and chosen—carefully chosen and used by the Member for Mayaro. I listened to him and I could not help but smile, and I think it is worth repeating and placing on the *Hansard*. So, the Member for Mayaro starts by praising this as an innovative green industry. It will spawn a massive industry, who can participate and who can benefit commercially. That is my first concern and I will come to that in a short while.

The Opposition Bench is fully supportive of this burgeoning industry. It is going to be a growth industry. We are far behind. We should have been doing this before. T&T is behind others. We must follow Jamaica and their tourism based on weed. This is a green economy. And, you see, that plus the fact that I cannot remember many joint select committee reports where there was full support but this is one of them and we must examine that very carefully here today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I want to talk a little bit because it is the report that we are here looking at and I participated in both of the Joint Select Committees, including this one, which has produced a report for the House. It was a very productive exercise and the Members who were part of the Committee for the Opposition, they have left the Chamber now, but it was the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, the Member for Mayaro; from the other House, Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial and then we had Independent Senator, Paul Richards. We had a number of Members from the Government. And the way that Committee worked, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my submission, is the way committees should work for Trinidad and Tobago. We sat there, we worked hard. There were a lot of meetings held during a difficult period of time. And as I was reading the report, I reflected on the few absences that I had. How come? And some of them coincided with the Minister of Health, for example,

and it is because we were going through a COVID period and there were many occasions when we were called away for meetings or to do press conferences, et cetera, coming out of Cabinet, had to go in different directions. But what struck me throughout the whole work of that Committee was the collaborative effort that was made by all members of the Committee.

And I remember reflecting at the time and saying, wow, it has to come down an addictive drug, something that has been destructive to many families, for the Opposition to want to progress this forward for Trinidad. And boy, straight out of the box tonight, straight out of the starting blocks, the Member for Mayaro put it all on the record when he talked about this industry that we are seeking here today to provide for regulation but, more importantly, to open up. And I disagree with him. I think Trinidad and Tobago being cautious and approaching this potential industry—because we have heard it all before. When we studied it, you looked at St. Vincent and the Grenadines, you looked at Jamaica, Barbados. I heard it here referred to in the House this afternoon how Barbados—you know, and when we looked at this legislation, we looked at the approach Barbados had taken, Jamaica, a number of other jurisdictions. And it is interesting because just this week people from Barbados were reaching out to me to say they felt in Barbados the boat had been missed with the potential of this industry.

You look at what is going on in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, you see people investing. You look at Jamaica. Canada has been trying to do it. In the United States, a number of States are doing the same type of thing. It is no race. So, I disagree completely with that part of the submission of the Member for Mayaro that we were late to it. It is better to be cautious, especially with something that three years ago, the possession of it for personal amounts could have landed you in Remand Yard. And you do not just dispense with all of that caution.

So, we are here today to look at the legislation that is going to open up the potential of this industry. And I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, strongly that it is absolutely necessary for this industry to be properly and carefully regulated and monitored, and that is what this legislation begins to set the framework and the foundation for. So, I would like to put a few things on record. These are my views and I want it recorded here because when we eventually get to looking at regulations down the road, let it be put on the *Hansard* the views of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

The first thing is, I heard and I was a little surprised when I heard it, the suggestion that 30 per cent of this industry would be reserved for local ownership. I would just like to say that that is one position. This is not the settled position and we will eventually, when we reach to that stage, we will have proper and full discussion on it because I certainly—I am of the view that the local content has to be much more than 30 per cent. We cannot limit it to 30 per cent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: It is going to be the main basis of my submission here this afternoon to this House and to the population, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this regularization and regulation of the industry that we are looking to open up has to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It has to benefit the young people that Minister Cummings is trying to foster, no pun intended, trying to gather together and to move forward. It has to benefit all of the people who are interested from all 41 constituencies and not just a small handful. And “who vex for me saying that, loss” because that is the position of this Government I am certain.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: So, immediately, I want to dispense with the red herrings that may have been thrown out in the previous speeches, in particular from Mayaro and the

suggestions that this is going to be some sort of cloistered boys' club, an elitist industry. I am putting on record, I will not support anything of that nature. It is my position, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to protect the small and local farmers.

And I was listening to the previous speakers and I was thinking, decades ago, Trinidad and Tobago was a sugarcane industry and the way it was done is the small farmers, they would grow their sugarcane and they would then bring it to be weighed, to be sold, et cetera. And that is how this industry should develop. It should not be any exclusionary type of industry. It should not be a small percentage of people. We have to protect the local content and the ability of those who want to get involved in the farming side of this industry to be allowed to do so. And I am putting this futuristic authority of the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority on notice that that is the intention of the policymakers. That is the intention of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the intention of the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. And that is the intention, I am sure, of every sensible Member of Parliament who wants to go down the road, and I believe it is unanimous, of opening up this industry. It cannot be an exclusionary industry, save for those who have found themselves involved in criminality, be it money laundering or anything like that. This is an opportunity, and I am putting it on record, an opportunity not for the few but an opportunity for the many.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: Because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is already being said in many circles, and I was surprised by this, that this legislation is being passed to facilitate a few, to set up an industry for a handful of beneficiaries. So, I am putting loudly, clearly on the *Hansard* here this afternoon that as the MP for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and as a citizen, that is not the policy, that let the regulators

and the authority to come understand when they are preparing the regulations the approach that should be taken must be an approach that encompasses and an approach that facilitates, of course, within a structure—because ultimately when we come to the legislation we will see that the benefits of the legislation are to regulate it, to monitor it at every single step.

And when we had our joint select committee meetings, we spent a lot of time on that discussion. I remember the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, the Member for San Fernando West, Sen. Paul Richards, the types of conversations that took place at that Joint Select Committee when it came to how is it to be dispensed, how is the licensing to take place, the transportation, et cetera. And, yes, there are risks in transportation. Unfortunately, we have seen in this country, cigarette—persons transporting cigarettes, other small goods are often robbed along the way, et cetera. Cannabis is not going to be any different. But, you see, one of the policies and the philosophies, as I understood it, when we had the discussion at Cabinet and when we took the decision a few years ago to go down this road was if you legitimize something and take away the element of criminality of it, you actually provide a realm of safety because you are coming out of the dark into the light to allow people the opportunity to do things legitimately. So, the fact that you will—under this legislation, you will have persons who are authorized to go into the various business places to look at the books. You heard the Acting Attorney General talk about it, that you have to have proper books, et cetera. That can only be steps in the right direction. You are allowing now an industry to be properly taxed so it is an additional revenue to the people of Trinidad and Tobago as opposed to this sort of underground economy that is taking place with it now.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not support this industry being for a few or for a handful of those from a sector of society to the exclusion of the local and

small farmers. I am very clear about that and I am putting people on notice about that. This legislation certainly is not to be developed for the elite or the wealthy, or the big consumers, which is a problem some of the other small islands have fallen into. We must not go down that road as Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: The philosophy behind this legislation is to allow for locals to have access to the industry, to regulate the industry, to provide for standards and safety, to allow for taxation, and a proper monitoring and regulation of the industry.

To come to the Bill now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill is to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority and it says so very clearly at the outset, and that is what we are here today to do. But, you see, as legislators—and I have seen this in the practice of law, I have seen it recently in the courts interpreting law—if we do not put down here in our contributions what the policy should be, then those who had no part to play in the formulation of the policy, who are now called upon to interpret it, very often can go down the wrong roads. And that is why I have taken this approach because this, in my view, is one of the most important pieces of legislation and a milestone opportunity for Trinidad and Tobago.

So, you are going through the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it starts off with the initial clauses as these types of pieces of legislation do by setting out what it is for, and it tells us clearly:

“The Bill seeks to provide for the regulatory control of the handling of cannabis for certain purposes...”—and importantly—“the establishment of Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority and connected matters.”

And it then tells us the various pieces of legislation that will have to be

amended and what it affects. Previous speakers have touched on that. It talks about the setting up of this Authority. And, you know, it is the first time in a debate in a long time, in the last seven years, I did not hear everybody picking and nit-picking at the composition of the Committee and saying, “Well, how come this one could be appointed by a Minister? And how come this one by the President? And why this one doh”—and, again, that struck me.

But the Bill goes into it and sets out who will be the board, importantly that they must be no conflict of interest. It talks about:

“...immunity from suit on Members for acts or omissions unless the act or omission was a result of gross negligence or done in bad faith.”

It talks about:

“...the meetings of the Board, the quorum and decisions...the appointment of committees...”

All of that is happily non-controversial.

It then talks about:

“...the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer of the Authority who...”—will—“be prohibited from being engaged or employed in handling of cannabis or...having any pecuniary interests in an entity regulated by the Authority...”

Again, this is a point we spent a lot of time on, not only with respect to the CEO and the members of the board, but in looking at it, to ensure associates—how do you know if it is a cousin, a friend, a this or that will not be benefiting from some of these people. That is provided for in the legislation. We listened carefully. Changes were made where changes had to be made. It provides for accounts to be submitted, accounts to be produced and accounts to be audited, all very honourable provisions.

And then clause 29 of the Bill:

“...empower the Authority to issue several types of licences”—Mr. Deputy Speaker—“for medicinal, therapeutic or scientific purposes...”

The previous speakers, the Minister of Health, went into some of this. I think the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla did as well. And then also it then lists:

“...Cultivator Licences, Research and Development Licences...”

You can immediately see the difference between those two; the cultivator licences, of course, being for the farmers. Research and development licences, you heard the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph talk about that there are 500 components in marijuana, in cannabis and maybe something special is inside of there that has not been discovered as yet.

“...Laboratory Licences, Processors Licences, Retail Distributor Licences...”

So, you see these two:

“...Cultivator Licences...”—and—“Retail Distributor Licences, Import Licences, Export Licences...”

—those are the ones that we are concerned and why we must put on the *Hansard* as the policymakers and as the ones birthing, to use a word of San Fernando West, this legislation, that it is not intended to be exclusionary. It is not intended to be for a handful or for a few. So, those are the types of licences.

And then, of course, for religious purposes. We spent a lot of time in the Joint Select Committee looking at that, exploring, listening to the experts from the different religions, what are religious purposes it can be used for, et cetera.

It then goes on to list other parts of the Bill:

“...the eligibility of applicants for licences and...the making of applications for licences.”

Very important provisions because this is where you can exclude people for justifiable reasons as to why they should not be allowed to obtain licences.

And, of course, as previous speakers pointed out quite correctly, the regulations are going to be critical and the development of those regulations are going to be critical as to how this legislation is really filled out, how the flesh is put on the skeleton of the legislation. And that is why I was so cautious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to put at the outset my views and very strong views as a warning and as a caution as to how this should develop in Trinidad and Tobago.

It talks about terms and conditions of licences, the duration of licences. We had looked at this and we were very careful to say that you must have a duration because it allows people to then reapply, it allows you to do an assessment if they continue to be worthy of being licensed in this whole realm.

A lot of time spent on medicinal cannabis and the pharmacies or dispensaries, how they were dispensed, et cetera. Again, the regulations would flesh all of this out. They talk about the religious purposes. That has been dealt with previously.

Importantly, clause 50 of the Bill:

“...would prohibit a person from causing or permitting a child to use cannabis at a place of worship, a sacramental dispensary or an exempt event.”

And this an opportune moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to again issue a word of caution to Trinidad and Tobago. Adults have the right of choice because it is assumed and it has been assumed for many years in law that once you cross some magic age of majority and becoming an adult, you are now responsible fully for your life's decisions. Fine. But we all know the decisions we may have taken at the age of 18 can be very different from the decisions we will take at the age of 40, the

age of 50, 60 as you have more wisdom and life experiences. But children; children must be protected and I think we as legislators—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have two more minutes, Member.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think we as legislators have to appreciate that and we must do all that we can because ultimately this drug remains an addictive drug and can still be a dangerous drug, especially to young children. So, I am glad to see that we included these types of provisions.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, other will get into further analysis of the legislation itself. My contribution here this afternoon was very focused I hope and certainly it allowed me the opportunity, which I do not take very often, to place onto the record my personal views as the elected Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West as to how this should be developed. And I just end by saying, we must enter this realm cautiously. Do not pay heed to what the Member for Mayaro said about "Johnny come lately. We late, we coming"—hogwash. We do things properly. We do it cautiously. There is no loss to anyone. But the most important point I wanted to make in my contribution, as I end, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it must not be exclusionary of the small people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 30 minutes.

Mr. Dinesh Rambally (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to join this debate. Let me say from the outset, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I certainly endorse and adopt the contributions made by my colleagues on this side, starting with the Member for Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally: I would also like to say that I do appreciate the contributions coming from the other side. And certainly, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I am particularly pleased to hear some of the oral commitments made in his contribution today. And it is good to see that, you know, Members before me have mentioned that this report that we are seeking to adopt is one which saw unanimous support. And so, I am happy that it seems to be translating into the debate here and we are seeing commitments being made, given that we ourselves are raising certain concerns. So, I say that in the context of, for example, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said, certainly, he is on record, he is not supporting and nor do we on this side, we are not supporting any legislation which by the time the regulations come around that it will somehow only be benefiting a few and not the small man. And I think that what the Member for Mayaro was seeking to do at the very outset when he made reference to the 30 per cent and the shareholding and we do not want to have big—we do not want to have joint ventures where you have big investors who are effectively dominating the market. So, I want to say that I appreciate that.

What I do not appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the beginning of the contribution from the Member for St. Joseph. When we look at clause—and I want to make reference to clauses 29 and 30 of the Bill to make this point. When we look at clause 29 of the proposed Bill, which is at Appendix IV of the report, what we see—and Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West did refer to some of these provisions. You have the authority may issue certain licences for:

“...medicinal, therapeutic or scientific purposes...”

And so, you will see that you can apply for:

“...a Cultivator Licence...”

...a Research and Development Licence...

...a Laboratory Licence...

...a Processor Licence...

...a Retail Distributor Licence...

...an Import Licence...

...an Export Licence...

...a Transport Licence...”—and it goes on.

And clause 30 says:

“A person...”—so, it is now talking about the eligibility for a licence.

So, in order to be able to somehow dispense in one way or the other or treat with cannabis for the purposes as indicated here:

“...medicinal, therapeutic or scientific purposes...”—you must obtain the licence.

Who is eligible for a licence?

“A person who—

(a) is eighteen years of age or older...

(i) is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago;

(ii) is a permanent resident of...”—T&T;

“(iii) is a citizen of a CARICOM Member State, other than Trinidad and Tobago...

(b) is a company, firm, partnership or co-operative society, may apply for a licence...”

So, the only person or persons or entity in law who can benefit from this are those persons who are eligible and who would in due course obtain a licence as described at clause 29. So, I do not know that anybody who is a pharmacist in this country will have any conflict of interest in debating this Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally: I mean, what rubbish we heard for about five minutes that the Member for Mayaro ought to have disclosed that he is somehow affiliated with a pharmacy. If that be the case then I have a conflict of interest because I am entitled to apply for licence under this as well.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

5.30 p.m.

Mr. D. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not questioning your ruling, I am talking about the fact that we are responding to whether somebody was somehow dealing with the house and somehow being less than—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, hold.

Mr. D. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to make my contribution, please?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. D. Rambally: I would like to make my contribution please, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. All right. Hon. Members. [*Interruption*] Hon. Members, please, let us recognize the decorum of the Chamber. Okay. And the Member for Chaguanas East is the one that is—for Chaguanas West, sorry, that has the floor at this time. So again, the crosstalk between both sides will not be tolerated. Right. Hold on, one second, and again with regard to the ruling of the Chair it still stands, so again, be conscious of your statement hon. Member as you continue to go forward.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you. Thank you, I am guided.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Because a ruling would have been made by the Chair so in

terms of your content and your language, please be careful.

Mr. D. Rambally: Yes. Yes. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided. The point I am making is that persons who stand in a position and will have a conflict in this debate are persons who have a licence. If you do not have a licence under this Bill, you cannot have a conflict, and that is the simple point I am making in direct response to the Member for St. Joseph. This has absolutely nothing to do with any ruling of the Chair. I want to make the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member. Member, please. The ruling of the Chair, I would like you to retract that statement and continue.

Mr. D. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not questioning the ruling of the Chair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. No. The ruling of the Chair, please, retract that statement and continue your discourse.

Mr. D. Rambally: For getting on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I withdraw that statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. D. Rambally: Let me go back to this Bill, everyone, even myself being a Hindu and being a member of the largest Hindu organization in Trinidad and Tobago who can formalize arrangements, the Attorney General, Member for San Fernando West, Acting Attorney General, made mention that if you formalize the arrangements under the non-profit organization requirements, that you can apply, and you can obtain a licence. I do not think I have a conflict of interest that I need to declare here in this debate. I want to put that on the record. You need to have a licence. So, it is just as simple as that. I do not understand why it is Member for St. Joseph felt the need, in common parlance, to go down in Member for Mayaro bedroom, to talk about whether—does he know that Member for Mayaro will be applying for a licence? How does he know that? When you go in people bedroom,

so to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what happens? Curtain rod fall on your head. [*Laughter*] Curtain rod fall on your head.

Anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move along. I want to say that Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, just for the record, I want to make it particularly clear that I know he will say, and I genuinely mean this on a lighter note, that he was saying that he was putting certain things on the record because, you know, there comes a time when it has to be questioned or interpreted in the court of law and other places. But parliamentary debate is only admissible—hon. Attorney General knows this—in court proceedings in the rarest of circumstances. So when we sit here as legislators, what the courts have said, and you have practitioners, I mean, renowned practitioners, jurists who have indicated that when we sit here what we have to ensure is that the language of the Act as we deem it here and we commit it on the *Hansard* and on the record eventually, the language of the Act must be objectively clear. So this is why we take the time and we sort of sometimes you have a pernicky critique that is applied to certain clauses.

[*Electronic device goes off*]

Mr. D. Rambally: Sorry

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Electronic devices ought to be on silent. Please, no more disturbance from electronic devices, please.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was just making that point in response to when we say we want to put things on the record. But I am glad, and I return to the point I started off with, that I am glad that there was a speaker committing, and I think that, I am confident that that is the view of all Members in the Chamber today, that we really do not want to have a roll out of this piece of legislation and regulations to come down that will only see the benefit translating or manifesting for the benefit of a few and not everybody across the

board.

So I just wanted to make that point. So I move away and, you know, just to tease the hon. Attorney General, Member for San Fernando West, the case is *Pepper v Hart*, he can tell his colleague that. So whatever we put on record the language must be objectively clear, that it is understandable, we can understand it. I want to start off by talking about Part VI of the proposed Bill at Appendix IV of the report. And let me, of course, commend all the Members who were involved in this Joint Select Committee. I think that was something that was being expressed here—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally:—if it was in doubt before, I want to make that clear. So, Members on this side and Members on the other side, so to speak. Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I go to sacramental purposes. Now, for sacramental or religious purposes only a restricted number of licences can be had. So I have already referred to some of them at clause 29, the cultivator, dispensary, import and export licences are allowed.

Now, however, you do not have here, and I am talking specifically under sacramental purposes. No research and development, lab, processor or retail and distribution licences are allowed for the religious purposes. So the distinction is clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, religious should not be mixed with business or science. We accept that. When we look at clause 47 we are told that there must be no commercial benefit, no sale, supply or any transaction involving cannabis for sale, profit, monetary gain or compensation. And in the interest of time I will not go to the actual reading of the clause. But what I would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that not even water which falls from the sky is free. So, how then are we expecting the religious groups to procure, to store, maintain and dispense cannabis completely

devoid of any cash flow to facilitate a basic access to cannabis for religious use? That is something that has struck me when looking at the sacramental purposes.

Furthermore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the amount to be dispensed to any adherent to the faith, it is 30 grams of cannabis, and this is already a provision enjoyed by citizens of the country. So what it suggests, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an insensitivity to the religious group to tell them to apply for a licence to get the amount of cannabis they could already get without a licence, because that is all each adherent is allowed anyhow, 30 grams. And I think Member for Mayaro was asking when he was raising some of the points, he was saying that at the end of the day how often is an adherent actually going to be permitted to access the 30grams from the religious dispensary.

So, furthermore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on clause 47, anyone who contravenes the section, that is to say, engages in handling cannabis for money, not necessarily for profit, because it could be the mere reimbursing of moneys used in the acquisition, is liable to stiff penalties, \$10,000 or six months in prison. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question arises, who wants to get a licence to give exactly what they could get without the hassle? Why would you want to get a licence? So, in my humble opinion, to that extent, the Bill, this proposed Bill is faulty. Even if the controller of a religious organization decided to apply for a cultivator's licence, we cannot pretend that this kind of undertaking could be truly free from the elements of commerce. And that is the point I really wanted to make.

So yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, puzzlingly, they can apply for a licence to import and export, and the question again arises, how can that be devoid of commerce? So this is what is allowed for the religious purposes, and I am saying that when you say you want to take out the elements of commerce and you are criminalizing that, how can you really say, okay, there is a licence to import and

export for the religious faith which cannot be devoid of commerce.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we get into even more disbelief when we see passes for a sacramental dispensary. Now, this is another area I wanted to really say that I know that the Member for St. Joseph, hon. Minister of Health was saying that he felt that Members on his side had not read the Bill. But I think really he needs to take a look in the mirror, because he was talking about religious, the sacramentary dispensary, and speaking as if that is somehow equated to pharmacies, and that cannot be. So I will get into it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the avoidance of doubt, the word “dispensary” has been described in the proposed Bill as follows, and I read:

“‘dispensary’ means any premises on which—

- (a) the sale, dispensing or provision of medicinal cannabis prescribed or recommended by a medical practitioner; or
- (b) the use or consumption of medicinal cannabis by a patient,

is permitted under a Retail Distributor Licence referred to in section 29(1)(e).”

So a dispensary is largely concerned with medicinal cannabis for sale as prescribed or recommended by a medical doctor. That is what we would think at first blush as we would say sometimes. And somehow that word “dispensary” is superimposed on the religion and nonsensically becomes a sacramental dispensary, unless, according to the Member for St. Joseph, that this sacramental dispensary is the equivalent of a pharmacy. So I do not know if the religious faiths are now going to have and operate pharmacies in some premises somewhere to be able to dispense for the religious side of things.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, pray tell, what then is a sacramental dispensary? And this takes me to clause 48. A sacramental dispensary is stated at clause 48 as it

shall:

- “(a) not be operated for money or for any profit, financial or monetary gain or compensation;
- (b) only dispense to persons registered as adherents to the religious organisations;
- (c) dispense no more than thirty grams of cannabis to any single adherent; and
- (d) establish and maintain all prescribed records.”

So in other words, the core elements of a dispensary suddenly becomes obsolete, no finance, no medical prescription, and this is what I am saying is a complete butchering of the term “dispensary”. What tracking system will be used, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to monitor production, distribution and consumption of cannabis in the sacramental sector? This is what remains unresolved in my humble opinion in the proposed Bill. And what exactly is someone of the religious faith supposed to do to register as an adherent? Because that is what the Bill asks the person to do, register as an adherent, the entity, sorry.

So this is personal information lodged and registered somewhere so that you as a member of the faith can access the sacramental dispensary to get your 30 grams of marijuana, which, as I stated before you could grow in your backyard anyway. So, speaking of terms, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill was careful to use the word “recommend”, and “prescribe” as duties of medical practitioners. And I know I have heard some of my colleagues on some of these issues. I will not repeat what they have said, but one can generally understand the natural meanings of these words. No specific distinction was made between them, and that is something that could cause problems later on when we have to even get to the regulation stage. In essence, when a doctor recommends a medicinal cannabis product it

might be no different from him recommending exercising and dieting. Yet even for recommending, not necessarily prescribing, medicinal marijuana he must keep a record, and this takes us to clause 44, that:

“A medical practitioner shall maintain a record of every patient to whom he has prescribed or recommended medicinal cannabis.”

And I would not read in the interest of time the entire clause.

What it does, however, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it begs the question, what is the point of keeping a record of persons to whom you have recommended medicinal cannabis, not necessarily prescribed, so that you can submit these records when called upon to do so, minus the names and the identity of the patient. It seems to me, I am not a medical practitioner, but it seems to me as though as legislators we can be accused of trying to trip up these medical practitioners, when you put this kind of language. Is it not enough that the pharmacist, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is already keeping a formal register of those patients who have received prescriptions and recommendations from doctors? So that is something that I throw out there. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission and assistance, how many more minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You end at 5.56, Member.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you very much. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the types of cannabis, and again getting back to the sacramental aspects of cannabis use, we all know that there are different aspects of the cannabis plant that can be used for different purposes. The Member for Cumuto would have mentioned that and went into a fair amount of detail. To me, the question is, why treat all cannabis plants alike?—which is what this Bill is doing. So, for the sake of breaking it down a bit, we have heard about the cannabidiol and we have heard about non-psychoactive. It does not give you a high. We have heard about THC, I

will not repeat it. That is the one that generates the psychoactive response. You can get a high. We have the different varieties of notes. There are many varieties, but the ones of note in terms of cannabis varieties, cannabis sativa, the cannabis indica, and the ruderalis.

Now, I just make mention of these, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the cannabis sativa generally produces very small quantities of THC while the indica is said to have large amounts of THC. And the intention in drawing this reference is, could this difference in the varieties, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have been more properly used to regulate the industry, the cultivation, consumption for recreational sacramental and medicinal uses accordingly? So I ask that question as well for consideration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to the International Narcotics Control Board, and there is something that I want to break down for the purposes of simplicity, and, you know, a question that I will pose to the hon. Attorney General when he is winding up that he can probably, if at all it needs clearing up in his mind, but certainly for me, we need to ask some of these questions. We understand the need for rigid regulations but not the absurdity of financial castration of the religious bodies that come with it. I want to say that we appreciate that the fluid global nature of the illicit drug market demands not simply a national strategy, but an international one. And we have been seeing that time and again when you have these different pieces of legislation international being ratified and you have certain treaties being ratified, some of them have been mentioned when the Attorney General was piloting. To this end, countries have ratified some of these treaties, and a number of these narcotic treaties obligating signatory countries to take effective steps to control potentially dangerous drugs. So we have to make sure that is what we achieve here. So we have heard that since 1979, we have

heard this already, that Trinidad and Tobago has been a signatory to the International Narcotics Control Board.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, international law influences the rights and freedoms of every individual, including those rights related to substances like cannabis which is a controlled narcotic. Current prohibitions on cannabis are anchored in the global drug control regime defined by the three treaties, the 1961 Single Convention, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Purportedly aiming, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to eliminate the world drug problem, these UN controlled treaties unambiguously—and this is what is important, unambiguously prohibits States like ourselves which are signatory to the treaties from legalizing and regulating cannabis for recreational use, or for any use other than medical or scientific uses.

So, part of what we are doing here today deals with medical and scientific uses, but part also goes outside of that ambit. So, this is where the concern comes in, are we running afoul of these treaties? As stated before, the 1961 convention was ratified in '79; as a matter of international rule of law, countries are not at liberty to pick and choose which international laws to follow, and the question for us is one of abiding by and respecting our international treaty obligations. It is no different with cannabis control. International studies have concluded that the regulated cannabis market without further diplomatic and or regulated action would definitively contravene and exceed the latitude offered by the international drug control regime. It would also undermine the international law treaties which depend on a good faith interpretation of treaty provisions by all parties in light of the object and purpose of the treaties.

And this is something in law, we see the doctrine of *pacta sunt servanda*

encapsulating the imperative to perform agreed upon international obligations in good faith. What does this mean, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The Single Convention requires parties to implement baseline legislative and regulatory measures to prohibit the production, use and trade of narcotic drugs. And this is something that in the preamble the treaty invokes the concern for health and welfare of mankind and describes addiction as a serious evil for the individual that is fraught with social and economic danger. Using vocabulary resembling a call to arms, the preamble imposes a duty to prevent and combat this evil.

So although there is no explicit definition of the term “narcotic drug” in the ’61 Single Convention, Article 1J defines drug as any natural or synthetic substance within Schedules 1 and 2 and next to the Single Convention. And I will in the interest of time say that cannabis extracts, including cannabis hashish and cannabis oils, are listed within Schedules 1 and 4. So, in an effort to maintain, Mr. Deputy Speaker, control over the illicit drug market worldwide, the Single Convention contains provisions for a system of estimates and quotas required for narcotic drugs from all its Member States, and that will now include us. Parties must furnish annual information regarding the quantity of drugs required for legal use to the International Narcotics Control Board, that is, the regime’s independent monitoring body.

So this International Narcotics Control Board, and for ease I will use the acronym INCB, is an independent and quasi-judicial monitoring body established by the Single Convention to oversee the implementation of the drug control treaties. The information on drug usage as supplied by a country is tallied against the total legal production of drugs in that country. Yearly statistics on the production or manufacture of drugs, use of drugs for the manufacture of other drugs and specified substances, consumption and stock of drugs must also be

provided including import and export data.

So the INCB is also engaged in enforcing compliance with treaty obligations. Frequently, the body uses its annual report or press releases to comment on the non-compliance of a specific country or party. And when in doubt, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it may dispatch missions to a specific party and begin confidential consultations, request explanations and propose remedial measures to bring errant parties within the boundaries of the treaty provisions. And if unsatisfied then there may be certain references to the UN Economic and Social Council or the Commission on Narcotics Drugs.

So, I am saying all of this because I heard in the very last maybe two or three sentences of the Attorney General's piloting of the Motion to adopt this report today, that we had international agencies who have already looked at this and they have indicated that we are not running afoul of obligations. So, maybe Member for San Fernando West, hon. AG can tell us when he said he is referring to the INCB, we know that based on media reports INCB was here in 2019. And if they have, have they all spoken and discussed the potential for first warnings and all of those things. Because if that should come to pass, hon. Attorney General, we may be grey listed in some list which may not mean anything enforceable against us, but it could have potential to impact on our ability to import and export. So all of these things are how the treaty obligations are enforced against us. I raise that. I cast no aspersions, certainly not, and I am saying that these are things that we could probably have clear for the record that we are sure that we are not running afoul of treaty obligations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the interest of time, I wanted to speak—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have two more minutes, Member.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you very much—with the rule of law, and particularly

clause 63 which deals with the inspector who will now be able to access premises without a warrant. And I want to say that it is something that— This power at 62 is for the purpose of questioning persons, verifying compliance with the licence, takes official sufficient samples for analysis, take photographs of anything, make copies of any record, seize anything of evidential value, or suspends the activity which he, the inspector, believes to be in contravention of this Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, those are sweeping powers, given that there may be no warrant. Having not obtained the special majority to authorize searches without the use of a warrant and or some other form of judicial scrutiny, to me the Bill attempts to marshal its legislative powers in a manner to extract consent to arbitrary searches and seizures as it is a condition of the licence. So to get the licence you have to agree that these people can come in any hour of the working day or hours of operation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the record such use of power, we must be very careful because it lies contrary to the constellation of benefits which surround the constitutional rights to the protection of law. Mr. Deputy Speaker, how many seconds do I have remaining?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A couple.

Mr. D. Rambally: [*Laughs*] Well with that, let me say thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 22nd day of

April at 1.30 p.m. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is Private Members' Day, so we would be grateful to know what we would be debating on that day, please.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To all, the Opposition will be dealing with Motion No. 6 which is under Private Members' Motion. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.56 p.m.