

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, June 23, 2021*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Mr. Ravi Ratiram, MP, Member for Couva North; Mr. Saddam Hosein, MP, Member for Barataria/San Juan and Ms. Michelle Benjamin, MP, Member for Moruga/Tableland, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMDT.) BILL, 2021

Bill to amend the Sexual Offences Act, Chap. 11:28, brought from the Senate [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

GAMBLING (GAMING AND BETTING) CONTROL BILL, 2021

Bill to provide for the regulation and control of gaming and betting and matters related thereto [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage of the Bill be taken later in the proceedings. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Environmental Management Authority—Environmental Trust Fund for the year ended September 30, 2020. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and

UNREVISED

Tobagoon the Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

3. Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Selection Process) Order, 2021. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Auditor General's Report (Investigation into COVID-19 Grants)

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In light of the discrepancies contained in the Auditor General's Report for 2020 relating to the COVID-19 grants, could the Prime Minister indicate whether an urgent investigation will be undertaken?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, is this mike on? At the last sitting, Madam Speaker, of the House, I did seek your permission to be absent and that permission was granted, and I gave the undertaking to my colleagues that those questions would have been answered today. I just want to remind the House that today, on the Order Paper, is not Prime Minister's Question time and, therefore, the new questions attached to the Order Paper today, I would answer them to the best of my ability, but they do not form part of the Prime Minister's Question time on notice, because I only just received them. Madam Speaker, answer to question number one—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I just seek clarification on what the Prime Minister just said, because we have a list of Prime Minister's Questions approved here. We have an Order Paper, so I am a bit confused. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Well, I do not know that a point of order is clarification. I think

the Prime Minister said what he had to say. I do not know that there is anything to be clarified under that.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, we have 10 Prime Minister's Questions on the Order Paper here today. Is it that these 10 questions are not being answered by the Prime Minister?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, please continue.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am sure that English is still the language of the Parliament, so I proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Lee: So, Madam Speaker, I seek clarification again, please. What questions are the Prime Minister answering today?

Madam Speaker: Can we proceed? Can we proceed?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: We have half an hour for the questions to be answered. So the more time we take up here, the less likelihood we are going to get through the questions.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, you are allowing the Prime Minister to proceed and not answer the questions approved by the Chair?

Madam Speaker: May we proceed, and we will see what unfolds? I have not heard what you all have heard. I really have not heard that. [*Crosstalk*] Prime Minister—is the Member for Oropouche West vacating the question or not?

Mr. Tancoo: The question stands, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: With respect to the question on the Auditor General's Report, Madam Speaker, the Auditor General does an ongoing exercise in reviewing Government's operations and reports on the ongoing COVID-19 grants are treated in the normal way and, at this time, there is no immediate involvement

of an urgent investigation. However, all Ministries and Departments to which reference is made by the Auditor General, requiring adjustments or improvements in their operations are underway. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In light of Prime Minister's indication that there will be no such urgent investigation, can the Prime Minister indicate whether he is comforted in the knowledge that 713 persons used the same bank account number in their application and will not be held—no one would be held accountable for this?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I did not say that and, therefore, I will not respond to that.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the Prime Minister's initial presentation, the Prime Minister said that no urgent investigation will be undertaken at this point. We have an indication, Madam Speaker, and I would like the Prime Minister to answer clearly, whether any investigation will be done on the fact that 2,672 persons received both Income Support Grant and Food Support Grant for a total of \$8.115 million and no one would be held accountable for this breach? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, what I did say is that references made by the Auditor General requiring departmental intervention, those references will require adjustments by the relevant departments and those adjustments are ongoing.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Speaker, my question is very clear. Will an investigation be undertaken—[*Crosstalk*—allow me please. Will an investigation be undertaken to hold someone responsible for the fact that \$8.115 million has been inappropriately spent, when 7,000 applicants were not able to get a Salary Relief Grant?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, in the ongoing work of the departments concerned in the various Ministries and Departments, to the extent that those matters are identifiable and persons are to be held accountable, they will be held accountable with or without the fulminations of my colleague from wherever he is from.

**China/Trinidad and Tobago Loan Agreement
(Percentage for Sinopharm Vaccines)**

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*): Could the Prime Minister indicate to the House what percentage/value in money terms of the recently signed loan agreement between China and Trinidad and Tobago is being used for the procurement of the Sinopharm vaccine?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, to date, all the Sinopharm vaccines procured by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have been paid for using general revenues from the Consolidated Fund. The proposed loan from the China Development Bank may be used for future purchases of Sinopharm vaccines, depending on the timing of such purchases.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Prime Minister, is this in conflict with the presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance on a previous occasion when he indicated that a percentage of the loan will be used for the procurement of vaccines?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It is not. And just to make sure that you do not confuse the public, at the time when the Minister spoke, we had payments to make. We got the first set of vaccines before the loan finalization was done, so we paid for it from our Consolidated Fund and we continue so to do. And the Minister was very, very clear. He pointed out that it was not a condition of the loan to buy vaccines. It was a condition of the loan that a certain small percentage of the loan to be used on Chinese products of whatever Trinidad and Tobago choose. So if do not spend it

on vaccine purchase, we can spend it on something else. So do not mislead the public. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the hon. Prime Minister then indicate, what is the amount of money that has been spent on purchasing from the Consolidated Fund in purchasing these Sinopharm vaccines from China?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: If the appropriate notice is given, I will be able to give you the exact figure down to the last cent.

Daily-Paid Workers Contributory Pension Plan

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, given the announcement by the Minister of Finance that a contributory pension plan for daily-paid workers in the public service will take effect in 2020, could the Prime Minister inform this House why this said plan has not come into effect?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, this is a very, I should say, ticklish matter. It also requires a lot of work. The work is continuing. The expectation was that the work would have been concluded during this period so that it can be implemented. However, there have been some element of delays, because as you would expect that the public systems have not been functioning in the way they would have been functioning normally, and the meeting and interacting of people as required here. So, there is still some work to be done, Madam Speaker, and as soon as that is completed, we will proceed to do this.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, could you tell us, given the information at your disposal, when the ticklish work will be completed to facilitate this exercise?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: As soon as the exercise is complete and the Government is satisfied that the Government is ready and that the workers are ready, we will put this into operation.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, given the fact that a number of daily-rated employees have retired since this announcement was made, could you tell this House if the said plan will be made retroactive to the point, based on the announcement of the Minister of Finance on the 7th of October, 2019?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I do not have the authority of the Cabinet to make that commitment to you and, therefore, I will not make it.

US Vaccine Allocations

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, in view of a recent report from the US White House that and I quote “Haiti and other Caricom countries will impart benefit from a 14 million vaccine allocation as part of President Biden’s pledge to share vaccines”, could the Prime Minister indicate how many of these vaccines Trinidad and Tobago is expected to receive?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, as the Government has said on a number of occasions, we have to await the outcome of the allocation process which is a matter for the United States Government. Statements made by the Government of the United States are not under our control. And, as I speak now, we are still awaiting the allocation of the United States Government. We have said that on more than one occasion, so the question does not change that.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker; thank you, Prime Minister. In light of that response and in light of an announcement by the Mexican Foreign Minister yesterday, can the Prime Minister indicate how many vaccines are expected via this donation?

Madam Speaker: The Prime Minister is not hearing you.

Dr. Bodoë: Oh, sorry. In light of an announcement by the Mexican Foreign Minister yesterday, can the Prime Minister indicate how many vaccines are

expected via this donation?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, we await the specificity, we await the announcement by the relevant authorities who are making those announcements. They have not been made and, therefore, the Member knows I cannot tell him that.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Prime Minister. Again, in relation to the issue of vaccines and the current shortage that we are experiencing, Prime Minister, can you provide, at this time, any update at all on the status of the vaccines suppliers through the African Medical Supplies Platform?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, with respect to last part of that question, I can comfort the Member by telling him that with respect to our expectation of vaccines from sources, governments outside in bilateral arrangements, our contacts and our discussions are continuing, they are progressing, and that is the most I can say at this time.

With respect to the vaccine, the Johnson & Johnson vaccines that are due from the African Medical Supplier Platform, nothing has changed since the Government's last statement that we expect our first delivery towards the end of August. And, of course, we have to rely on the delivery of those vaccines from the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust and, therefore, until they tell us when and how much we will get at that time, I cannot say more to the Member at this time. **Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni Central?

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central had a sudden emergency. Can I ask his question?

Madam Speaker: Yes.

**Port of Port of Spain Operations
(Status of Divestment)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you. Prime Minister, on behalf of the Member for Caroni Central, question number 5. Given the recent reports that the

Government is committed to locating a private operator to partner with the Port of Port of Spain to divest its operations, could the Prime Minister provide the House with a status brief on this project?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, in October of 2020, a committee was established to consider the arrangements for privatization of the Port of Port of Spain. The committee organized itself into five subcommittees to review the organizational structure of the Port: a strength and weakness analysis of the Port of Trinidad and Tobago; review top-performing ports; benchmarking public/private partnerships; and a road map design. Work had continued on that, Madam Speaker, and widespread stakeholder consultations have gone on with the Port Authority, Customs and Excise Division of the Ministry of Finance, the Immigration Division of the Ministry of National Security, the Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, the Trinidad and Tobago Pilots Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Haulers Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, Customs Clerk and Customs Brokers Association, the Shipping Lines all and, in addition, Madam Speaker, the committee has been working with presentations from the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Business Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago, the Andean Bank and, Madam Speaker, these works have continued. They are close to completion, and very soon the Port has already been authorized to proceed to invite interested parties sometime in the not-too-distant future, but the work has been considerably advanced.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a follow-up question to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, there was a memo issued by the Port Chairman yesterday

to the employees talking about a transition team to look at the privatization of the Port. The question would be: Is that team already been formed and who are the private partners who would be on that transition team?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I could not answer that at this time, Madam Speaker, but if the Member poses the question to the relevant Minister, he will be satisfied by the answer he will get.

**Vaccination Policy for Senior Citizens' Homes
(Status of)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Prime Minister: Given the Government's policy on the vaccination of elderly persons in senior citizens' homes, could the Prime Minister confirm whether the JC MacDonald Home for the Aged and other such homes have to date received Covid-19 vaccines?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health's policy with respect to the vaccination exercise specific for home for the ageing is that vaccines are being provided and administered by the regional health authorities. The Ministry of Health is dealing with the Association of Homes for the Aged and JC MacDonald Home for the Aged is not a member of that association. The Ministry of Health will request that the appropriate RHA reach out the JC MacDonald Home.

Mr. Charles: Mr. Prime Minister, I spoke to the home and up to, an hour ago, they have not received vaccines. And, Prime Minister, given the optics of the elderly lining up for vaccines and statements by the Minister of Finance that the elderly is a burden on the pension plan, do you not think there is time for you to adjust your policies towards the elderly? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the fact that the Member for Naparima has said that, is a good chance that it is not true. [*Desk thumping*] And, secondly,

Madam Speaker, I have not heard the Minister or any Minister of this Government saying that the elderly is a burden on any part of this Government or this country [*Desk thumping*] because if that was true, Madam Speaker, the Parliament will not pay the Member for Naparima. [*Desk thumping*]

**US Lobbyist Group DC
(Justification for Continued Government Use)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you. Could the Prime Minister justify the Government's continued use of its lobbyist in the United States, that is Group DC, given that to date they have failed in our desire to obtain vaccines from that country?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the premise of the question is wrong and misdirected and, therefore, the outcome has to be wrong. The lobbyist is doing considerable valuable work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, has allowed us to be able to reach and to speak and to maintain inter-governmental contacts at the highest level in the United States and, therefore, the Government is very satisfied with the work of the lobbyist working alongside our Mission in Washington.

Mr. Charles: Prime Minister, the lobbyists for Israel, Canada and Mexico were able to obtain millions of doses. All we have been able to obtain is meetings with Heads of the Congressional—

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles:—would you not say that we are not getting value for the US 100,000 per month?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, is that last person who should be talking about our lobbyists anywhere is this Member of Parliament who disgraced this country by selling out the country for a plate of food. [*Desk thumping*] This

Member of Parliament sold out this country for a plate of food when he met with racist Mary Lappan in Washington, DC. So do not come here and talk about nobody—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(4).

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Trinidad and Tobago—[*Inaudible*] You should not have met with Mary Lappan in New York when nobody—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Charles: “I eat ah lunch.” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—for a plate of food. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: What insulting language like that from the Prime Minister to a Member of this House, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Member, you have another question? Okay? Member for Naparima.

**Patriotic Energies and Technologies' Proposal
(Status re: Petrotrin Refinery)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Could the Prime Minister state the status of the Patriotic Energies and Technologies' proposal to acquire the Petrotrin Refinery given that its President indicated on Sunday that a new proposal was submitted?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the status of Patriotic's technical proposal referring to the last invitation has been made quite clear to the country that the proposal was found to be unacceptable and the Government did not accept it and that issue was closed then and there. To the extent that the union has another proposal to put in as we go out on an invitation that is due to go out in a matter of a day or two, that proposal is not before the Cabinet at this time because the invitation has not yet gone out. But I can tell you, Madam Speaker, an invitation is due to go out in the next few days.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Prime Minister, could you indicate how many times this Government intends to reject Patriotic Energies and Technologies'?

proposals? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the Government does not write the proposals. The Government simply has to look after the public interest and we take decisions on a case-by-case and a time-by-time basis.

Mr. Lee: Just a follow-up question to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, you just mentioned in a couple days a new RF, a request for proposal will go out. Would you allow, the Government allow Patriotic to resubmit a new bid in that time?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We have no control over Patriotic or any other interested party. So I do not know why the verb of “allowing” is being used. That is meant to mislead. We have no control over what Patriotic does. We put out an invitation there and, by its very nature, it is open to every interested party. So if Patriotic is interested to submit again, then they are free to do so.

Government's Management of COVID-19 Pandemic (Commission of Enquiry Into)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you. Is the Prime Minister prepared to conduct an independent Commission of Enquiry into his Government's management of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I am sure that at the end of the day, if the Opposition continue doing what they are doing now, an enquiry would be required. But, in the meantime, the Government will not be distracted by demands of that nature which is meant to distract us and to disturb what we are doing, and to send the wrong impression, Madam Speaker. We will continue to look after the interest and the health of the people of Trinidad and Tobago as our colleagues continue to try to undermine it.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Prime Minister, are you waiting for another thousand people to die before you enquire into the deaths of COVID victims in the health institutions?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am not the one who told them not to take the vaccine because they are Guinea pigs. I am inviting the entire population of Trinidad and Tobago to take the vaccine and save their lives. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister stating that this Government will not hold anyone accountable for the mismanagement of the vaccine acquisition in Trinidad and Tobago and leaving all of us exposed?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, if the Member believes that by not using hydroxychloroquine, ivermectin and Puncheon and rum, is a mismanagement of the COVID-19, then so be it. If the Member believes that by not using sunshine and, Madam Speaker, telling people not to take the vaccine, that is mismanagement, then he can do that. As far as we are concerned in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, we are managing this situation as best we can, and the population does not share the view of the Member for Naparima. [*Desk thumping*]

10.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Prime Minister, given that we have the worst performance in terms of vaccination and testing in the region, besides Haiti, you are not holding anyone accountable for that situation, Prime Minister?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, as soon as the Member puts an element of truth before me, I will respond. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: In case the Prime Minister was in his fridge when I spoke so he does not understand, the question I ask is that, once again, Trinidad and Tobago will underperform and there will be no transparency and accountability whatsoever under his Government.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the view of the Member for Naparima is

usually at variance with the truth and today is no different. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker, on behalf of—

Madam Speaker: The Member is here.

**Donated Pfizer Vaccines
(Recipients of)**

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister identify the group of persons in National Security who have received the 200 first shot of the Pfizer vaccines donated by the Government of the United States?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, we have made vaccines available to National Security from the Government sources and those particular 400 doses and they have been used by members of the National Security department. I do not and I am not prepared to identify individuals who have received the particular vaccine. I did say to the country last Saturday that the 400 vaccines were all offered to the National Security department and it was for use by the National Security department and it has so been used under the guidance of the Ministry of Health.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Prime Minister, in light of the suspicious nature of the importation of these vaccines, are you willing to provide to the House, at a later time, the list of persons, it is a matter of public record already, who have received these vaccines?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information and if the Member wants the names of who got it, then I will ask the Ministry of Health

whether they are prepared to do that or whether they can—if the patient record is available. I will ask the Ministry of Health. But I will also tell the Member, there was no suspicious nature other than the suspicion that you try to create.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, given this continued veil of secrecy in relation to these 80 vials of Pfizer vaccine, are you willing to provide a breakdown in terms of the classifications of persons within the National Security intelligence network that have received these vaccines?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Depending on what the answer to that question is, Madam Speaker, I may or may not. If it is a matter of National Security, I will not.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East—Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Can the Prime Minister indicate whether he was a recipient of this Pfizer vaccine? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I wish that the Members of the Opposition would stop attempting to mislead the public with blatant lies and untruths. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I have stated to this country before, unlike the other leader in this House—unlike the other leader in this House, I told the country— [*Crosstalk*]—unlike the other leader in this House, I told the country when I was diagnosed as a positive patient with COVID-19. I told the country when I was in isolation. I told the country when I can be vaccinated. The Minister of Health actually told the country the date on which I can be vaccinated. So to come here today and ask me if I took vaccine from the 400, you are just a mischief-maker and that is your pen. [*Desk thumping*] Go and find out from your leader when she took it and when she got COVID. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes or no, Prime Minister; that is all.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima. Prime Minister, time is not up as yet. Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Prime Minister, it is a simple question, yes or no, did you receive the vaccine, the Pfizer?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I would not dignify the Member for Naparima, his out of place question with an answer. You are a stranger to the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Those are four questions.

URGENT QUESTIONS

SEA Supervisors (Number Vaccinated)

Ms. Anita Haynes (Tabaquite): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Could the Minister indicate how many SEA Supervisors have been fully vaccinated in anticipation of their presence at the SEA Examination next Thursday?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the question presupposes that full vaccination was a condition of supervising the SEA examination. This is a false premise; 3,635 MoE staff were given their first jab, those who were willing to so accept between 27th May and 4th June. This included 1,708 teachers from 442 primary schools who had volunteered to supervise the SEA, along with willing principals of 184 primary schools; all of whom play a supervisory role in the SEA.

On Saturday 26 June, an additional 500 teachers who have volunteered to work in the SEA administration and are willing to be vaccinated will receive their first vaccination dose.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Minister, is it that the education sector falls outside of the “vaccinate to operate” policy of the Government because the policy is that you get vaccinated and you are allowed to operate within our sector, but now you are telling us that it is not a condition for SEA students—supervisors?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Again, Madam Speaker, a false premise. The policy is that we encourage persons to be vaccinated once they are willing to be so. There has never been any mandatory condition to be vaccinated to be able to operate in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, could you indicate whether the SEA supervisors will be asked to self-quarantine following the examination to avert any risks of COVID19 to the wider society?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Speaker, I do not know of any practice that says that persons that go and do or work, as persons have been working since March of last year, that they have to self-quarantine after going to work. I do not know that this is something that is practised in Trinidad and Tobago or anywhere else globally.

Caribbean Airlines (Current Financial Position)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: Given the recent announcement that Caribbean Airlines has taken a decision to reduce its staff by 450 employees, could the Minister inform this House of the current financial position of CAL in relation to an after tax loss or profit after the first quarter of 2021?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am advised by Caribbean Airlines that the airline lost the sum of TT \$172.7million in the first quarter of 2021.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, given the current decision in relation to the staffing levels at CAL, could you state that if any position has been taken as it relates to the Jamaican component of the business model of CAL in terms of day-to-day operation?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the Member knows, Caribbean Airlines operates in two countries within the Caricom region, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, and Caribbean Airlines restructuring will be taken in both countries in the best interest of the airline.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, could you give an indication to the retrenched employees, or the contemplated retrenched employees, when their severance payments will be calculated and effected?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Again, as the Member well knows, being a trade unionist in the past, there are procedures under the law requiring consultation and notice. Consultations are in progress and at the end of these consultations, according to the law, the appropriate notice will be given and within the prescribed period of time, prescribed by the law, the payments will be made.

**Salary Relief Grants
(Applications Received)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the

Minister of Finance: In light of the Government's decision to invite applications for Income Support Grant to all construction workers, could the Minister inform this House of the total number of applications the Ministry has received through the National Insurance Board for Salary Relief Grants as at the 23rd of June, 2021?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wish to point out that the 23rd of June is today, this Urgent Question was received only a short while ago. I have some information on the May 2021 applications. The information I have as of the 18th of June, 2021, I am advised that 19,309 applications have been submitted and 10,811 applications are in progress. If you add those two numbers together, Madam Speaker, you would get 30,120.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, could you give this House the satisfaction of what will be implemented by the Ministry of Finance given that the Auditor General's Report has revealed that 2,672 persons received both grants which accounted to the sum of \$8,115,000 as at the 30th of September, 2020, so that this will not repeat?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, contrary to information that I heard in this House a little while before, the persons who have made a false declaration have been reported to the police and the Ministry of Finance is not the only agency or Ministry that provides Salary or Income Relief Grants. These grants are provided by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and by the Tobago House of Assembly. All three agencies collaborate to determine fraudsters and persons who seek to double-dip and falsify their applications and all matters are being reported to the Fraud Squad.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A follow-up question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, you said 10,811 applications are in progress, when could the employees or the individuals receive payment of their Salary Relief Grant?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, there is no connection between the two parts of that question. If an application is in progress it means it has not yet been submitted. And let me clarify, what we did at the cut-off date in the first period of these salary relief grants for the month of May 2021, we allowed those applications which were still in process of being completed, we allowed those persons to finish their application, get all the supporting documentations that they require and submit them. And there are 10,811 such applications where the person is in the system, they are not being excluded and they have been given time now to collate all the necessary supporting documentation to submit their applications; assuming that all 10,811 submit, then the total number of completed submitted applications would be in the vicinity of 30,000. It is therefore impossible to answer a question which asks about an application that has not yet been submitted.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I indulge—the Member for St. Augustine had an emergency, so can I ask her Urgent Question? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Moratorium on Payments (Public Utilities)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): On behalf of the Member for St. Augustine, to the Minister of Public Utilities: Is the Government willing to consider a moratorium on payments for public utilities for persons who have lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this matter is currently not before the Cabinet at this point in time and therefore I am not in a position to pronounce on this. However, Madam Speaker, I am advised by both WASA and T&TEC that they have already started making special arrangements with their customers to enter into payment arrangements; those customers who have been impacted negatively by the global pandemic and therefore they have already started the process of entering into arrangements with their customers to settle their arrears.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Speaker, thank you. Would the Minister indicate whether and when WASA will be continuing their disconnection drive?

Madam Speaker: That question is really out of order. Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Could the Minister indicate what special provisions, if any, that these utilities are considering?

Madam Speaker: Member, may I hear that question again?

Mr. Ram: Could the Minister—in response to his answer, I am asking, what special provisions, if any, are these utilities making?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, I thought my response was absolutely clear. My response, and let me say it again, that customers are encouraged to contact the utility companies, both WASA and T&TEC, if they find themselves in arrears. They can contact the utility companies and to enter into special arrangements to settle their outstanding arrears with these companies.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is one question for oral answer and that question will be answered. Madam Speaker, you would note that questions 126 to 130 are for written response, we are asking for a further deferral, Madam Speaker, because our information is that, given the nature of these questions, we would have to ask each person if they are willing to have their information revealed. So we are having some—we need more time.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House, I have been just advised that Question No. 168, notice withdrawing that question was sent yesterday had not reached me.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I did not know that. I think that was a good idea.

Madam Speaker: And just for the record, might I ask, which question, written question is being asked to be deferred?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The written responses to 126 to 130, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: So they are being further deferred?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Ms. Michelle Benjamin (Moruga/Tableland):

La Ruffin, Moruga (Construction of a Jetty)

168. Could the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries provide the steps that will be taken to accommodate the requests made by the fisherfolk of Moruga for the construction of the jetty in La Ruffin, Moruga?

Question, by leave, withdrawn.

GAMBLING (GAMING AND BETTING) CONTROL BILL, 2021

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move:

That a Bill to provide for the regulation and control of gaming and betting

and matters related thereto, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, the matter we are dealing with is the Bill as amended in the Senate which we dealt with on Friday of last week and Monday of this week in the other place where some amendments were made; amendments that improved the checks and balances in the Bill. This matter has been before this Parliament, at least under this PNM administration led by the hon. Prime Minister, for almost six years. The previous administration, in May of 2015, just prior to the dissolution of the Parliament in June of 2015—in fact, just a couple of days before, had debated and passed a Bill that more or less is a mirror image of this Bill with few differences, called the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill. Because we in this Government, this PNM administration felt that the control of gambling and betting is so important and because it is a known fact that Trinidad and Tobago is the only country in the world that has an unregulated but thriving gambling, casino gambling industry, we felt it was so important that rather than revisiting and reviewing and amending the Bill, that was debated and passed by the former UNC administration at the end of May 2015, we thought it appropriate assuming, clearly foolishly now in hindsight, that the UNC would not oppose its own Bill, we laid the same Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill passed by the UNC in the House of Representatives, word for word, verbatim.

We did not change a full stop, a semicolon, a word, a paragraph, nothing—same Bill. Having laid the same Bill that was introduced and passed by the UNC in 2015, the UNC immediately opposed it and therefore taught us a valuable lesson that there are no standards on that side. We then found ourselves having to send the Bill to a joint select committee because it required a special majority because of certain enforcement procedures and found ourselves in that joint select committee and another joint select committee for four years, Madam Speaker. During that

four-year period,- we had numerous meetings of the joint select committee, over 20. We had discussions and consultations with stakeholders, persons involving in the casino industry, persons involved in the amusement, gambling industry, bar owners, casino owners, persons involved in the sale and distribution of gaming machines—“*cote cecote la*” for almost 100 hours of consultations, almost 25 meetings, I am told, of the joint select committees.

So we consulted ad infinitum. It is therefore ridiculous to see some of the commentary coming from the other side that we are trying to rush this legislation without consultation. I want to repeat, that except for some improvements that have become necessary because of the evolution in the requirements for anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing and proliferation financing that have evolved over the last six years, as a result of the deliberation of the Financial Action Task Force, the Global Forum, the EU Council of Ministers, and so on, apart from those enhancements to the Bill to introduce the Financial Intelligence Unit as the supervisory agency for money laundering as it relates to casino gambling, and so on, apart from that, this Bill is more or less the exact same Bill that was presented and passed by the other side in 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

I just want to look now at how serious this matter is. The Financial Action Task Force revised 40 recommendations, which have had over 10 updates since 2012, give an overview of how dangerous our position in Trinidad and Tobago is from an anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing compliance perspective. In 2007 the Third Round Mutual Evaluation Report stated:

There are 20 private members’ clubs registered with the Board of Inland Revenue which operate as casinos. In addition, there are 147 recreation clubs which entertain gambling on a smaller scale. There is no association of private members’ clubs; they are monitored by the miscellaneous taxes

department at the Board of Inland Revenue through field visits and audits. No AML/CFT guidelines or AML/CFT reporting system is in place for private members' clubs.

Now I fast-forward to 2016. I am quoting from the Fourth Round Mutual Evaluation Report and this is all related to FATF:

Private members' clubs: there is a significant presence of private members' clubs within the country, Trinidad and Tobago, which provide gambling activities through gaming tables and machines that are similar to casinos. The high cash turnover of these institutions, the nature of the clientele, and the non-rigorous application of AML/CFT requirements are a cause for concern.

And FATF went on to note—or CFATF, for that matter:

That some banks have refused to do business with some of these entities as a result of the perceived high risk of the industry.

In fact, I am told, there may be just one local bank that has decided to do business with these private members' clubs/casinos:

There are inadequate measures in place to prevent criminals and their associates from holding or being the beneficial owners or having a significant or controlling interest or a management function in these entities.

This is a particular concern in private members' clubs that provide gambling activities through gaming tables and machines that are similar to casinos:

Given the significant risk from money laundering and terrorist financing by such entities, this deficiency ought to be addressed.

And then to seal the final nail in the coffin, in Trinidad and Tobago's third enhanced follow-up report in 2019, which included the gambling sector:

One of the four recommendations is still listed in that year as partially

compliant.

So, Madam Speaker, as I said in the other place, the Opposition has filibustered on this matter for six years; we in this Government are no longer willing to tolerate that filibustering. This is a \$16 billion industry, there are no adequate controls to ensure that fit and proper persons are owners and operators of casinos. There are no adequate controls to ensure that there is proper scrutiny of potential money laundering and terrorist financing. There are no adequate controls to ensure that these entities in this \$16 billion industry pay their taxes, and the time has come for this to come to an end.

I also want to deal with a matter that was raised in the other place where an Opposition Senator made the ludicrous statement that we should allow bars to have gaming machines, such as roulette tables, and if we do not allow bars to operate, in my words, as casinos, then we would be losing over \$200 million in revenue on an annual basis. That is an absurdity. These bars that want to operate as casinos with roulette tables are currently avoiding paying their taxes and if we get \$2 million out of them, we get plenty. So the idea that if we allow bars to operate as casinos we will get \$250 million in revenue is just an absurdity, because what was being proposed by the UNC is that we do not regulate bars that operate as casinos. Right now bars are allowed to have up to 20 amusement machines, which are machines that have a very small pay out. They are designated as amusement machines. They are not supposed to be recalibrated to operate as gambling machines, but quite often they are. And if a bar wants to have more than 20 amusement machines, then that bar is effectively turning into a casino.

If a bar wants to have a roulette table and a blackjack table and various other gambling activities, then that bar will be a casino and therefore it is absurd for persons who purport to represent that sector to say that they should not be

regulated. We will continue to allow bars to operate with up to 20 amusement machines. Once that threshold is crossed, anybody who wants to engage in gambling using roulette tables and so on, will have to apply to the Commission for a licence to become a gambling establishment. Madam Speaker, this is now the second time I am presenting this legislation. The Bill before us has a number of clauses—let me just get the precise number—there are 89 clauses and four Schedules.

The first part of the Bill has the traditional clauses with the commencement clause. And I want to make that point that as with other similar legislation, we will be allowing the Commission to establish itself and put all its systems in place, populate its personnel, get proper accommodation, prepare rules and regulations. We will start with that and then at the appropriate time, sooner rather than later, the full effect of this legislation will be implemented. That is why there is a commencement clause so that we will—after we seek and obtain the approval of this House, we will proclaim those parts of the law that allow for the establishment of the Commission and the various entities associated with the Commission and allow the Commission to start preparing forms of licenses and rules and so on, and get the Commission up and running and then bring all of these entities within the ambit of the Commission; but I want to stress, that will be sooner rather than later.

11.00 a.m.

The regulations have already been prepared. That was a sticking point in the Joint Select Committee. The Opposition, in its attempt to filibuster and drag this thing out until the next century, demanded that we produce detailed regulations, which we did based on consultation with expert gaming consultants that we brought in from Australia and from the United Kingdom. That was one of the benefits of the JSC, we had expert international consultants, and we were forced,

because at that time the Bill required a special majority, to draft regulations and then critique these regulations in the Joint Select Committee, with Members of the Opposition, with the support of the international consultants. So we have regulations already. So that that is something we can bring to this House very quickly, the regulations for the gambling industry.

The objectives of the Bill are set out in clause 4. The Commission is in Part II of the Bill, and may I say, in the UNC version of this Bill the Commission was appointed by the Minister. We have sought to change that slightly to make it appointed by the President, which in the context of the wording of the legislation, will mean Cabinet, which would mean that the Minister would submit a note to Cabinet and Cabinet would make the decision as to who should populate the Commission, who should be the members, and then that would be sent to the President in the normal way. So it is the Cabinet that will determine who would be on the Commission. In the UNC version, it was the Minister.

One of the adjustments we made in the other place was on the qualifications for persons who would be members of the Commission, and I want to thank Sen. Vieira for that, for enhancing and improving the requirements, and this is the addition that we made.

A person shall be qualified to be a member of the board where:

- a) he has worked and has experience in the gaming and betting sectors;
- b) is an attorney-at-law of at least seven years standing;
- c) has AML/CFT/PF experience; and.
- d) has at least five years' experience in accounting, finance, economics, information technology, management, social work or law enforcement.

What Sen. Vieira allowed us to do was to put further specifications with respect to

the attorney, seven years, the other members accountants and so on, five years' experience, and also introduce the concept of somebody who has anti-money laundering counter financing of terrorism and proliferation financing experience. That was a very welcome addition, and it has improved the legislation.

With respect to eligibility, that is another point that was confused by the Members of the Opposition in the other place. We have made it very, very clear in the legislation that a person is ineligible—ineligible—to be a member of the Gambling and Gaming Commission if the person if the person has an interest in gaming and gambling, whether financial or operational interest. Let me just read it, it is in clause 5(6):

“A person who—

- a) has operated a gambling establishment prior to the coming into force of this Act;
- b) holds a licence issued under this Act;
- c) intends to apply for a licence pursuant to the provisions of this Act; or
- d) has a financial interest in but does not operate a gambling establishment

shall not be eligible for appointment to the Board...”

We had an absurd proposition in the other place, where an Opposition Member said that you could have somebody on the Board who is a competitor of somebody who wants to get a gambling licence and that person could then use their position on the board to block the other person; absurd. Such a person would be ineligible to be a member of the gambling commission.

The other clauses in Part II deal with, as I said, the functions which would be:

“(a) to regulate and control the operation of gambling...”

- (b) provide such information to other regulatory, supervisory and government agencies.”

This is one of the enhancements to the legislation since the last time we were here with this. This now allows various agencies involved in law enforcement and enforcement of various types to collaborate. So the Board of Inland Revenue, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Integrity Commission, the Customs and Excise Division, the Commissioner of Police, the Police Complaints Authority, the Betting and Levy Board, the Financial Intelligence Branch of the police. Now, there would be collaboration and communication between these agencies, to allow for better enforcement and control of the operation of gambling in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Bill also has two funds in it, a Rehabilitation Fund and a Development Fund. The Development Fund is typical of the funds that we find in legislation dealing with the proceeds of gambling, such as lotteries, and the Development Fund will be used to finance sport and culture and community work, and that sort of thing. The Rehabilitation Fund will be a fund set up to deal with chronic or problem gamblers and persons who are addicted to gambling, to get them off of that addiction.

There are a number of licences in the Bill which are identified in Part II, and if I can just go now and read from the Bill, Madam Speaker, the various licences. We felt that we needed to distinguish the various types of licences that would be granted by the Commission. These would include persons who would be applying for:

“a Gaming Operator’s Licence, which shall permit the licensee to operate a gaming establishment for the purpose of conducting gaming;”

That is an important point. We are not permitting Internet gambling at this point in

time. We are of the view that Internet gambling is very complicated, and the control and enforcement of Internet gambling require a lot of consultation, and a lot of expert advice. So we are limiting gambling to gambling within an establishment. We are not allowing online gambling, Internet gambling.

The second type of licence is:

“a Betting Operator’s Licence which shall permit the licensee to operate a betting shop...”.

Third:

“a Gaming Owner’s Licence, which shall permit the licensee to own a gaming establishment...”—although not operating it.

So you have the person who operates will get a licence. The person who owns it will get a licence.

Another form of licence is Bookmaker’s Licence, because these gambling activities are all different. So the Bookmaker’s Licence permits:

“the licensee to conduct betting activities, other than pool betting;

- (e) a Promoter’s Licence which shall permit the licensee to stage live racing and conduct pool betting...
- (f) a Gaming Machine Operating Licence which shall permit the licensee to sell or lease a gaming machine for use in premises approved by the Commission for its purpose, including casinos, gaming lounges and other premises licensed to conduct such activities;
- (g) a Gaming Machine Distributor Licence which shall permit the licensee to import and supply licensed gaming machines or prescribed gaming components and related equipment;
- (h) a Technical Operator’s Licence, which shall permit the licensee to install, maintain or repair licensed gaming machines;”

This is an important point, Madam Speaker, because the software that is used in this machine is very sophisticated, and persons can hack into the software, into the hardware and the software, and can corrupt the machines to the point where they would not be making the fair pay outs to persons. In fact, persons would just be putting the money into these machines and getting nothing. So that the persons who would be authorized to install, maintain and repair licensed gaming machines must come under some form of scrutiny, and that is where a Technical Operator's Licence would be required.

- “(i) a Premises Licence, which shall permit the licensee to conduct activities approved by the Commission under an operating licence...
- (j) a Personal Licence, in respect of key employees...”

This, again, is a feature of this Bill, a significant improvement on the current arrangements where it is a free for all, and anybody could manage a casino, or anybody could be a senior operative in a casino. Now, the key personnel will have to get a Personal Licence after being subject to a fit and proper test, and that is only proper. We have casinos here owned and operated by persons from eastern Europe and from the Far East, and there is a lot of reported irregularity in these casinos, and a lot of leakage of foreign exchange, because I am advised that because the ownership is overseas, the profits go overseas, and the US dollars, I am told, is quite often obtained illegally to be exported. So there is a lot of leakage of foreign exchange out of these establishments.

The Gaming Machine Manufacture Licence, again, that is with respect to the possibility of people tampering with the machines, and then there is a catchall, any other licence that the Commission deems appropriate.

One of the enhancements to the legislation is clause 31, that:

“The FIUTT shall be the Supervisory Authority responsible for the

AML/CFT/PF supervision of gambling establishments.”

This is something that was not there before, and we are bringing it in now to ensure that we maintain our compliance with the Financial Action Task Force.

As I go through the rest of the legislation, Madam Speaker, standard clauses are there. The important one would be the power of the Commission under clause 13(2) to:

“grant, renew, suspend, review, vary, amend, revoke or cancel licences... verify or cause to be verified...”—and this is very important—“the background, character and reputation of an applicant and any associate,...”—because a person may be fronting for somebody else—“employee, relative or other person as it deems necessary;...

“direct the implementation of a computerised internal enterprise network system...”—so that you can monitor what is going on, and “require” —and very importantly, right now it is a free for all, and there is a very important function in clause 13 too:

“require verification of all income and other matters relevant to the business for which a licence is granted under this Act;”

Clause 18 gives the sources of funding for the Commission, which will include appropriations, grants, moneys collected in respect of licensees, et cetera.

Clause 20 indicates that any surplus generated by the Commission is to be paid to the Consolidated Fund, clause 20(4).

Clause 22 requires the Commission to keep proper accounts.

Clause 23 provides for parliamentary scrutiny and requires the Commission to prepare an annual report laid before Parliament.

As we continue we get to Part III, “Licensing Regime”, and as I just indicated there are a number of different licensees which will now be required. To

answer another silly point made in the other place by the Opposition, these licensees all go to unique people. There is not one person who will need to get 11 licences. Because of the different types of activities, machine manufacturers, machine repair, gaming owner, gaming establishment operator, these licences are all unique to different people. It is not eleven licences going to one person.

As we move along now, the question of AML/CFT compliance. The licensing regime is extremely robust. It is subject to the provision of in-depth information by applicants, inclusive of a completed anti-money laundering risk assessment questionnaire, and it is also subject to public scrutiny, as notice of the application for a licence must be published by the Commission in at least two daily newspapers, inviting the public to comment, and persons can object. Residents, teachers, religious groups, et cetera, who become aware of the intention of someone to apply for a licence, they can object. It also requires a fit and proper test. It also allows the Police Commissioner to make enquiries with respect to the background of applicants, and to provide information to the Commission.

The other clauses are technical clauses that deal with the variation of licences, the expiration and renewal of licences and so on. Clauses 44 and 45, establish a review mechanism for licences granted by the Commission, and this is typical with the rules. This is consistent with the rules of natural justice, so that a person will be notified of procedures to be observed during a review, provided with the opportunity to make representation, all these natural justice provisions.

Clause 46 provides the procedure for the revocation of licensees. Clause 47 obliges licensees to notify the Commission of any change in circumstances. And clause 50 provides for the appeal of any decision of the Commission to the High Court.

Clause 51 provides for a register that is public and private. It provides the

name of the licensee, a list of every gaming machine and gambling device granted under a licence, the address of any premises. All of this will be in a public register, a far cry from what happens now. We do not have a clue as to the gaming machines and gambling devices, because people move them around. As the inspectors come, they take them out and they hide them, and then when the inspector goes away, they put them back. Now it will be a requirement and an offence if you do not indicate every single gaming device and gambling device in your establishment in a public register.

As we go now into the latter clauses of the Bill, Madam Speaker, Part IV deals with gaming shops, betting shops and so on. Clause 53 provides for a transitional period, where we amended that in the Senate to allow that transitional period to be extended in the same way we have done with other legislation by Order of the Minister, if that is warranted.

Clause 56, very important, gives the Commission the authority to designate machines as either amusement machines or gaming machines. As I indicated previously, an amusement machine has a very small pay out. It is really for recreation. A gambling machine is serious business.

Clause 63 gives the taxation on the various types of machines and devices: Baccarat Table, Blackjack Table, Stud Poker, Dice Table, Roulette Table, Electronic Roulette Device, et cetera, et cetera.

As we move towards the end of the Bill, we gave the establishment of the Rehabilitation Fund and the Development Fund in clause 64, which are to ensure that the economic output of gambling will be directed in a purposeful and socially beneficial manner.

As we come along now to the key part of the Bill, how much more minutes do I have, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: You have roughly one minute.

Hon. C. Imbert: One minute, good. In Part VII we have the enforcement provisions, and in this part we are introducing the concept of an enforcement officer who would be a police officer, and that is how we have done away with the special majority requirements.

Madam Speaker, we are satisfied that this Bill will do what it is supposed to do. It will regulate the practice of gambling in Trinidad and Tobago. It will ensure the Government gets the revenue it is supposed to get. Right now if we get 50 million, as I said in the other place, we get plenty. We should be getting 500 million, because this is a \$16 billion industry. So we are satisfied that this Bill, which is a simple majority Bill, will now allow Trinidad and Tobago to take its place in the world, with a properly regulated gambling sector, and that the current completely unacceptable situation will be a thing of the past.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise in this honourable Chamber and be part of the Opposition's response to this Bill entitled and Act to provide for the regulation and control of the gaming and betting matters related thereto, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Finance in presenting or piloting this piece of legislation, provided the legislative history of this Bill and where we are today. He made some interesting comments, and provided some interesting commentary and so on. But you know any time the Minister of Finance speaks, you cannot take it with a pinch with a salt, you have to take it with a pound of salt in terms of what he provides to

this House, and even outside of this House.

Madam Speaker, I am a person that does not gamble, but if I had to pick the two biggest effects on the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, my Pick 2 will be the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance, when I listened to him, apparently he has now become an expert in gambling the last six years, probably because he has gambled away the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, he is a desperate Minister of Finance, bringing this piece of legislation without putting the important checks and balances as it relates to protecting, not only the economy of the country, but protecting the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and more so the workers of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the fact that I have indicated to you and to this House that you must listen very carefully whenever the Minister of Finance speaks, because he is very good at what we may term twisting and manipulating words. He has indicated that this particular piece of legislation was the mirror image of the Bill that was passed under the previous administration, led by the Member for Siparia, and the UNC immediately opposed the Bill, and there are no standards on this side of the House.

Madam Speaker, immediately I want to go to the *Hansard* of when the Minister of Finance spoke in a debate on this particular piece of legislation. He spoke on the 18th of November, 2016.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, point of order, 48(1). That is another Bill, another debate. It is not relevant.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I am replying to the Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker: So I will give you a little leeway, but remember this is the Bill we are speaking about.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: You see, Madam Speaker, he said that this is the mirror image of the Bill that we have before this House that came from the incarnation of the previous administration. Today I want to ask if this is the mirror image of the Bill, where is the three-fifths majority protection in relation to this piece of legislation? [*Desk thumping*] That is all I simply want the Minister to answer, because the Minister and the Attorney General too, the Member for San Fernando West, they have the largest amount of hypocrisy in terms of their conduct in this Parliament and outside of this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(4) and (6).

Madam Speaker: So in terms of Member I will ask you to withdraw that. You can find another way to say that.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I withdraw. Madam Speaker, when the Minister spoke on the 18th of November 2016, he indicated: “We are satisfied now, this Government is satisfied, that the approach of the last Government and the persons before who had sought to regulate the sector is the correct approach.”

He further went on to say:

“Clause 3 makes it clear that it is inconsistent with the Constitution; that is why we need a special majority. Clause 4 is the interpretation clause.”

And that is why I am saying to the Minister of Finance—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, point of order 48(1). That is not the Bill before the House.

Madam Speaker: So Member, I think I understand what you are trying to get at, but remember the debate is on this Bill. So I uphold the objection that the debate is not about the other Bill, which is irrelevant. I uphold that.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am guided. I have made by

point, and I move on, Madam Speaker, as it relates to what the Minister of Finance, which is attempting to hoodwink the population in relation to what he has presented.

In addition to what he has indicated, I want to also put this particular piece of legislation in its proper historical context. Because it is important for us to understand that the United National Congress, led by the Member for Siparia, is on official record of being in support of the regulation of the gaming industry. [*Desk thumping*] And Attorney General, you should not be amazed in terms of what I have said, because your very Minister of Finance has said the Bill that he has before this House today is a mirror image of a Bill that emanated out of the People's—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(4), 48(6), 48(1). He cannot keep repeating this untruth.

Madam Speaker: All right, I am on my legs. Member for Couva South, I have already ruled that this debate is not about a past Bill; that is irrelevant. So if you could proceed, let us deal with what is before us.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, as I said, they seem to be offended with the truth, but I move on.

Madam Speaker, in fact, this piece of legislation, as I said, had its foundation and we have established that. Madam Speaker, when you examine Part I of the Bill and the objects of the Bill, it is important to note that the focus is on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons:

- “...from being harmed or exploited by gambling;
- (b) ensure that gambling is conducted in a fair, open and responsible manner;
 - (c) prevent gambling from being a source of crime, being associated with

- crime or being used to support crime;
- (d) ensure compliance with written laws for anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing in line with the Financial Action Task Force recommendations;
 - (e) ensure consumer protection;
 - (f) provide for the collection of taxes; and
 - (g) contribute to the economy by creating employment.”

But again, as I said, the history and the records must be established in terms of from a historical point of view, that all the objects of this particular piece of legislation was really the vision of those of us on this side of the House, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Again, using the Minister of Finance’s words, it is the mirror image of what we had in this particular House.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(1), again. This Bill is not the same as the other Bill. His statements are irrelevant, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So I allow that particular statement. It is in response to something you have said. Let us get on with this Bill again. Please, Member for Couva South.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, as I said, I want to place this industry from the point of view or in the context of a socioeconomic importance to the stakeholders and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It has been established that more than 20,000 persons are employed within the industries, 75 per cent and more are women and single mothers and the average number of dependents within each home or within each household is an average of five.

And, Madam Speaker, just to further amplify what it means to persons who are working in this industry, I want to, based on the research that I did in

preparation for this debate, I want to refer to the testimony of one Ms. Ayanna Francis of Mentor Alley in Laventille who was a reception supervisor at the Ma Pau club and I want to quote from an article which is found in the *Trinidad Guardian*, while engaged in my research, as I said. Her job is to greet clients as they enter the club and the starting salary in the said environment compelled her to join the gambling industry. And I quote:

“I’m from Laventille, what people...call a high risk area. I’m a single parent,”—and so on. My dad’s daughter—“...was shot and killed four years...With my job I have been able to take care of my daughter and help my...”—mother and—“I have been afforded a lot of concessions at my job to help my family live a much more comfortable...and have a better standard of living.”

Many single parents like herself and people who have just left school have been able to get jobs within the industry, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, another issue I want to deal with because the Minister in his presentation apparently did not find favour with everything that was presented by the Opposition in the other place. And he consistently referred to about absurd recommendations and absurd contributions and so on being made by Members in the other place. But I want to tell the Minister, if it was not for the role of the Opposition in the other place, the particular Bill that we have today would not have been amended and it would not have been refined, Madam Speaker. You all continue to treat stakeholders in the society with a sense of disdain.

And, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance indicated to the House this morning that after the Bill was sent to the JSC, they listened to numerous consultation with all stakeholders and so on, Madam Speaker. And he indicated further to that, that the regulations have been made a reality because the

Opposition demanded the regulation and he referred to a number of consultants that were that engaged by the Minister and the Joint Select Committee and so on, Madam Speaker. And in that regard, Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Minister—I want to ask the Minister today and probably in his winding up, if the regulations that he alluded to are indeed the finalized regulations, the final regulation and it is not draft regulation.

And, Madam Speaker, the Minister indicated that he is deeply satisfied given the legislative history of the particular piece of legislation, that consultations have been adequately dealt with, with all the stakeholders. And today I want to ask the Minister whether the draft regulations or the finalized regulations have indeed met the approval or he has engaged, for example, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Trinidad and Tobago Members Club Association, the Betting Levy Board, the union clubs and lotteries workers, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, the Commissioner of Police, Customs and Excise, the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority, just to name a few of the stakeholders. Have these stakeholders that all came before the Joint Select Committee, have they had the sight of these regulations? Have they made their comments? Have they made their submissions? And has the joint select—well, did the Joint Select Committee have the final sign off on the regulation that the Minister boasted of here this morning? Because in another incarnation the experts that were engaged by the Minister and the Joint Select Committee pointed in the direction that the draft registration should have had the sight of all stakeholders within the framework of this legislation in the context of the operationalization of this particular piece of legislation, Madam Speaker. And just for the record, Madam Speaker, how much time do I have again?

Madam Speaker: 11.49:49.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, and I now want to go into the legislation itself because there is the need for clarity, there is the need for the Government to make it very clear in terms of certain definitions from an interpretation point of view, and also the Minister in his presentation here this morning focused or attempted to focus on an issue that has been raised by the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Bars & Restaurants and so on. And I know because information has reached me in my mailbox, Madam Speaker, that indeed letters were dispatched to the Minister of Finance and the Attorney General on the 21st of June, 2021, and I do not know if indeed the Minister of Finance has responded to the matters raised. And it has relevance to this particular legislation, Madam Speaker, because when the Minister piloted the Bill in the other place, he made it clear that the Bill does not apply to bar owners because they are governed by the Liquor Licences Act, Madam Speaker. And in the interpretation the “gaming lounge” means that it falls under what we would call—the premises fall:

“...under the Liquor Licences Act, in respect of which a licence is issued by the Commission, pursuant to this Act, to accommodate a maximum of twenty amusement machines;”

And, Madam Speaker, the issue seems to be whether the roulette devices and multiple-player linked gaming machines have become part of the—which have become part of the gambling landscape of Trinidad and Tobago given that what is being proposed under this legislation, will they no longer be allowed in bars and restaurants, Madam Speaker.

And indeed, if I listened correctly to the Minister of Finance in his opening salvo here this morning, he attempted to create again confusion and chaos because he attempted to give in the other place a sense of comfort that well, we are not

going down on bars and restaurants very hard, and they seem to be in a huddle, they seem to be in disarray, Madam Speaker, as I speak, because the Attorney General, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries seem to be in a huddle in terms of where we are on this particular piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, it is important for this to be clarified because it will definitely impact upon the level of employment in the bars and restaurant industry and also the level of taxation that the Government would realize. And it was not an absurd observation by my colleague in the other place as it relates to what the Government will lose. It has implications for the revenue stream of over \$250million. And in addition to that, Madam Speaker, there will be severe unemployment if this amendment to this particular issue is not clarified in terms of where we are in terms of this interpretation and the issues that have been raised by the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Bars & Restaurants, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, when you look at also “associate” as it relates to this particular piece of legislation, it is vague, it has a wide—it can be interpreted in a very wide manner, Madam Speaker. And this provision, Madam Speaker, does not describe or go into describing what influence, because:

“‘associate’, in relation to a licensed business, means any person who holds any financial interest in, or can exercise any power, control or influence over, the licensed business;”

Madam Speaker, this is important in terms of clarification because this provision does not go on to describe what “influence”, “power” or “control” means. In administrative law and criminal law there is an overarching principle that the person must be of a certain parameter in terms of what is permissible conduct. And in a situation where critical terms remain uncertain, unclear and undefined, the

power to interpret will lie with the Commission. And in the case of a perverse interpretation, the aggrieved party will have to go to court to vindicate themselves and it will all point in the direction of time delay, financial expenditure and inconvenience, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, I also want to focus on from 3(1) again under the term of “authorised officer” and what an “authorised officer” means as an officer designated under clause 67 of this particular piece of legislation, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, if we go on to the clause 67 of this particular piece of legislation under Part VII of “Enforcement”, it clearly indicates that:

“The Commission may designate suitably qualified officers of the Commission to perform the duties and exercise the powers of authorised officers...”

And, Madam Speaker, and it goes on to spell out what an “authorised officer” would be, and also from the point of view of an “enforcement officer”, Madam Speaker. So there are two officers who will be called upon to work on behalf of the Commission.

And again, it is important for clarification purposes, where will these authorised officers be engaged from? Will they be solely employed from the point of view of the Commission that will be established by this particular piece of legislation, Madam Speaker? Or will they be incorporated from different arms of the law enforcement fraternity in Trinidad and Tobago? And when I say so, will it be from the—under the purview of the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago or any other arm of the police service? And this leads to the very important issue that has to be addressed in this particular debate, Madam Speaker. Who will the enforcement officer report to? Will the enforcement officer report to the Commission? Will the enforcement or the authorised officer report, for example, to

the Commissioner of Police? Or we have heard also that there may be officers from within the supplemental police of Trinidad and Tobago or what we would call the municipal police, Madam Speaker, arm of law enforcement. And that needs to be clarified in terms of the size of this force, whether it will be a special unit of this force and how will it operate in terms of the different regions from a policing or an enforcement point of point, Madam Speaker?

And, Madam Speaker, too we have to ask ourselves the question: How long will it take to fully train these officers so that they could be on the ball, as we would say, from the point of view of enforcement and from the point of view of performing their roles from an authorization point of view, Madam Speaker? Because this is specialized training and you just cannot take from the point of view of where the police force is at the moment and whether it is SRPs, municipal police and so on and ask them to take charge of their responsibilities from an enforcement point of view without giving them the specialized training that is needed, that will be needed to give some kind of teeth to this Commission that this legislation seeks to create.

Madam Speaker, there is also the very important issue of what we would call this fit and proper issue because, again, this can be subjected to what we would call wide interpretation. And, Madam Speaker, this is especially an onerous requirement when one considers that many of the persons referred to as requiring a licence will not meet the fit and proper requirement as set out in this Schedule. These fit and proper requirements are more onerous and stringent than the equivalent fit and proper criteria under the Financial Intelligence Unit Act, Madam Speaker.

Financial institutions are in an identical position to casinos with regard to money laundering and terrorist financing. If that underlining assumption is adhered

to, then the requirement for fit and proper ought to be the same and the classes of persons to whom fit and proper ought to be applied ought to be the same, Madam Speaker.

And also, from the point of view of the licensing regime that is being contemplated under this particular piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, again it is widely framed because when you look from the point of view for the purposes of this Act, a personal licence is a licence which authorizes an individual to perform a specified function in connectivity or in connection with a licensed game activity, a licensed betting activity or a licensed premise.

And again, it speaks to an associate, it speaks to key employees and security staff at all levels. And again, these things are subject to interpretation. For example, would security officers obtained from an independent security firm, would they be subjected to licensing requirements? It would mean even a security guard in a car park or a compound would have to obtain a licence. This could easily deter landlords of entities which—or entities such as malls or others complexes from allowing casinos to operate in the environment.

So, Madam Speaker, as I end, they were red and ready. The red ball now has been picked, and in terms of their state of red and readiness, it is very clear that they are not prepared to get this economy working again and we ask the Government to take on board the checks and balances that are needed for an efficient industry in terms of regulation, Madam Speaker, and also law enforcement. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I begin, would you just remind me the speaking time in the House? Is it 20 minutes?

Madam Speaker: Twenty minutes.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you so much. Madam Speaker, permit me to dive directly to the chase. The Government arrives in presenting this legislation under section 53 of the Constitution to make laws for the peace, order and good governance of Trinidad and Tobago. The Opposition is on record as saying that they do not support this law. No amount of fancy footwork about they support the concept of regulation, is going to take them out of the fact that they cannot explain to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, or to international agencies, or to the United Nations Security Council resolutions, or to the IMF which has rated Trinidad and Tobago as the only country in their pack of assessment that has no regulations for a gaming industry, the United National Congress cannot explain why they will not support this law.

Now, Madam Speaker, allow me the opportunity to put on record the following. I am surprised that learned Senior Counsel, the Member for Siparia was not the first responder to this law. I am honestly surprised and I will tell you why. Madam Speaker, the UNC has said that they are going to court on this law. Senior Counsel is counsel at the head of the Bar sitting in the front row of the court, and the Member for Siparia is not even in the Chamber today again. But permit me to put this in terms or relevance.

I say that I am surprised that Siparia has nothing to say on this law because of the following: Cabinet Minute June06, 2013, confirmed June13, 2013. Who was the head of the Cabinet?—Kamla Persad-Bissessar the Member for Siparia. And the Cabinet approved the establishment of a legal and regulatory framework for the gambling and gaming industry in Trinidad and Tobago. The Cabinet approved a working group to establish all of the parameters around this law. The Cabinet then approved on the 26th of March, 2015, the following: The Gaming and Betting Bill

which was laid in the Parliament; the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2015 itself; the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control (Application for Gaming Licences) Regulations 2015; the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control (Accounting and Internal Control) Regulations, 2015; the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control (Anti-money laundering) (Casino) Regulations, 2015; the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control (Gaming Devices and Equipment) Regulations, 2015; and lastly, the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Regulations, 2015.

So in clarifying the statement of the Minister of Finance, made a short while ago in piloting this Bill, and in answering my colleague from Couva South, led me make it abundantly clear, the Minister of Finance said that in 2016 this Government laid word for word the same 2015 Bill which the Leader of the Opposition when as Prime Minister passed in the House of Representatives on the 27th of May, 2015.

The hon. Minister of Finance said that the Bill before us today has a different structure. And what is that structure? We have brought a simple majority Bill premised on the basis of adding due process, of adding consent in respect of licensing, of adding enforcement officers who are different from authorised officers, where enforcement officers are police officers or powers of police vested in them pursuant to the Supplemental Police Act, Chap. 15:02, and in bringing a simple majority Bill, we do this to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

The UNC arrives before this Parliament eight years after 2013, eight years after 2013 and has absolutely no shame in telling this country that they will not support legislation again. We amended the Bill that the UNC refused to support in 2018, refused to support in 2020. We amended that law in the terms now set out before us in the Bill as approved by the Senate. And in the Senate only the

Independent Bench, every single one of the Senators on the Independent Bench said yes to the legislation. So what does this law seek to do? And what are some of the burning questions before us?

Madam Speaker, I am shocked that the Member for Couva South could have asked the hon. Minister of Finance whether the regulations have been finalized and whether the regulations are made. It is definitely clear that the Member for Couva South has not read this Bill. Had the Member for Couva South read this Bill, he would see clause 87 which says that the regulations have to be approved by the Parliament by affirmative resolution. What kind of intellectual inability presents itself where a Member who is seasoned in this Parliament for decades, a Member like Couva South who participated and attended every single meeting of the Joint Select Committee established to look at the previous versions of the gaming Bill. Every single meeting the hon. Member attended but apparently the hon. Member may have been a somnambulist at work. What is a somnambulist?—a sleepwalker, because clearly the Member was asleep.

So, Madam Speaker, the regulations were considered by the Joint Select Committee. The regulations were the subject of international experts and wide-scale consultation, and the law has been ready for eight years in terms of policy and for six years in terms of prescription going on seven years. And I have to ask the Member for Siparia, why will the UNC not support gaming legislation? And let me put it in this context. It is a fact that there are thousands of gaming devices in operation, upward of 10,000 devices in operation. It is a fact that there are casinos and gaming establishments everywhere. And permit me to say, Madam Speaker, I have acted as an attorney-at-law for many gaming and gambling entities, private members' clubs, I have in the past, and I in fact have members of my own family who have been involved in the gaming industry for a very long time, and as

Attorney General having drafted this law I can say, Madam Speaker, that I support the full regulation in the fullest extent possible to all entities. And let me say this.

When the Board of Inland Revenue tells you that for the period 2017 to 2021, the following numbers of persons were registered with the Board of Inland Revenue; listen to the numbers: 2017, 253, only 69 people paid taxes out of that 253. In 2018, 251, only 47 people paid taxes. In 2019, 246 registered, 36 people paid taxes. In 2020, of the 247 registered, 18 paid taxes. But listen to the Financial Intelligence Unit. For 2013 to 2014, only 64 entities were registered with the FIU. The next year, 10 people registered. The year after, 2015 to 2016, 24 registered; '16 to '17, 19 registered; 2017 to 2018, 12 registered; 2018 to 2019, three registered.

12.00 noon.

Madam Speaker, in the context of thousands of devices, hundreds and hundreds of entities, with the Financial Action Task Force in its publication, in relation to Trinidad and Tobago's Fourth Round Mutual Evaluation and Third Follow-up Report, has said that we have no regulation of adequate measure for private member clubs. Who is the UNC protecting? I can tell you who they are not protecting, Madam Speaker. This law, in its licensing regime, sets up the structure for licensing so that private member clubs, gaming establishments, gambling establishments, betting establishments can be registered and come into the light.

What is the light? They can open bank accounts because they are not blacklisted. They can be seen by the financial sector. They can make their fair contribution. And their workers, the vulnerable workers, apart from the vulnerable persons in clause 64 that we treat in the establishment of the Rehabilitation Fund and Developmental Fund, apart from the vulnerable people that this laws protects, the vulnerable workers, the single mothers that Couva South referred to, naming

Gambling Control Bill, 2021
Hon. F. Al-Rawi (cont'd)

2021.06.23

one by reference, these people for the first time can get a mortgage, can buy a home because their revenue can be factored as legitimate revenue and earnings. And I would like Siparia to explain to the population, why as Leader of the Opposition for eight years, the hon. Member will not support the full passage of this law today? When as leader of the country, as Prime Minister in 2015—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: —on the 7th of May, 20—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1). The Attorney General keeps calling the Member for Siparia's name. Let us debate the Bill. This is not about the Member for Siparia.

Madam Speaker: Continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I am asking in relation to this Bill, which has the licensing regime and structures, why the hon. Member for Siparia will not support legislation to eliminate money laundering? To eliminate murder? To eliminate kidnapping? To eliminate trafficking in persons? To eliminate the abuse of vulnerable persons? To allow for the protection of vulnerable persons within the context of clause 64 of this legislation? I would the hon. Members to explain to us because, clearly, Siparia is absent and cannot do the explanation. I would like the hon. Members who have bothered to turn up in this law to explain to us what is wrong in the philosophy of this law? And let me turn to the constitutionality quickly. What time is full time, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: 12.09.29

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, in terms of constitutionality, permit to say this law is based upon the premise of proportionality. The proportionality that we seek to underwrite in this legislation is that this law has a legitimate aim. The legitimate aim is to deal with the matters I have just referred to: money laundering, terrorist

financing, proliferation financing, criminality, to protect the vulnerable, to protect society as a whole.

This law goes as far as is necessary. How far is necessary? We have been at it for eight years, and we could not get the passage of the law because the Member for Siparia refused to support the law. And this law brings to life a very important concept. It is a bifurcated concept. On the one hand, it allows for the right, the conditional right to private life and the conditional right to property, as identified in section 4 of the Constitution, and then later in certain aspects in section 5. It allows for those rights to be managed in a simple majority context by making sure that police powers are the only powers that are exercisable when it deals with enforcement provisions. And specifically, when you look to the provisions of clause 68 of the Bill, when we look to the exercise of a warranted aspect, we are seeing that once the enforcement aspects are built around the supplemental police, acting enforcement officers, where the licence has a conditionality that you consent up front to the use of the powers of inspection, et cetera—that is on one hand of the bifurcation. And on the other hand of the bifurcation or split, we are looking at the concept of due process. And in due process the grant of a licence, the variation of a licence, the revocation of a licence, the amendment of a licence, they are all subjected to the High Court's scrutiny. You bring your complaint to the High Court. You go to the Court of Appeal. You go to the Privy Council.

When we look to the Bill itself and we note, Madam Speaker, that in circumstances set out in clause 69, that it is a magistrate that exercises reasonable grounds for consideration on the entry into premises, et cetera, we need to go back to the powers of the enforcement officers and note that there is no compulsion to add answers or to answer questions, so we are not tripping the right against self-incrimination. We are very carefully prescribing the management of the right to

property and the right to private life. Yes, we are. And we are hanging our hat upon the existing law of Trinidad and Tobago as upheld by the Privy Council. And the Privy Council clearly sets out for us in umpteen cases, as has our Court of Appeal, that not every section 4 or section 5 right is necessarily to be managed by a three-fifths majority.

Now, Madam Speaker, it is imperative for us to recognize that this law—in very simple terms, in 20 minutes provided, to explain purpose on this point—this law is intended to pass something that the UNC is simply blocking. The question is: Why? The question is: When will we be satisfied? Is eight years of consultation not enough? Is the Financial Action Task Force telling you, telling Trinidad and Tobago, in 2015—in January 2015, that you have failed to regulate the private members club and the gaming sector not enough shame for us? Is the fact that a Fifth Round Mutual Evaluation for FATF is ahead of us not glaring enough for hon. Members? Is the fact that taxation is required in this country—not as an evil but as a necessary and legitimate part of our social enterprise—is taxation not necessary to pay for the vulnerable in the society? Why should private members clubs be excluded from supervision? Why is Siparia blocking the passage of law? Why is there a threat that will go to the court, where we will happily meet them to defend the rights and privileges, issues and constitutional arguments? We will happily meet them there. But, Madam Speaker, the question is: Why will the UNC not support law?

Madam Speaker, I will end as I come to a conclusion, by pointing out, the Member for Couva South attended every single meeting of the Joint Select Committee on a previous version of law that we sat on. Every single one. And there was no minority report by the UNC. None that I found. What can explain the change in circumstances? Why are we subjected to the vagaries of a sector that all

know is not paying its fair share or being managed in the best way possible to protect the vulnerable who work there and to protect the vulnerable who entertain themselves there?

Madam Speaker, I will be available at committee stage to answer all questions. I will say this as a matter of record: none of the ridiculous submissions made in the other place by the UNC were accepted that caused any proper legislation to come before us. We thank the Independent Senators of this country for demonstrating what support good law looks like. [*Desk thumping*] We thank all of the hardworking persons in this country who contributed over eight years to this legislation, and we will defend the law in the court and in this Parliament. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for allowing me to join this debate on this important piece of legislation, the Gambling (Gaming and Betting Control) Bill, 2021. I just listened to the Attorney General and I also took copious notes of the Minister of Finance when he piloted the Bill earlier. And let me just put on the table, on the record, Madam Speaker, some of the points raised by the Attorney General because I would not like to go off track, so I want to make sure. The Attorney General said that, in clarifying what the Minister of Finance said, he laid in 2016, word for word, the 2015 Bill that was passed in May 2015 in the Lower House, which was the PP government's gaming Bill in 2015, and the Minister of Finance laid word for word that particular Bill. And the Minister of Finance—and the Attorney General talked about that this Bill that is in front us today, they did some amendments to the 2016 Bill, that the Opposition abstained on that piece of legislation in 2020.

What they did in this Bill that is before us today, Madam Speaker, they removed the three-fifths majority clause, clause 3, that was in the 2016 Bill, that

the Attorney General mentioned. They introduced something called an “enforcement officer”, which is really a police officer. And in the 2016 Bill, there was something called an authorized—a designated position called an “authorized officer”, which is still there in this Bill, Madam Speaker. Those are the major points or clauses that they would have—or changes they would have done to this present Bill before us here today.

The Minister of Finance in his opening remarks talked about the gambling industry is a \$16 billion industry, there are tax leakages, a drain—a run on the foreign exchange. The Minister of Finance talked about the Fourth Round Mutual Evaluation Report, that there were some large amounts of clubs in our country that they were unregulated and there is a cause of concern for that, and we agree on that, Madam Speaker. We agree, as an Opposition, that this industry needs regulating. We agree on that. What we do not agree, Madam Speaker, is passing bad law. That is what we do not agree with. Because when you look at this particular Bill that is in front of us, the major clause that was removed was the three-fifths clause, which is the special majority clause and it is now a simple majority Bill. And when I reviewed the Senate—when we piloted this Bill in the Senate on Friday last and Monday of this week, Madam Speaker, it was interesting that—I paid very close attention to that proceedings in the Senate. And it is basically the same reasons that the Minister of Finance and the Attorney General is using there that they used today, about the removal of the three-fifths clause.

And, Madam Speaker, when you look at the Bill that is in front of us today, the Bill is not proportionate. Because the Bill in 2016 was not proportionate because that is why it required a three-fifths—a special majority vote on that particular Bill. The same clauses that the Attorney General mentioned here today, clause 68, about a warrant; clause 69, about you can go to a magistrate, they were

there in the 2016 Bill. The Attorney General also mentioned that in the licensing approval, you require consent. So you are giving up your consent. That was there in the 2016 Bill.

So if the Bill, in 2016, was not proportionate and required a special majority, I have reviewed the Bill and I am still—and we are puzzled to find out—even our Opposition Members in the Senate—to understand how this Bill could be passed with a simple majority. And that is the crux of the matter here today. Because when you review the Senate proceedings and they went through committee stage, it is interesting to note, Madam Speaker, when it came up to that clause about consent of the licence, even the Minister of Finance, in his experience, Madam Speaker, in his experience at that committee stage, he knew there was an issue that this Bill can be challenged in the court and he knew it was an issue. Because if you review the committee stage of the Senate, he even gave an undertaking to the Independent Senator, Sen. Vieira, that he knew there was a problem and he would review it. And he promised to review that part of the clause or even the entire Bill. So he knew—the Minister of Finance, sorry, and the Attorney General, very well know that this Bill does not stand up to a simple majority and it will be tested in court.

Now, the reason I ask—and I put this out early, Madam Speaker, because I ask the question: What is the need or the rush—besides the taxation leakage, the foreign exchange leakage, that we all know, the regulated aspect, is there another reason that we are passing this Bill as a simple majority here today? Is it to meet some international obligation or requirement that we have a Bill—a gaming Bill that is passed in our Houses, so the international requirements are met? And at some later time—because the Minister of Finance in his wind up in the other place talked about this Bill, when it is passed—because it is a simple majority, they do

not need our votes—when it is passed, it will take at least six months to implement.

Now, six months from now is about—maybe six, seven months could be January next year, Madam Speaker. And I am sure, given the experience of the Minister of Finance, there would be some changes to this Bill, but it is about satisfying some need and I do not know what that need is, Madam Speaker. Because six, seven months away, you are not going to get any additional taxes. Six, seven months away, based on what the Minister of Finance had mentioned in his opening—in piloting the Bill, even the Attorney General, we all understand the leakage. But it is not his taxes or the taxes that he expects to get is not going to happen now, Madam Speaker.

So what is required? What is required of this Bill? So I listened to the Attorney General in his run up, Madam Speaker. He talked about banking issues in the industry. And I want to ask the Minister of Finance—this Bill will be passed here today because it is a simple majority. I want to ask the Minister of Finance, when the Bill is passed today, because it was passed in the Senate—unless they have amendments that they want to go back to the Senate. If it is passed today, I am asking the Minister of Finance, in his winding up, could he tell the industry of the gaming industry, whether it is casinos, bars, et cetera, would they be able to now go and bank their money from their business or even their employees can open bank accounts because of the issues that they were having before because it is considered unregulated? Because after we pass this Bill here today, in our view, it becomes a regulated industry because you have a Bill. And I am asking the Minister, could he, in his winding up, give some happiness to the industry, that they can go and open back accounts? Because they have both mentioned—the Attorney General and the Finance Minister—that that has been a big issue.

So, Madam Speaker, I have some issues and I want to go clause by clause

because I know I have limited time. So I will go through some issues I have with some—clause by clause. I have some issues with about five or six clauses, Madam Speaker. When you look at clause 5(4), which is the establishment of the gaming Commission—and I understand there is an amendment that was brought via the Senate, and it is about a new amendment giving a proper classification, commissioners who will be appointed, seven years' experience as a lawyer, some financial experts, et cetera.

Now, these individuals, and we are happy for that, Madam Speaker, these individual who are now—will be called “commissioners and be placed on the board, they do not—based on the Bill, are subjected to a fit and proper test. And the Minister of Finance might say, “Well, are you questioning lawyers? Are you question the other—based on the new amendment came from the Senate?” And we are saying that if you are asking all individuals who are part of this gaming industry or bar industry to subject themselves to a fit and proper, we also feel that there is some logic that the commissioners should also be subject to a fit and proper. Because we are in a small country, Madam Speaker, we have—all of us know one another and lawyers are not immune to the ills of society or even financial experts. So we are also asking that some fit and proper regime is put in for those commissioners. So we recognize the good work that was done in the Senate.

When you look at clause 15, Madam Speaker, provisional liability of the board, the commissioners on the board are immune to any sort of personal liability based on their actions as part of the gaming Commission. And we really feel that some thought should be given that they should not be immune from personal liability. Because according to the Minister of Finance, it is a \$16 billion industry and it is not small money that we are talking about. It is a \$16 billion industry. And

we also feel that based on some of the actions done by the commissioners, it can affect the industry. So we ask the Minister of Finance to consider looking at that clause, clause 15, Madam Speaker.

When you look at clause 16, Madam Speaker, it talks about—clause 16 is the execution of the policy of the gaming commission. Now, this clause in the Bill makes the commission wholly open, in our view, to political interference. And what is also interesting, Madam Speaker, this clause 16— and it might be numbered differently from the Bill of 2016. Now, what the Minister of Finance failed to say in his opening, when the Bill was passed in May 2015, in the Lower House and the PP government Bill, the Bill was debated in the Senate in June 2015. That is the same Bill that the Attorney General said that they brought in 2016. They did not change a clause. Now, in that Bill in 2015, that was brought back in 2016 by this Government, some of those clauses, Madam Speaker—the Attorney General in his debate, as an Opposition Senator at the time in June 2015, had grave issues and problems with a lot of the clauses of the same Bill that was brought in 2016, which is similar with the exception of two or three clauses that the Bill is here today.

And the same issues that the Attorney General had in 2015, you would think, Madam Speaker, that over the last six years that the Attorney General, with the same issues that he had then, would have ensured that this Bill that is before us today would have reflected his concerns.

Madam Speaker: So, Member, I gave you some leeway but I have ruled on that point already. So condescend on this Bill.

Mr. D. Lee: Yes, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, so the clause 16, the execution and policy, we feel that it is open for political interference and political complexity. When you look at clause 30, which

is the “Categories of licences”—and I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, when you look at clause 30(2), it talks about the Bill defines a key person and it does not define a key employee. And I am asking the Minister of Finance, if it is one and the same? Clause 30(2)(j), Madam Speaker, and I read in the Bill:

“a Personal Licence, in respect of key employees within a licensed betting or gaming establishment;”

Now, when you go to the definition section, there is nothing such as a “key employee”, they have a “key person”. The Bill defines a “key person”. So we are asking if it is one and the same? So the Minister of Finance could clarify that issue because we feel that there is a room of vagueness that needs some clarity, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about the “Fit and proper regulation criteria”, clause 33(1). All I would say, and I would just in passing, that that fit and proper criteria, we feel that they should have a two-tiered system of fit and proper, meaning that we do not have a problem with the operators, the owners but the lower-level individuals that have to work in the industry is subject to the same fit and proper criteria. And we feel that they should have some flexibility in that fit and proper criteria to accommodate the lower-level staff because that is critical.

The other issue that we have a problem with is the leasing premises licence, Madam Speaker. Because you are now subjecting all landlords who rent their buildings to casinos or gaming establishment, they are not subject to a fit and proper regime, a criteria test, and we are ask: What is the rationale for that? So, for example, a lot of the malls have gaming establishments in their facilities—the malls—and what happens, who, as part of the mall, will then have to apply for the licence and pass that fit and proper test? Is it the CEO? Is it the chairman of the board? And we ask the Minister of Finance to look at that.

My colleague touched about the draconian issue about the fit and proper criteria. Madam Speaker, I want to touch on clause 33(1), on the horse racing industry. Now, I have no problem with the horseracing industry. I grew up in the horse racing industry, like so many others. It is called the “sport of kings”. But clause 33(1) or 30(3) in the horse racing—and I want to quote the clause, 30(4). 30(4) says:

“For the purposes of subsection (3), a ‘key stakeholder’ includes a race horse owner, trainer, jockey and a member of an organisation affiliated with or regulating the betting industry.”

So, in clause 30(4), a “key stakeholder”—in clause 30(3):

“A person who is a key stakeholder in the racing sector shall not be issued a Bookmaker’s Licence or a Promoter’s Licence.”

So (4) says:

“For the purposes of subsection (3), a ‘key stakeholder’ includes a race horse owner, trainer, jockey and a member of...affiliated...betting...”

Now, we are asking, I am asking, why is the horse racing industry being treated differently from the gaming industry? Because gambling is gambling, Madam Speaker. And why these individuals, the trainers and the jockeys are given—and I use these words and I mean no disrespect—a free pass? Because gambling is gambling. And the same money laundering that the Minister of Finance talks about in the gaming industry, could happen and has happened in the horseracing industry? So I ask the Minister of Finance to clarify why the horseracing industry is being treated differently? Because he would say that it falls under the Betting Levy Board or the horse racing—but the fit and proper criteria, they do not have a fit and proper criteria.

So in my last few—one minute or so, Madam Speaker, we are about passing

good law, Madam Speaker. And when you look at the removal of the three-fifths in this particular piece of legislation, it leaves much to be desired. And I know the Minister of Finance and the Attorney General is fully aware that this Bill, as it is placed here today, will be tested in the courts if they do not do some amendments to this Bill. So, Madam Speaker—and we are about regulating this industry and we do not—and I want to say, we do not have any—according to the Attorney General, we are not batting for anybody in this industry. With those few words, I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

12.30 p.m.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, once again we are here as a House, I believe at least on the third occasion dealing with the regulating of an industry, the gaming and the gambling industry, right. This is the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2021. As previous speakers have outlined and they cannot change the facts, prior to 2015, 2014/2015 period legislation was brought, from the quick research I did and looking at the *Hansard*, it was debated, it was passed in one House and then went to another House and then unfortunately it lapsed before it could have become full and wholesome law at the end of a term in 2015 of a previous government, a UNC government.

I think any citizen looking on can come to a conclusion that that was all a facade. It was all smoke in mirrors because looking at what has happened from 2015 to now it is obvious as we have heard previous speakers from the other side, that the UNC now in Opposition has no interest in supporting legislation that is going to regulate this industry, an industry that requires regulation; an industry that is screaming out for intervention; an industry that any law-abiding citizen would

wish there to be regulation, intervention and a proper commission looking at it. I have listened to the previous speakers and I am sure there will be other speakers to come and I would be surprised, Madam Speaker, but pleasantly so if I hear one good reason from those on the other side as to why there should not be regulation. You see, what happens is exactly as we just heard from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. They come, they make noise, they attack legislation, they say this is not good, that is not good. He said on at least four occasions in his contribution, they will challenge it in court. I heard the hon. Attorney General speak about in the other place, again, the clarion call, we will challenge it in court, but then end with, which is one of the cliché catch phrases of the UNC, we will support good law and then the speaker before he ran out of the Chamber had the audacity to say we want to regulate.

Madam Speaker, I want to put on the record through you that I was a member of the Joint Select Committee in the previous Parliament, the previous term of Parliament, and we sat for five years going through and I have walked today, they talked about consultation, they talked about stakeholders, they have talked about what was done, now they try to change to it to regulations. I want the population to know and they cannot change this fact, we sat as a joint select committee, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance was the chairman of that Committee and he exercised unusual levels of patience. I used to tease him about it, Madam Speaker, because he allowed every single intervention by the Independents and the Members on the other side, we went through every stakeholder. Madam Speaker, let the population see this is just one submission from one of the major casinos in Trinidad and Tobago and the Member for Diego Martin North/East made us go through every page. We spent a number of days with all of the stakeholders in the industry. They asked for regulations, we had

persons, if I remember correctly, employed by the Parliament from Australia, all of that body of work came and was rejected by the UNC. So we are back here today and let me just focus quickly on the legal point being raised now, that it is another red herring.

The previous speaker, Madam Speaker, talked about proportionality, unconstitutionality, said the difference with this Bill is just the removal of the requirement for a three-fifths majority. I am sure that will be addressed in the winding up, but it would be remiss of me as someone with a legal background and someone who spent many years in the court not to put on record that there is no failure of proportionality here. What you are being asked to apply for if you want to run a casino, a gaming house, a lounge, any type of gambling institution, is a licence. Everybody knows that you can put conditions on a licence and there is no right to a licence. So if one of the conditions of a licence to be granted by the Commission to protect the population is that there would be a right of entry to check your books, et cetera, there is nothing disproportional with that, there is nothing unconstitutional with that. There were other areas removed, if they say, no, then you can go for a warrant, again in full proportionality.

So I do not want any Member, any law-abiding member of the population to be fooled by the constant throwing of red herrings in an attempt to once again obfuscate and prevent the passage, or not prevent the passage, show that they are not supporting the Bill for any legitimate reasons. So it is now set in history that the Opposition does not want to support gaming legislation. The question must arise, why would any law-abiding citizen not want an industry like the gaming industry to be popularly regulated?

It is undeniable, and no one can produce any submission that contradicts, that unfortunately the gaming industry internationally, gambling industry

internationally has been and can be infiltrated by crime and criminality. One of the main purposes of this legislation is to deal with money laundering. And I just want to put on the *Hansard* a live example of how money laundering can take place by the use of casinos.

You can have—the family member of a Minister of Government, a former Minister of Government meet with family members of contractors in a casino in Las Vegas, for example. The contractor can go and purchase a whole set of chips with cash and just slide those chips across on a table to the family member of a former Minister. They can then go now, walk away from the table, encash it, money has passed, money is washed. The same way any criminal can go into a casino, purchase chips for example with cash, go play one game and decide I am not playing any more, go and encash it and walk out, and when asked where does this money comes from, “I just got it from the casino”. And as simple as that, money laundering takes place.

Casinos worldwide, the gaming industry worldwide have been legitimately accused and persons have been prosecuted, not only for money laundering, for financing of criminal activity including terrorism. And this is what we are here today to consummate the regulation of that industry to try and protect and prevent that from taking place, as simple as that.

What we are seeking here today to do, Madam Speaker, is to properly regulate this industry, and I will go very quickly to clause 4 and set out, so the population understands what the objects of this Bill are, because it is important that they understand because at the end of the day they will judge the parliamentarians today by what they failed to do or what they do.

“4. The objects of this Act are to—

(a) protect minors and other vulnerable persons from being

harméd or exploited by gambling;”

Which law-abiding citizen would not want that?

“(b) ensure that gambling is conducted in a fair, open and responsible manner;”

Who wants to stand in the way of that?

“(c) prevent gambling from being a source of crime, being associated with crime or being used to support crime;”

The population must listen carefully and see. Who does not want that?

“(d) ensure compliance with written laws for anti-money laundering...counter-terrorism financing in line with the Financial Action Task Force Recommendations;

(e) ensure consumer protection;

(f) provide for the collection of taxes; and

(g) contribute to the economy by creating employment.”

These are all admirable objects of the Bill and we have not heard a single person so far, and I am certain we would not hear another one for the day, who can provide the population, the law-abiding population with a single proper reason why the objects of this Bill should not be fulfilled or where in the Bill we are infringing anything and not passing proper law.

So what is this here doing is establishing amongst other things, a Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Commission. This will allow proper taxation. We have heard the Minister of Finance say repeatedly, it is a \$16billion industry. We have just heard the hon. Attorney General talk about how few are actually caught in the taxation net. If persons want and it is their free choice to go and game and to gamble, why should it not be properly taxed? Why we should allow these institutions, in particular, foreigners who come into the country and set up these

massive gaming houses, casinos, et cetera. Madam Speaker, I went to a casino once, once. I have no interest in it whatsoever, I put that on the record. My best friend wanted to go into a casino once in Antigua, I accompanied him. And I saw how quickly you can get entrapped into a game. It was, “God, ah almost there, if ah play once more I could win, if ah do it once more”. Very quickly the funds in pocket were over and out had to come a credit card. And that is how gambling and gaming can destroy lives. I have seen it first hand in other families, how it has affected generations of hard workers and then somebody in the family gets caught into gaming and gambling.

So one of the great things about this legislation I would also like to hear why anyone would object to, is the provision for the first time for “vulnerable persons” in the definition clause and to deal with the addictive effects of gambling. That is something that is laudable, but we are not hearing anything about that. There is no doubt and we had the stakeholders of I think two bodies come and explain to us how they try to rehabilitate persons who unfortunately get addicted to gambling, cross the line and very quickly gambled away all of the families wherewithal. And this Bill here today at clause 64—and it is something we should all support. Anyone who stands in the way of it must answer to the population why, why not. At clause 64 of this is a “Rehabilitation Fund” to be established and hear what it is for, Madam Speaker:

“...to assist non-governmental organisations and other groups working with vulnerable persons and their families suffering the effects of gambling addiction and other forms of harm or exploitation associated with gambling.”

And it also allows for the Commission to establish programmes, including programmes for public education, research, training, rehabilitation, intervention

regarding problems and compulsive gambling, treatment and prevention of problems and compulsive gambling. What is wrong with that? Who will stand in the way of that? For the first time what you are seeing is the industry will provide money towards the establishment of this fund to help those who are negatively affected by gambling. I am not saying everyone is, but those who are. You ask any family—and I could give first hand stories—any family who has been destroyed by the effects of one member of that family getting caught in the addiction of gambling. So let us pass the law, let us allow for that funding to take place, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, how much time do I have?

Madam Speaker: You end at 12:50:40.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. Another thing I would like to use, another point I would like to use my time to very quickly draw the attention of the public to, through you, for the public to know what it is, what is the business that we are doing here today in the House, starting a sitting at 10 o'clock, which is a little unusual, but it is because of the importance of this and let every Member who speaks put on to the *Hansard* what his or her position is for the public to judge.

When you look at clause 13, clause 13 of this Bill, Madam Speaker, sets out the functions of the Commission. So this is what we are setting up the Commission to do:

- “(a) to regulate and control the operations of gambling in Trinidad and Tobago.
- (b) ...to provide such information to other regulatory, supervisory... government agencies, including the”—BIR—“the FIU...Integrity Commission...Customs and Excise...Commissioner of Police...Police Complaints Authority...Betting Levy Board...”

That is to tackle criminality.

“(c) to seek to address, through the Rehabilitation Fund and the Development Fund, the harmful and negative effects of gambling;”

Again, it is there. Commission, that is your job; go and help and fight the addictive effects.

“(d) to ensure that licensed activities and all gambling activities conducted under this Act are conducted in a fair and honest manner;”

We have all heard the stories, we have all seen it on television shows, movies, where a casino may manipulate machines or manipulate the dealers to stack against the player as they say and what that does to persons’ lives. So now let us put in place a commission with the power to go and ensure that does not happen.

Madam Speaker, I also want to draw the public’s attention because the public must know the powers that are being given to them here today and that they can intervene in this industry if they have a problem, for example, with the establishment of some of these casinos. Clause 32(8), I had to highlight, to draw to the public’s attention, to let the public know that we are providing here today for:

“The following persons to object to the granting of a licence”—by—“writing to the Commission.”

So the public now knows, you have a say, you have a voice. Where is the disproportionality in that? So:

- “(a) any resident of, or business owner in the area in which the proposed licensed premises are located; can object.
- (b) any school principal, teacher or parent of a student of a school in the area in which the proposed licensed premises are located; can object.
- (c) a representative of any religious group that is located in the area in which the proposed licensed premises are located;

- (d) the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly;
- (e) a municipal or regional corporation defined under the Municipal Corporations Act; or
- (f) any interested party.”

This is giving the people the power to determine where these houses should go. Because it is an undeniable fact, unfortunately, sometimes these institutions attract the wrong people for the same reasons I started off with, the money laundering, the ability to go inside and wash large amounts of cash. We are trying to prevent that, we are not trying to shut down the industry. It is regulating the industry, Madam Speaker.

Just very briefly to deal with a couple of the points, because there were not many that were raised before by the other side. The removal of the three-fifths clause, I have dealt with that. Yes, it was removed and those parts that are affecting our constitutional rights have been removed. You can put any condition on a licence, there is no right to a licence. I want to hear the lawyers on the other side come and justify to the population that anyone has a right to have a licence to open a casino anywhere they want. Is that the submission that is being made? It will be tested in court.

I take serious umbrage, Madam Speaker, as an elected Member of Parliament, someone given the privilege to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago and in particular Port of Spain West, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West to have every single time, they spit out their dummy, they pick up their marbles, well, “I doh like what yuh doing, this affecting meh financiers”, this affecting this one that one, so I going to court. Go to court. But you cannot come here as a parliamentarian on every occasion threatening the Parliament, threatening the Legislature with court. That just does not sit right.

One of the most ridiculous submissions very briefly, Madam Speaker, what is the need and rush to pass the Bill. We have heard here this has been before the Houses since 2014. It is to rush and to pass legislation to deal with some of the areas I have just raised, to regulate an industry that unfortunately throughout the history of time has associations with crime and criminality, and we want a fighting chance as the law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to regulate it via a commission and to also have a rehabilitation fund and other things to assist to maybe deal with some of the ills of this. There is not going to be any political inter—that is another red herring. The Commission is open to political interference. The appointment of almost everybody in statutory bodies in the legislation of Trinidad and Tobago is done subject to Cabinet even when it says the President, there are very few instances where Her Excellency has a sole discretion. So, no matter who is in government that is a power that you have and there is no instance where there is political interference. The same thing applies across the board.

So, Madam Speaker, I believe my time is running out. What time was it?

Madam Speaker: You have 20 seconds.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. So, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity. I sat on that Joint Select Committee for many years, we went through everything. This Bill here today is a truncated Bill. Certain powers that we wanted to give them have been taken out. It is not unconstitutional and with those few words, Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dinesh Rambally (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to join in this debate. Let me start off by saying that certainly I endorse the contributions made by my colleagues, Member for Couva South and Member for Pointe-a-Pierre on this side. In terms of what I have heard on the other side,

Madam Speaker, I want to say that there is still a lot that is left to be answered. And I will seek to answer some of the issues raised by the Member for San Fernando West and Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West as I delve into the details of this Bill.

Madam Speaker, may I say at the outset that this Bill is a Pandora box. It raises more questions than it gives answers. And we had today, I would say in the short time, I see my colleague is here, the Member for San Fernando West, in the Chamber, we have had a plethora of legal opinions which, you know, debating the question as to whether or not the test of proportionality was met.

Now, I want to say that whilst this debate rages on, I am convinced, Madam Speaker, I too have practised at the Bar for many years and I am not convinced that this is a Bill that can be passed without the three-fifths majority. And I want to say why. I know the Attorney General spoke to proportionality and of course he is referring to in pursuit of a legitimate aim. Yes, the proper regulation of the gaming industry is a legitimate aim, so I would agree with that. But he referred to this test of proportionality and no doubt he is referring to the case of Suratt and also trying to set the context of a bifurcated scenario referring to conditional rights as well as due process.

But the fact that you may have due process in a piece of legislation does not by itself mean that you have satisfied the test of proportionality. And that is just but one factor. And what I want to point out is that, to the hon. Attorney General, Member for San Fernando West, this is exactly where we deviate in our opinions. Where we deviate is that if it is in a piece of legislation you are talking about warrantless entry into premises and in this particular Bill, that is clause 67. So warrantless entry to premises, you are talking about clause 13, we are referring to retention and mandatory disclosure of private information. If you are talking about

seizure and control, impounding of gaming equipment, this in itself is infringing the right to property without due process.

So, the fact that these rights are being in potentially infringed within this Bill that by itself is the reason why we deviate from the opinion on the other side that it does not require a three-fifth majority. So I want to set that squarely. I know the cases, it is all there, Madam Speaker, the judgment of Suratt is what I know the Member for San Fernando West would rely upon but there are other cases as well. *Dominic Suraj v the AG*. You also have the case of *Barry Francis v the AG*, the case of *Jason Jones v Attorney General*. Some of those cases I myself have appeared in.

So, Madam Speaker, these are cases which say and they have expressed some dissention from the position in the Suratt judgment. Having said that, Madam Speaker, it shows that there is a fundamental difference in terms of how we judge constitutionality of a particular piece of legislation. Proportionality is but one factor, it is not the determining factor.

Now, Madam Speaker, as we look at this particular Bill, much has been said on other issues in the other place. I would like to draw your attention to the issue which has troubled me immensely, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West did refer to this particular point that I would like to delve into as one of the laudable aims of the Bill before us and that is when we talk about a vulnerable person. Now, it is not a matter of paying lip service to those who are deemed to be vulnerable persons, because they are the persons who I think we all agree are most afflicted by the scourge of black gambling. And I am sure the majority of the population will frown upon a financial restructuring of the gambling industry if only they feel that the gambling is a vice and it breaks up families and it causes degenerative behaviour. So it is a laudable object. The

question is whether or not this particular Bill achieves that aim in protecting vulnerable.

While I understand the need for accountability and compliance in this being a very big industry, as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre had indicated, proper attention should have been placed on this said vulnerable person. So the Pandora box, Madam Speaker, has already been opened so to speak, it is a matter of mitigating the damage which is not now only possible, but it is expected and this is what we have to get into. So I go to the object of the Bill and I know Members on the other side have referred to clause 4. I would say that clause 4(a) is the one that I am pointing to, to protect minors and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling.

Now, this is what Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was referring to as an example of the laudable part of the Bill. I want to let the Member know that, yes, in principle this is laudable and we agree. Have we achieved it is where we defer, where we differ, sorry. So perhaps the most laudable part that there is recognition in this Bill spells disaster for some persons, but here it is I want to get down into the detail and you have—the Bill has set out the establishment of two separate funds. So this is what I will be getting into, Madam Speaker, and that is where you will at clause 13(c), you have the establishment of the Rehabilitation Fund and the Development Fund meant to address the harmful and the negative effects of gambling, clause 13(c).

Clause 64(2) as well, this is where reference is made to:

“The Rehabilitation Fund is established to assist non-governmental organizations and other groups working with vulnerable persons and their families suffering the effects of gambling addiction and other forms of harm or exploitation associated with gambling.”

So, Madam Speaker, those are the particular clauses which referred to the vulnerable person. What is a problem gambler is the question we must ask ourselves. Is it something that it depends on a trained, as we would say, a trained “Trini eyes”? How do we identify this problem gambler? Now, according to this Bill we simply have to look for evidence of financial mismanagement. So that is essentially the crux of the test. The definition for “vulnerable person”, Madam Speaker:

“means a person”—and I am quoting from the particular clause 4.

“means a person who exhibits an addiction to gambling as evidenced by—

- (a) his indebtedness to an extent that he cannot pay gambling related debts;
- (b) his inability to—
 - (i) meet his basic needs or family obligations because of gambling related debts; or
 - (ii) meet the obligations of his job because of his addiction to gambling.”

So, Madam Speaker, this definition, simpliciter begs the question, is this all that it takes to determine that you have a gambling problem or you have a gambling debt? And, Madam Speaker, this where when you look at what obtains in the gambling industry in other countries, I turn to the American Psychiatric Association. And when they determine who is a “gambling addict”, you need to have a check of at least four of nine factors to be met. So they do not deal with this strictly from a point of view of a financial mismanagement occurring in the instance of an individual. They are looking at it in a different way. And as I get into it, Madam Speaker, they have referred to what is called a “non-substance addict”. And this is what we are dealing with here, this vulnerable person will be a

non-substance addict.

1.00 p.m.

So getting back to the American Psychiatric Association, this diagnosis of gambling disorder, as I said, requires at least four of the following factors to be determined and satisfied:

1. The need to gamble—so we are talking about individuals whether they have a need to gamble—with increasing amount of money to achieve the desired excitement;
2. Restless or irritable when trying to cut down or stop gambling;
3. Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back on or stop gambling;
4. Frequent thoughts about gambling (such as reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next gambling venture, thinking of ways to get money to gamble);

Again, Madam Speaker, I pause here to remind the House that you are talking about the instant definition dealing with only financial mismanagement in determining who is a vulnerable person as opposed to what obtains in other countries, where they are looking at it from a non-substance addict and it is a pathological condition.

I go on with the American Psychiatric Association. If a person has:

“Frequent thoughts about gambling...;

Often gambling when feeling distressed;

After losing money gambling often returning to get even (referred to as ‘chasing’ one’s losses);

Lying to conceal gambling activity;

Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, a job or educational/career

opportunity because of gambling;

Relying on others to help with money problem caused by gambling”.

And what the APA, the American Psychiatric Association, goes on to say is that a “gambling disorder tend to run in families”. So this is the kind of research they have done and it tends to run in families, but environmental factors may also contribute.

This may sound to the layperson as—you know this is common sense, but it has to be informed by some kind of research which is why they have moved away from just somebody who displaced financial improprieties or financial mismanagement with their moneys and it goes now deeper into a pathological condition. Symptoms of the disorder according to the American Psychiatric Association can begin as early, sorry, as adolescence or as late as older adulthood. Men are more likely to begin at a younger age and women are more likely to begin later in life.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So in short, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a recognized—as I indicated before, it is a recognized non-substance addiction which may cause impaired judgment. So it is way more than the instant definition which is whether or not you are owing money and the treatment is specific. Treatment could be while some people can stop gambling on their own, many people need to address their gambling problem. Problem with gambling disorder seek treatment, and what is also says, American Psychiatric Association, is gambling affects people in many ways, and different approaches may work better for different people. Mr. Deputy Speaker, several different types of therapy are used to treat gambling disorder including cognitive behavioural therapy, psychodynamic therapy, group therapy and family therapy, and this will become pertinent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we go into what the Fund

is being established for.

The United Kingdom has recognized 10 symptoms of gambling which include money problems, mood swings, social withdrawal, increased generous weight loss, lack of motivation or concentration, depreciation, anxiety, insomnia, criminal activity, verbal or physical abuse. So when we look at the definition that we have in the Bill, and again I go back to what Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has said, is one of the most—I do not want to misquote him, but he definitely referred to this as being one of the laudable objects of the Bill. Mr. Deputy Speaker, problem gambling, compulsive gambling or non-substance addiction is a real medical and mental health issue. So we must recognize that before we get into what it is we are establishing a Rehabilitation Fund to do.

So I want to say that an application made on behalf of a vulnerable person by a non-governmental organization to the committee is provided for in clause 64. A vulnerable person, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if having met the criteria for being deemed to be needing help, this criteria set out in subclause (3) which simply says that he is someone who is a gambling addict because he cannot pay his gambling debt and that gambling debt is having an adverse impact on his ability to meet his obligations or his family or his job, those alone when we look at what obtains in the international platform these cannot be the symptoms alone. It cannot simply be limited to financial circumstances. So it must have an element, a greater element or inclusion of the pathological symptoms that it is taken on board. So, I would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Bill has failed to fully recognize the deleterious impact of gambling addiction on the mental health of the problem gambler and his or her family. The problem is couched here in terms of dollars and cents and I am saying that that is a shame, that when we talk about one of the major social ills, by-products as a social ill out of this industry we are not treating with it in a proper

manner.

Now, two Funds have been proffered in the Bill as a sort of peace offering to bridge the gap between revenue earning and treating people who have a social ill arising out of this, and those Funds are to be disbursed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, according to clause 64(2). Now:

“The Rehabilitation Fund is established to assist non-governmental organisations and other groups working with vulnerable persons and their families suffering the effects of gambling addiction and other forms of harm or exploitation associated with gambling.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, nowhere in the Bill does it state exactly what those Funds are going to be used for. We simply do not know. I know in the other place one of the Independent Senators appropriately called it in my view, or appropriately referred to it as the conscience funds. This generates as I started off by saying more questions than answers. So according to 65 and 66 or clause 65 and 66 of this Bill, when we look at it:

“The Committee shall guidelines to facilitate applicants...”

That is clause 65(7).

Clause 66(1):

“All accounts relating to the Rehabilitation Fund and the Development Fund shall be managed by the Committee, which shall disburse monies from those accounts in accordance with its procedures.”

So I want to say it is not enough according to this present drafting to say that the committee is empowered to give guidelines for persons seeking assistance, but not necessarily giving some criteria or even giving a measure of the procedures in place to disburse those moneys.

So we would like to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, upfront that there is

certainty and specificity from this being the parent legislation in terms of the following questions I would want to ask. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what level of financial indebtedness will have to be met before funds are released? So according to the definition what level of indebtedness before somebody qualifies under this fund? For what purpose will the funds be released? What is the limit of funding per problem gambler, aka the vulnerable person? To whom will funds be released? The gambler or the family? And that is pertinent because if you give the moneys to the gambler what is going happen? I highly doubt that that is what is being contemplated here, but I am saying that we must certainty. No mention is made of the therapist or the counsellor, the physiatrist, or a rehabilitation centre, and I would think that if you are establishing these Funds that this is the direction that you will be heading in.

If the problem gambler re-offends, can he access this Fund more than one occasion, or the NGOs as the case may be, access the fund one than one occasion? Mr. Deputy Speaker, can I ask how much time I have again?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Two more minutes.

Mr. D. Rambally: Two more minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. D. Rambally: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I have made that point. I want to just respond to—I think I have dealt with the constitutionality argument and the need for a three-fifths majority. I want to say that it is clear the way I have heard Members on the other side speak today, the gambling industry does have laws that to regulate it at present. I am not saying because of that we should not seek to make these laws better and implement a better regulating mechanism, but there are laws in place. And when I heard Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West speak, it was as though well you know the public does not have the power to object to licences,

that obtains under the present law. You can go to the Magistrates' Court as the case may be and you can object to licences being granted. And I want to say that everyone has a right as it stands now to apply for a licence. What they have a right to is that it be assessed fairly.

So whether we talk about existing law, we talk about this present Bill that is something that everyone has a right to the benefit of the constitutional section 4 rights. And what is objectionable, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in my humble opinion the Government's view to tell members of the public, citizens, or be it through this forum, that they must give up their constitutional rights in order to obtain a licence because that is the kind of narrative I am hearing on the other side and this is what I would want to say, this is akin to legislative extortion.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say very clearly that what we are dealing with here is that do not misled the public. Member for Couva South has indicated that the issue which he had with the consultation was that what steps were taken with the stakeholders? At the end when you had the final product what consultation was held at that point with the stakeholders and can you deem that to be a proper consultation? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for this time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the contribution of Members opposite has been abysmal especially the contribution of the last speaker. I am amazed when you have a piece of legislation that indicates that there is a Rehabilitation Fund whose purpose is to deal with the harmful effects of gambling—and that is in 13(1)(c)—that the Rehabilitation Fund and the Development Fund will deal with the harmful negative effects of gambling. And then with respect to the committee that will be established to administer that Fund, the Bill clearly states that that committee shall

formulate guidelines, and clearly those guidelines would be with respect to the use of the Fund to deal the harmful effects of gambling, And in clause 65(9), it indicates that:

“The Committee...”—the Rehabilitation Fund committee in particular—
“shall within three months at the end of each financial year, submit a report to the Minister on the activities and management of the...Fund...and the Minister in turn cause the report to be laid in Parliament.

All of that is in the Bill, but we just heard 20 wasted minutes about how this Fund will be operationalized; a complete waste of time.

Then we had the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre wasting our time asking us questions that were asked ad nauseam during the committee deliberations for the last five years. All of those questions asked by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre were asked and answered during the Joint Select Committee meetings which went on for years, and years, and years. And therefore, it is obvious to us on this side that the UNC has no intention of ensuring that criminals and other pernicious elements are removed from the gambling industry. It is obvious to us in their filibustering, time wasting and repetitive foolish question asking for the last five years that they have no intention of supporting the proper regulation of a \$16 billion industry which is subject to all sorts of criminal interventions.

They are not interested. They are not interested. What I noticed in the other place is that they brought in somebody as a temporary Senator who had been fired from the Barkeepers and Operators Association in 2020. In fact, in November 2020 the Bar Owners Association removed their interim president, Mr. Teron Mohan. Got rid of him because he was not working in the interest of bar owners, and the UNC brought him in as a temporary Senator just to obstruct, obfuscate, resist proper regulation of an industry.

I have just heard a Member just speak for 20 minutes about problems with problem gamblers but he will not support the Bill, and let me deal with now with the matters that have come up during discussion. There is a clause in the Bill, it is clause 38 with respect to the granting of licences, and there is a point which was—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister, what clause you said?

Hon. C. Imbert: 38. That is the clause that identifies the conditions upon which a licence is granted, clause 38. I am actually reading from the Bill Essentials from the Parliament and I am on the page that deals with clause 38. And the point is made that it will be a requirement of the licence that a licensee will be required to consent to the entry of authorized officers and enforcement officers on any premises specified in the licence. And the point being made by Members opposite, and the reason why they say they are going to challenge this Bill and go to court, proving once again that they want to support illegal gambling, is that they say that that will require a special majority.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West made the point that there is no prohibition against regulation. And I can assure you, Madam, sorry, I can assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I certainly did not say as falsely indicated by a Member opposite that I had a problem with that clause. I did not say that. I simply said it is a clause that we will looking at very carefully to ensure that those opposite cannot undermine, sabotage and scuttle this long overdue reform of the gambling industry. [*Desk thumping*] If they feel that we are going to sit down and close our eyes and allow them to undermine this, as they have undermined so many other things, they better think again. So I am saying now that the Ministry of Finance will be looking at that to ensure that it is not an opportunity for them to allow illegal gambling to continue to proliferate in this country.

With respect to the other things, there is nothing said by Members opposite

that made any sense, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Absolutely nothing! Just a repeat, a regurgitation, ad nauseam, of the obstructionism of the Opposition since 2016. [*Desk thumping*] Obstructionism, and I want to correct some mischief put into the system by the Member for Couva South. At no time did I say the Bill before the House is a mirror image of the Bill presented, debated and passed by the UNC in May 2015. At no time did I say that. Members opposite love to twist the truth. They love to put falsehoods on the parliamentary record. That is their modus operandi. [*Desk thumping*] But what I said is that the Bill that this Government introduced in 2016 was a carbon copy of the Bill passed by the UNC in 2015. That is not this Bill.

This Bill has enhancements in it that deal with the evolution of the requirement of the Financial Action Task Force, the Global Forum, and the other entities worldwide that look at things like money laundering and require countries to improve their legislation to weed out, control and eliminate things like money laundering. That is the only significant difference between this Bill and the Bill that we laid in 2016. It simply has enhanced procedures to deal with money laundering and the countering of terrorist financing. But in principle and in terms of its core provisions this Bill is more or less the same as the Bill that was passed by the UNC.

The membership of the Commission, the Rehabilitation Fund—as a matter of fact I am just amazed that the UNC passed a Bill with a Rehabilitation Fund, with a Rehabilitation committee, with provisions for our guidelines. UNC passed that Bill and a UNC Member comes in here and to complain that the provisions are no good. What is going on the people on with the other side? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is long overdue. This PNM Government will no longer tolerate time wasting, obstructionism, and perverse filibustering by the Members on the other

side. We intend to pass this Bill and we will use every resource in our capability to ensure that this gambling and gaming Commission will do its work properly and will not be sabotaged by Members opposite, and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, if I may, given that there are no amendments could we do all the clauses together please?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, may I just enquire if Senior Counsel for Siparia will be joining us insofar as we have contributions to be made to this critical Bill?

Clauses 1 to 89 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I wish to report that the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2021, was considered in committee of the whole and approved without amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with this report from the committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

Hon. Member: Division.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Members, a division having been called, we know

that we allow three minutes for Members to make their way to the Chamber before we commenced the vote. In the event that a Member is not at their seat when their name is called, they will be allowed to vote any time prior to the vote being announced.

[*Pause*]

Okay. So hon. Members, the three minutes is now up so the vote will commence.

The House divided: Ayes 21

AYES

Imbert, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Young, Hon. S.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Forde, E.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

Richards, K.

Manning, Hon. B.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland, K.

Monroe, R.

The following Members abstained: Mr. D. Lee—[Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Members, can the vote be taken in silence? [Crosstalk]

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, Laventille West—

Dr. Moonilal: Minister of National Security saying is jail we want.

Madam Speaker: Members?

Mr. Indarsingh: No, but we cannot operate in this environment.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, if you look this where you will see that I am on my legs. Member for Oropouche East, Member for Couva South, Member for Laventille West, Member for Naparima, can we proceed with proper decorum and in silence?

Mr. Indarsingh: That is the Member for National Security.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South?

1.30 p.m.

Division continued.

Ms. K. Ameen, Mr. R. Charles, Dr. R. Moonilal, Mr. R. Paray, Mr. R. Indarsingh, Dr. L. Bodoë, Mr. D. Rambally, Mr. B. Padarath, Ms. A. Haynes, Mr. D. Tancoo, Ms. V. Mohit, Dr. R. Ragbir, Mr. A. Ram and Dr. R. Seecheran.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, on a division with 21 Members voting for, no Members voting against and 15 abstentions, the Motion on the third reading of the Anti-Gang (Amdt.) Bill, 2020, is approved. [Desk thumping]

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday 25th of June at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, that is Private Members' Day so I await the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre who will tell us what we will be doing on that day.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In response to the Leader of Government Business, we will be doing Motion No. 6 on the Order Paper, which is not on the Order Paper today, but it will qualify on the 23rd, which is a motion brought by the Member for Caroni East and I will just read the last thing:

Be it resolved that this House express a lack of confidence in the Minister of Health and call for his immediate resignation.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, if I may, before we put the question, I would just like to indicate to my colleagues of the House that, on Monday, we will be dealing with the Tobago Self-Government Bill and we will be starting at 10.00 on Monday. We anticipate that on Tuesday, the debate will continue and we will also start at 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday. Madam Speaker, we start with the Tobago Self-Government and we also have the Tobago Island Government Bill, so it is two Bills that we have to deal with. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.38 p.m.