

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, December 09, 2022*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**CONDOLENCES****(MR. HERBERT PHILIP VOLNEY)**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as you may be aware, Mr. Herbert Philip Volney, a former Member of Parliament, passed away on Wednesday, December 07, 2022. Mr. Volney served as a High Court judge from 1994 to 2010, and thereafter as a Member of Parliament for St. Joseph, and Minister of Justice during the Tenth Parliament from 2010 to 2012. I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes on the passing of Mr. Volney. Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I rise to pay tribute to one of our own in the person of Herbert Philip Volney, born June 08, 1953 in Dominica. Madam Speaker, when one looks at his “Caribbeanness”, one will see that he was schooled in Antigua, Barbados, St. Kitts and Dominica. He studied for law at Cave Hill, Barbados and then came to Trinidad at the Sir Hugh Wooding Law School. So he was indeed a Caribbean man.

He was recruited by then Attorney General, Selwyn Richardson, to work in the Office of the DPP from 1979 to 1989 to sort of cut his teeth, so to speak, and then in the law chambers of Karl Hudson-Phillips who also brought him into the law fraternity. In 1994, he was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court where he performed his duties from 1994 to 2010. It is in 2010 that Herbert Philip Volney,

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Justice Herbert Philip Volney, began his political career and won his seat, the St. Joseph seat, in the general elections of 2010. Thereafter, he was appointed the Minister of Justice. In looking at the man as a whole, one could say he was controversial, one could say he was flamboyant, and one can say he was vocal. And I think all of these adjectives are true.

However, after all the reams of paper that have been printed about his political career, I will not go down that road this morning. Why? Because a wife has lost a husband, children have lost a father and the Catholic community of St. Joseph has lost a valued member. It is my duty, therefore, Madam Speaker, to speak a little bit about my personal reflections of Mr. Herbert Philip Volney.

Mr. Volney supported me wholeheartedly in the 2013 by-elections, the 2015 general elections and the 2020 general elections. I remember fondly going to mass one day at the Catholic Church in St. Joseph for one of the feasts and at the courtyard afterwards, Herbert and I were speaking. We developed a very collegial relationship after a while. And Father approached us and he said, “Terrence, Herbert you all have made me a happy man today.” So we said, “Why Father?” He said,

Look at you two, political adversaries, but you are here in the house of God putting aside your political differences.” And that is why I said I developed a very collegial relationship with Herbert from 2013 to now.

Actually, he would call me because one of his bases in St. Joseph was the Champ Fleurs area, Quarry Drive area, where he had a political base, and he was often my ears and eyes on the ground. And up to last week Mr. Volney contacted me after the rains to tell me about the situations of flooding, of landslides in Quarry Drive. He would always reach out to me to solve issues. That was the type of relationship I had with him.

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In closing, I want to say that the Catholic community of St. Joseph and Trinidad and Tobago has lost a valued member. As I said, a wife has lost a husband and children have lost their father. In speaking to Mrs. Tricia Volney yesterday, I said, “Tricia, what do you want me to say to the national community? What would you like Herbert to be remembered for? What are your wishes and thoughts as I have to speak on his behalf?” She said, “Minister, please tell the country that I”— meaning his wife—“I am truly grateful of the outpouring of love and support that they have received as a family in this time of need, in this time of distress.”

As I close, may I say that I have lost a colleague. And on behalf of his wife and children, may I say we all wish that his soul may rest in eternal peace and his memory be a blessing to us all. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And indeed it is a pleasure for me to take the opportunity here to join with my colleagues and all Members of this House as we pay our tribute and respect to the family of the late Justice Herbert Volney who served as a Member of Parliament in these very said Chambers. And today we pay tribute to a husband, a father, a lawyer, a politician and, most of all, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who made his mark on all fronts.

And as my colleague, the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph, indicated, that he was born on the 8th of June, 1953, in Dominica. And when we look at the various countries that he was educated in, he was indeed a quintessential Caribbean man and he understood that, in terms of his existence, and indeed he was proud of his Dominican heritage. And, in fact, when Dominica was battered by a hurricane he indeed led a drive to secure materials, building materials and so on, in relation

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to the rehabilitation of homes within Dominica.

And after graduating in 1976 with a Bachelor of Laws degree, he was admitted to the bar in 1978, and he forged a legal career in Trinidad and Tobago for which he will always be remembered, having served as a judge in the courts of this country. And when he moved from his legal tenure or service to Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean, he moved towards the political arena, and he served Trinidad and Tobago as the first Minister of Justice in the administration of the People's Partnership government led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. And during my sense of interaction with him, he carried out his roles and responsibilities with a sense of flair and a sense of wit, and a man of many words, or expressed himself in varying styles and varying demeanours. And sometimes the way he would have put it across to you, you would remember him for that particular delivery.

I also had the pleasure of seeing him in action at the level of the Magistrates' Court, and even within the courts of Trinidad and Tobago at the Hall of Justice and so on, and for this we will all remember him. We will remember his contribution as the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph. He served selflessly. And he served the Roman Catholic community with a sense of distinction, a man who was devoted towards Almighty God and the upliftment of his church and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, remember him, as I said, for his contributions as a husband, a father, a lawyer, a politician and a citizen. May Almighty God, at this point in time, grant members of his family; his wife, Tricia; and his children the necessary strength to come to terms with his passing. And may Almighty God grant his soul eternal rest. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I too would like to pay tribute to Mr. Herbert

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Philip Volney. Mr. Volney can be described as a true Caribbean man. As the prior contributions have stated, he was born in Dominica. Others have recorded that he was born in Montserrat to a St. Lucian mother and Dominican father, and educated in Dominica. Mr. Volney migrated to Trinidad and Tobago after completing his legal studies in 1978. In his adult life he was of service to Trinidad and Tobago, but never denied his Dominican roots.

Following his legal contribution to Trinidad and Tobago, and his career on the bench, Mr. Volney secured a seat in Parliament representing the constituency of St. Joseph. Moving from the Judiciary where law is interpreted, to the Parliament where law is made requires some reorientation. But Mr. Volney from his contributions in this House may have been considered to have adapted easily contributing, and I dare say with fervour, to many debates, including; the Anti-Gang Bill, 2010; the Miscellaneous Provisions (Ministry of Justice) Bill, 2011; and the Legal Aid and Advice (Amdt.) Bill, 2011. The Mr. Volney was also a member of Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, and the Joint Select Committee on Legislative Proposals on Public Procurement and on the Repealing and Replacing of the Central Tenders Board Act.

I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Volney family during this time of mourning and I pray that Almighty God grants them peace and consolation during their bereavement. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The House stood.

Madam Speaker: May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Members, an appropriate letter will be sent with our condolences to the family of the late Mr. Herbert Volney.

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Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, with respect to the matter of privilege referred

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to the Committee of Privileges on Friday, December 02, 2022, I have recused myself from the committee for this matter. As a consequence, I have appointed the Deputy Speaker, Mr. Esmond Forde, MP, a member and chairman of the committee for the said matter only.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following reports:

Land and Physical Infrastructure Management of the Water and Sewerage Authority

Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament, on the Management of the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) with specific reference to the 2020 Cabinet Sub-Committee Report on WASA and related recommendations.

Impact of Landfills on the Environment of Trinidad and Tobago

Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament, on the Impact of Landfills on the Environment of Trinidad and Tobago.

Human Rights, Equality and Diversity Cultural Heritage of the Indigenous Peoples (First Peoples) of Trinidad and Tobago

The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present:

Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on an inquiry into the role of the State in preserving the Cultural Heritage of the Indigenous Peoples (First Peoples) of Trinidad and Tobago,

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Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Resumption of Scrap Iron Operations

(Update on)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: Given the recent announcement by the Attorney General that the ban on scrap iron operations will come to an end before December 31st 2022, will the Prime Minister give a specific date for the resumption of these activities or an undertaking that this deadline to end the ban will be upheld?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the premise of the question is wrong. The Attorney General never said that. And I would like to clarify that the Attorney General did not say that the scrap metal ban would come to an end on December 31, 2022. That was never said by the Attorney General. In a media conference hosted by the Attorney General on Friday, November 25, 2022, the Attorney General reiterated that he gave the commitment to come back to the population in three months to give an update before the expiry of the scrap metal ban, which he initially stated would last for six months.

However, to say that the Attorney General stated that the scrap metal ban would come to an end on December 31, 2022 would be misconstruing his words, and I am sure the Member knows that it is not so. The Attorney General stated that he aims to shorten the period of the ban and that his office is aiming to put the scrap metal Bill into Parliament before the end of the year to get it debated and voted on. As such, no definitive date was proposed by the hon. Attorney General for an end to the ban.

I am pleased to report, Madam Speaker, that at the stakeholder consultation meeting held on the 25th of November, 2022, with members of the scrap metal industry, the President of the Dealers Association, the Minister of Trade and

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Industry, the Attorney General at that meeting advised stakeholders that the—

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

1.50 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister as a follow-up question, and based on your correction, do you have as Prime Minister, given that this industry has been shut down, do you have an idea as Prime Minister of this country when the industry will be open back up?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I have no information that is different to what the Attorney General has. It is the same Government and we have one government in Trinidad and Tobago. And what the Attorney General says is what the Government is saying. And if I may continue, I could tell you that, if I continue, that the draft Scrap Metal Bill was taken to Cabinet on the 24th of November, 2022, and it is the aim for Cabinet to have the Bill passed into law before the end of 2022 to introduce a new legislative regime into the scrap metal industry. The Bill is being laid today and I thank the Attorney General and his team for having done the work within the time frame that we had set.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Petrotrin Refinery Preferred Bidder
(Update on)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given the Prime Minister's statement in May 2022 that a preferred bidder for the Petrotrin refinery was identified by Trinidad Petroleum Holdings, will the Prime Minister give an update on these negotiations between the preferred bidder and TPHL?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, by a public open international request for proposals, TPHL and its advisors identified an initial preferred proposal from Quanten LLC whom they engaged in due diligence and discussions. This process has been recently concluded. On December 5th, 2022, TPHL, on the advice of its professional international advisors, terminated all discussions with Quanten LLC. There have been a number of entities who have expressed an interest in exploring the restart of the refinery and TPHL will continue to access these expressions of interest and we are also exploring whether there is any regional interest in the refinery.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister as you just mentioned in your response, Quanten, the preferred bidder, is no longer on the table with TPHL. Could you then state if the refinery would go back out to bidding or to the general market internationally?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I said—I said that TPHL will continue to assess and that assessment is done in whatever way, whether it is going back out or whether it is receiving a proposal. But the door is still open for interested parties to talk to TPHL or we may very well go back out again. But going back out does not guarantee that we will find someone, but we are always available and the door is open.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, again, as a follow-up, as we stand now based on your response there are no parties that TPHL

will be working with for the refinery to be open at this point in time?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: As of the 5th of December, that is correct, because the process did not deliver a usable, workable arrangement and that was properly terminated at December 5th. But let me just clarify something to assist my colleague on this answer, “eh”. When the refinery was shut down it was not shut down with an intention to open it on a particular date. It was the Government of Trinidad and Tobago coming out of the refining business. And we did say very clearly then that if there is anyone else who may have an interest in the refinery as it was closed and we are out of the business, such an entity would be entertained for discussions. So this approach you are trying to give the impression that the refinery is to be reopened within the budgetary period and this date and that date is purely misleading. In Trinidad and Tobago, the owner of the refinery has come out of the refining business. And if we are lucky to find someone who is interested and have oil to refine then we all would be happy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister as a follow-up to your response, seeing that four years ago the Government came out of the refinery business, is the Government today, after consideration, prepared to go back into the refinery business?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: That is a UNC position.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The reason why we came out of the refining business is because our oil production—we did not have oil to sustain a refinery in an efficient way and we were importing oil to refine and lose money on every barrel. That

going back into the refining business without an oil supply is a UNC madhouse business.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Coast Guard Vessels CG-41/CG-42
(Completion of Maintenance/Repair)**

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you, thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the Prime Minister inform this House as to when will the maintenance/repairs on Coast Guard Vessels CG-41 and CG-42 be completed?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, CG-41 is currently waiting dry docking for its maintenance and servicing and repairs. CG-42 will be serviceable and operational within a matter of days.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Prime Minister advise with the absence of these two vessels to provide border protection if at present we have sufficient border protection for the safety of our citizens?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And that is precisely why you asked the question so we can answer and tell the world that our two vessels are not available. I answered your question. But what is the outcome of that? We have told the world now that none of them are in the sea. And that is what you do all the time. And if I told you I am not going to answer the question you call me arrogant. Answering questions about assets might be useful inside the Parliament. It does not help with border security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Prime Minister are you aware that several of our fisherfolk have

been victims of piracy because of the lack of coast guard vessels to protect the water—

Madam Speaker: So, Member, based on the question, original question asked, supplemental, I would not allow that within the Standing Orders, okay. Member for Couva North.

**T&T Coast Guard Base at San Fernando Yacht Club
(Equipping of Functional Vessel)**

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the Prime Minister indicate when the T&T Coast Guard Base located at the San Fernando Yacht Club will be equipped with a functional vessel?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the San Fernando facility is available or will become available and as we complete the repairs and operationalization of some of the smaller units that we are working on right now that facility will be used from time to time.

**Ports of Entry Scanners
(Time Frame to Fully Equip)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you. Will the Prime Minister, as head of the National Security Council state whether he has taken, or intends to take charge of the process to ensure that within a reasonable time frame our legal ports of entry are fully equipped with the requisite number of scanners?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, there is a fully operational fixed scanner at the Port of Port of Spain. It is eight years old and it is still fit for purpose and is in operation. The mobile scanners donated by the United States to Trinidad and Tobago in 2018 and installed at Point Lisas were not new. They were 16 years old at the time they were given to us and they are now deemed

to be obsolete. Procurement of new scanners was initiated recently and tenders for new mobile scanners are expected to be received by February 23rd.

Madam Speaker, it is noteworthy that 17 per cent of all containers are physically inspected—inspected and physical inspected 20 per cent. The world average for scanner is 60 per cent and physical inspection 2 per cent. Insofar as the model of inspection is concerned we are inspecting above average because we do have a pressing problem of criminal intent and criminal penetration of our authorized ports.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Mr. Prime Minister given the fact that you—in your response you indicated that some of the equipment are over 16 years old. Are you satisfied as head of this Government to have a situation where our ports of entry, if we go by what the acting Commissioner of Police said, is responsible for guns entering Trinidad and Tobago at this time.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: There is nobody in this country who is satisfied with this situation with respect to the entry of illegal firearms. Maybe Naparima is, but there is nobody else satisfied. And that is why we are making efforts to ensure that we impede the importation on illegal firearms.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: We have been advised that there is shortage of staff in customs to man these scanners. Would you take the necessary steps to ensure that we have the requisite staff trained to handle these scanners?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so I am not going to allow the question on staff. Your original question is about scanners. Okay. Member for Naparima.

**Collection of VAT Revenue from Fuel Sales
(Using Revenue for Improvement of Roads)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you. Given that the State collects in excess of two billion dollars in VAT from the sale of fuels at gas stations and other revenues from fuel sales including petroleum levy, business levy and green fund and given the very poor state of our roads, will the Prime Minister take steps to use some of these billions to significantly improve our road network?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, it is one thing for the Member to make himself a laughing stock in the House with his speech, but it is another thing to provide misinformation to the House. The revenue collected from VAT, green fund and business levy on fuel is not \$2 billion. In 2022, this revenue amounted to \$223 million and the petroleum levy, if the Member would pay attention he might learn something, the petroleum levy is not collected on the sale of fuel. It is collected from oil production and it is used to offset the fuel subsidy which in 2023 will be \$1 billion. And I would appreciate if the Member for Naparima stops misleading the public with his falsification of the country's numbers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Given the poor state of the roads is the Prime Minister—will he use any of the \$223 million to improve the network in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Well I am glad you have accepted 223 as the actual figure and not two billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It would have been gentlemanly to apologize first but let us go.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the funding of projects and programmes in Trinidad and Tobago, they all come from the Consolidated Fund and money is fungible. We do not mark the name of any project on any dollar note. So we will provide resources from the resources collected from all forms and fashion through the Consolidated Fund and ensure that the road repair programme, the road reinstatement programme, the road construction programme is properly funded in 2023.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister aware that on every litre of gasoline sold in Trinidad the Government collects 90 cents in terms of VAT payment. Would the Prime Minister therefore consider reducing VAT, eliminating VAT or using the money to fix the roads in Trinidad—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member I am not going to allow that question within the confines of the Standing Orders. You have another supplemental? Okay, Member for Naparima.

**Crime as a Public Health Emergency
(Update on established committee)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the Prime Minister provide an update on the workings of the committee established to operationalise the Crime as a Public Health Emergency initiative?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (**Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley**): Madam Speaker, the Government appointed a committee which includes: the PS in the Ministry of

Health; the PS, Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs; PS, National Security; PS, Sport and Community Development; PS, Education; PS, Youth Development; PS, Rural Development; Chief Administrator of the Tobago House of Assembly and the Commissioner of Police. To date, Madam Speaker, this Committee is working on an action plan which is leading to the preparation of a profile of violence in the country, the conduct of a rapid assessment of the economic and social dimension of violence, the model for violence surveillance system and a communication strategy to prevent and reduce violence with behaviour modification outcomes. The work is ongoing, Madam Speaker, and we await the completion of the assignment.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, will primary school education as well as parental education be a focus of the committee to reduce illicit drug abuse and thus crime?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Any contributory component in the context of what I have just said in those four bullets would be part of the consideration and I would leave it to the committee to consider the intake of that similar components.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Has the Prime Minister—could the Prime Minister indicate a time frame in which we could expect this report of the committee?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: They have not got a date of completion, Madam Speaker. This is a completely new assignment and we are relying on the offices that I just mentioned treating with it, with dispatch, and I do know that they are, so we give them the time and the space to do it and report at the earliest possible date.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

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The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are no questions for oral answer and there are four questions for written response and we are answering all four.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Estimated Oil Production for Fiscal 2023 (Status of)

50. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister state:

- a) the reason why there was no mention of the estimated oil production for fiscal 2023 in his Budget Presentation 2023; and
- b) the estimated oil production for the upcoming period of October 1st, 2022 to October 1st, 2023?

National Gas Company Incentives to BP (Details of)

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

Will the Minister indicate the incentives that were given to BP by the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Ltd. (NGC) inclusive of the quantity of gas to be supplied to NGC as announced on September 23, 2022?

National Marine and Maintenance Services Company Limited (Rationale of)

52. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Given that the Government acquired CL Marine Limited in 2020 and formed the state-owned National Marine and Maintenance Services Company Limited, will the Minister state the rationale for acquiring this company?

Number of Established /Proposed Positions

(Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals)

59. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Will the Minister provide the number of established/ proposed positions, inclusive of the number of filled positions for each category of staff on the establishment at the following institutions:

- a) Arima Hospital; and
- b) Point Fortin Hospital?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

SCRAP METAL BILL, 2022

A Bill to create measures to regulate the business of dealing in scrap metals and for other related matters [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at the next sitting of the House.

[*Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE (NO. 2) BILL, 2022

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: I beg to move that:

A Bill to make provisions of a financial nature and other related matters be now read a second time.

Before you, Madam Speaker, is the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2022. This Bill is aimed at putting in place the remaining fiscal measures announced in this House on September 26th, 2022 in the Budget Statement for 2023 that were not included in the Finance Act, 2022, with one exception, and that is dealing with the issue of assault weapons which will be dealt with early in the New Year, in terms of getting

a proper definition of that.

As I stated on a previous occasion when the Finance Bill, 2022 was before you in this House some of the fiscal measures were not addressed in that Bill owing to the urgency to implement the tax amnesty which became effective on the 14th of November, 2022. This Bill now seeks to address the remaining fiscal and other measures that require legislative changes to be effective with some additional measures which I will go through.

With respect to the Bill itself, the Bill has a total of seven clauses, primarily geared towards incentivizing small businesses, manufacturing, and oil and gas sectors. The Bill also seeks to implement an interim pension for members of the defence force and the police service. The provisions for an interim pension for these officers, members of the defence force, and officers of the police service were not one of the fiscal measures read out in the House on September 26th, 2022.

However, given the significant positive impact that urgent implementation of this interim pension would have on the lives of those affected, as well as the fact that this Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2022 is a money Bill, it was thought best to include this pension measure in this Bill.

Clause 1 of the Bill is self-explanatory and needs no further explanation except to say that it contains the short title of the Bill, Finance Act (No. 2) 2022.

Clauses 2 and 3 deals with defence, (Pension, Terminal and Other Grants) regulations and the police service regulations. They amend the defence pension's terminal and other grants regulations and the police service regulations, to provide for an interim pension in the sum of \$3,500 per month for persons retiring from the defence force and the police service. It is common knowledge that the system relative to the processing and payment of pension benefits to recently retired public officers in Trinidad and Tobago is not the most efficient.

Just one month ago the issue of processing of payment of pensions and gratuities for retired public officers and contracted employees was the subject of consideration by the Public Administration and Appropriation Committee of Parliament in November of 2022, following its Third Report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Twenty-Fourth Report of the PAAC on the examination into the processing of the payment of pensions and gratuities of retired public officers and contracted employees, First Session, 12th Parliament.

That Third Report of the PAAC, there are a number of operational recommendations which include, among other things, the following: Training for staff in processing pensions and gratuities; implementing new methods to encourage Ministries and Departments to submit pension and leave records in a timely manner I would assume; circulating brochures to Ministries and Departments on frequently asked questions on understanding compliance instructions and guidelines with respect to pension, pension and leave, gratuities, et cetera; filling core positions to assist in the process of pensions and gratuities for retired public officers and contracted employees.

The Ministry of Finance is addressing these recommendations together with the other issues raised in the PAAC report. But in the interim it is thought that there is need to bring some measure of relief to retired officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Defence Force. It is common knowledge that retired officers such as members of the police service and defence force as are other public officers are subject to lengthy delays in processing pensions and gratuity payments despite the fact that their pension units are decentralized from the Treasury Division. And I want to stress that. Some time ago the Treasury took the decision in order to speed up the processing of pension and leave records and

the payment of pensions and gratuities to decentralize the function away from the centralized system that existed before. So, under this administration we decentralized the pension payment system to each unit, each Ministry, each Department and so on, and staff, allocations were made for staff in all of these Ministries and Departments. However, even though the functions were decentralized we are still experiencing delays. So it is an issue that we need to solve.

In this context the views of the acting Commissioner of Police and the Chief of Defence Staff were sought on the matter since even though the functions have been decentralized, it is no longer a direct responsibility of the Treasury Division but it is now resident within these various Departments. The views of the acting Commissioner and Chief of Defence were sought and there is agreement that provision should be made for members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and Defence Force to receive an interim pension, thus making provision for them in the same way that other public servants, other public officers, receive an interim pension. I am sure you will agree, Madam Speaker, that this move, given the delays that are being ventilated in other forums, will be welcomed.

Allow me to explain the concept of an interim pension. An interim pension is the payment of the minimum amount of pension a retired officer would be entitled to receive, that is to say \$3,500 on the basis of sufficient evidence that a person who has retired is eligible for a pension. So once it is deemed that the person will be eligible for a pension but their records are still being collated the concept will apply, so that person will get the minimum pension of \$3,500. This therefore offers the payment of a minimum amount to a retired officer until all required documents and records are collected and reviewed and audited to process his or her full pension benefits.

Some of the other features of the interim pension are: the payments made via the interim pension will be deducted from full pension payments when they become available to the retired officers, so as to avoid overpayment; and when individual and one assumes that once somebody is eligible for a pension they will certainly be in receipt of that \$3,500 no matter what the entitlement is at minimum; when individuals receives an interim pension is not eligible for a pension through some administrative error in the department, in the unit within the police service or the defence force that does the paper work, the State will have the option of recovering the money previously paid to the person by pursuing a civil debt against the individual. And as you know, Madam Speaker, on the many occasions this is not pursued because it is not the fault of the individual, but each case is dealt with on a case by case basis.

It is acknowledged that the implementation of a minimum pension is by no means the complete solution to the long delays in processing pensions for retired police officers or defence force staff, but certainly we are of the view that this will bring much needed relief to retired officers. And as I said before, the Ministry of Finance will implement the recommendations of the PAAC's Third Report in order to ensure that a more permanent solution to the question of delays in the payment of pensions in Trinidad and Tobago can be implemented and sustained. It is important that it also be sustained, it should not be a one-off.

Clause 4(a) of the Bill deals with the apprenticeship allowance announced in the budget and it is well known that persons who have completed their secondary education are usually not equipped to enter the world of work because they have no experience, they have no skills and experiences in problem solving, time management, prioritizing and other areas critical to good job performance. Persons who have just left school are also unfamiliar with workplace norms and

responsibilities and quite often experience difficulty in making a smooth transition from school into the working phase of their lives.

2.20 p.m.

Clause 4(a) of the Bill, therefore, implements an apprenticeship allowance by inserting section 10W under the Corporation Tax Act which is aimed at dealing with this issue of persons leaving school without any work experience. To support the development of these persons and the development of a globally competitive workforce in pursuit of everyone's goal of sustainable economic and social development, the apprenticeship allowance is aimed at the hiring of young persons between the ages of 16 and 25 who have completed their secondary education, and it will provide eligible companies with an allowance of 150 per cent of all remuneration paid under such an allowance up to a maximum of 5 per cent of the company's total wages and salaries bill for a year of income. And the meaning of the term "completed their secondary education" means that they have finished school and have left. It does not mean that they have to have five CXC passes. It means they are finished their secondary school, whether they do well in CXC or not, or CAPE as the case may be.

So this is intended to be for everyone. Of course, it will be up to companies to determine what sort of qualifications they would want from individuals. Unskilled persons could, of course, qualify for jobs of a less technical nature. In order to qualify for this allowance, the training programme instituted by the company must be registered with the National Training Agency. That is to allow some order into the system. It cannot be a free for all. You cannot make up a training programme and then seek to qualify for this tax allowance. You have to actually register with the National Training Agency who would obviously examine what you are doing. The period of apprenticeship will be limited to a maximum of

one year.

Clause 4(b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) relates to an approved small company, and it seeks, these clauses—let us start with 4(b), seeks to extend the corporation tax exemption to an approved small company for a period of six years commencing January the 1st, 2023. By definition, an approved small company in accordance with section 16A(5) of the Corporation Tax Act is one which has received a certificate from the Minister of Trade and Industry where that company:

- “(a) is locally owned and controlled as defined in section 16(9);
- (b) has machinery, equipment and working capital the value of which does not exceed one million five hundred thousand dollars;
- (c) if incorporated on or after the 8th of January 1988, is not the result of the splitting or the reconstruction of an existing company;
- (d) does not have as a shareholder any other company holding shares either directly or indirectly through its nominees;
- (e) maintains accounts which are audited by an accountant who is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Trinidad and Tobago;
- (f) has potential for creating permanent jobs;
- (g) has at least five permanent employees; and
- (h) makes optimum use of locally produced raw materials.”

Now, one of the problems we have in Trinidad and Tobago with small companies in particular, is lack of awareness. I am sure there are many small companies that are not aware of these things that I just read out, that will allow them to qualify for exemption from corporation tax.

And as you know, Madam Speaker, like the rest of world, Trinidad and Tobago is in a post COVID-19 period. Companies of all sizes, particularly small

ones, the ones that are being targeted by this measure, are being affected by supply chain disruptions, high cost of raw materials and many other things. There is need, therefore, to support small companies in this country in order for them to continue to play a critical role in the Trinidad and Tobago economy particularly in the non-energy sector. These types of companies, these small companies, the characteristics of which I just read out, have contributed significantly to this country's economic growth and more so job creation.

At another time I have made the point that if you look very closely at the corporate environment in the European Union, the countries of the EU, 90 per cent of the countries of the EU are small businesses. That is what generates the growth in those countries, and this is the area where focus is required. So given the present post-COVID environment where businesses have struggled, especially small businesses, a six-year relief from the payment of corporation tax will go a long way in boosting the performance of these types of companies and must redound to the benefit of the country as a whole.

Clause 4(c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) seeks to replace the now non-existent Small Business Development Company Limited, Industrial Development Corporation. These entities have gone out of business with designated entities by order of the Minister of Finance subject to the negative resolution of Parliament. In the past, the Small Business Development Company and the Industrial Development Company would have been the company that would have certified these small businesses. Now we have to select another one, perhaps creativeTT, perhaps exporTT, and perhaps the new company that is being formed as the merger of a number of these entities. So clause 4(c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) of the Bill are just matters of housekeeping, giving the Minister of Finance now the authority to designate a particular relevant and suitable company to certify what is a small

business and what is not.

Clause with 4(h), “Tax credit for manufacturing companies”. This clause is two-pronged. It inserts two new sections, 16K and 16L in the Corporation Tax Act. The first new section 16K implements a tax credit for manufacturing companies, and, Madam Speaker, the tax credit for approved manufacturing companies that we are seeking to introduce seeks to further incentivize the manufacturing sector which is doing very well. When one looks at the performance of the manufacturing sector year-on-year, we are seeing a growth of the order of 15 per cent year-on-year over the last 12 months. So this seeks to further incentivize the manufacturing sector and give them more ability to grow by the offer of a one-time tax credit of \$50,000 for expenditure incurred in 2023 by an approved manufacturing company acquiring new machinery, new production lines and new equipment. And for those who may not be too familiar with the jargon, there is a difference between a tax allowance and a tax credit. An allowance is subject to the rate of tax. A tax credit is a deduction. That is complete. The Minister of Trade and Industry will be responsible for certifying a company as an approved manufacturing company.

The second portion of clause 4(h) of the Bill addresses the proposed inclusion of section 16L of the Corporation Tax Act as it relates to the grant of a tax credit to e-money issuers, EMIs, and payment service producers, PSPs. Payment service providers are companies registered as such by the Central Bank which facilitate the transfer of money or discharge of obligations between or among entities other than banks. So these are entities completely different to banks, and we have quite an emerging group of such companies in Trinidad and Tobago. We have not gotten to the full case of mobile wallets and so on, but we are getting there.

So by way of background, the E-money Issuer Order, 2020, made by myself under sections 17(4) of—under section 17(4) of the Financial Institutions Act, 2020, sets out the legal framework under which e-money issuers can be licensed and operate in Trinidad and Tobago. E-money or electronic money is defined under section 2 of the Financial Institutions Act as:

“...monetary value represented by a claim on the issuer, which is—

- (a) stored on an electronic device;
- (b) issued on receipt of funds of amount not less in value than the monetary value issued; and
- (c) accepted as a means of payment by persons other than the issuer,

so however that the funds referred to in (b)...shall not be treated as a deposit under the Financial Institutions Act.”

Madam Speaker, with the existence of e-money issuers in the financial system, it is expected that there will be growth in the domestic payment systems as these issuers would aid in fostering competition and encouraging greater use and efficiency of electronic payments and e-commerce, reduce the use of cash and cheque payments, and promote greater financial inclusion. As an aside, there have been efforts in Trinidad and Tobago, which we in Finance have resisted vigorously, for a monopoly situation with respect to payment service providers and e-money issuers. And recently we had a visit from experts from Lithuania, which is one of the leaders in the world together with Estonia in electronic payments, and they advised us—and it is already the policy that we are following—that with respect to payment service providers and e-money issuers, there should be as much competition as possible and monopoly should be discouraged.

We therefore anticipate that the tax credit for e-money issuers and payment

service providers will further incentivize expansion in this sector and further encourage competition so that quality and value will become the hallmarks of the payment service provider and e-money issuer sector. The particulars of the tax credit being offered, it is limited to \$50,000 for expenditure incurred in the year 2023 involving:

- “(a) the acquisition of equipment;
- (b) intellectual property related to software outsourcing and creation;
- (c) product development;
- (d) web development;
- (e) security and maintainance;
- (f) hosting;
- (g) regulatory costs; or
- (h) bank settlement fees,”

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva is disturbing me.

Clause 5, the Petroleum Taxes Act. It is no secret that the energy sector continues to play a significant role in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, the sector contributed on average 30 per cent to the gross domestic product of the country over the last three years, and more than that in revenue. In light of this, there is a need at the very least in order to sustain and also grow the levels of hydrocarbon reserves, and in particular those of crude oil located in deep water and shallow marine areas as they pertain to existing and new fields. Based on what I just said, clause 5(a) of the Bill implements an increase in the investment tax credit from 25 per cent to 30 per cent in section 26(1) of the Petroleum Taxes Act. The simple intent of this increase in the tax credit for investment in deep water, shallow water, et cetera, production, is to stimulate exploration and development in that sector.

Clause 5(b) of the Bill reduces the Petroleum Profits Tax in relation to

petroleum operations in deep water from 35 per cent to 30 per cent. Again, to encourage operations in the deep water which is the most difficult, most expensive and most uncertain part of our petroleum sector. And this will be done through an amendment to the First Schedule of the Petroleum Taxes Act. The remaining provisions in clause 5 of the Bill relate to the Supplemental Petroleum Tax.

Clause 5(c)(ii) of the Bill extends the preferential SPT rate which commences at 18 per cent when the price is between US \$75.01 and US \$90 for small onshore producers of oil beyond 2022 by deleting the words “2021”. So it takes out the sunset clause aspect of this in paragraph 3(a) of the Third Schedule, Petroleum Taxes Act—paragraph 3(a) of Part A of the Third Schedule, Petroleum Taxes Act. So we are taking out the timeline. So this will now remain until sometime in the future when some other person may wish to amend it, if at all.

Clause 5(c)(ii) of the Bill amends the definition of a “small onshore producer” by increasing the limitation of crude oil produced per day from 2,000 barrels to 4,000 barrels. And in this context, a small onshore producer will mean a person who carries out petroleum operations on land under a licence, a sub-licence, contract, and produces less than 4,000 barrels per day, rather than the current limit of 2,000 barrels of crude oil per day. This amendment relates to paragraph 3(b) of Part A of the Third Schedule, Petroleum Taxes Act. And again, it should be obvious what we are trying to do here or what we are planning to do here.

Previously, we increased the threshold at which the Supplemental Petroleum Tax kicks in for small oil producers on land. We raised it from \$50 to \$75, and we limited the definition of a small onshore producer to a producer that produces less than 2,000 barrels a day. Now, in order to further motivate small producers on land of oil, we are taking out the time frame because previously there was a deadline where the incentive would come to an end—that is gone with this Bill—

and we are also increasing the volume of oil produced onshore that will now benefit from this increased threshold of Supplemental Petroleum Tax from 2,000 barrels to 4,000 barrels. It should be obvious, as I said, these measures are aimed at boosting the levels of crude oil production in the country. The measures are also aimed at making the petroleum tax regime in Trinidad and Tobago more competitive as it relates to other countries.

Continuing along this theme, it is proposed to adjust the SPT rates. So not only are we increasing the volume limit for small onshore producers having already increased the price threshold from \$50 to \$60—\$75, sorry, for SPT, we are also looking at SPT for shallow marine areas for new field development, and the new rates of Supplemental Petroleum Tax for new field development are now going to be as follows:

- With an oil price of 0 to \$50, the rate of SPT will be 0—current regime;
- With an oil price of \$50.01 to \$70, the new rate will be 15 per cent—previously it was higher than that;
- With a price of \$70.01—now existing is higher than that—to \$90, it will now be 20 per cent. Again, better than it is at present;
- And then from \$90 to \$200 it will remain as is. 20 per cent plus 0.2 per cent of P minus \$90 where P is the price; and
- \$201.01 and over, 42 per cent.

This calculation of SPT as it pertains to petroleum operations, a new field development, will be found at the paragraph 6A of Part A of the Third Schedule of the Petroleum Taxes Act. Given this move to revise the supplemental petroleum taxes as indicated, clause 5(c)(iii) of the Bill amends paragraph 6A(1)(c) to reflect that the base SPT rate in respect of new field development has moved from 25 per

cent to 20 per cent as column “B” of Part B of the Third Schedule for those who would be looking at the Third Schedule.

Clause 5(c)(iv) of the Bill introduces a new regime of SPT in relation to a new well in an existing field in shallow marine areas. In this regard, a new well means a well that was not producing oil before January the 1st, 2023, and an existing field is defined as a field that produced oil before January the 1st, 2023. The rate of supplemental petroleum tax to be applied to a new well in an existing field will be the same as that now proposed for new field development, and I do not think I need to repeat the rates because they will be exactly what I just read out for new fields.

These new wells in existing fields will be required to be certified and approved for development as is customary by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. Because you would realize, Madam Speaker, there is potential for fraud where persons can claim that an old well is a new well, try something because you will get a lower rate of tax and, therefore, the check and balance inside there is that these new wells in existing fields—obviously a new well in a new field is obvious because the field is new. But if it is an existing field, there will be some argument over whether it is new or old and, therefore, the Minister of the Energy and Energy Industries will certify these new wells in existing fields in shallow water marine areas.

Clause 5(d) of the Bill revises the current table for SPT rates in relation to new field development and to include the new well in existing field. Part B of the Third Schedule, Petroleum Taxes Act, will be amended to reflect the new rates.

Clause 6, wavier of value added tax, an alternate energy technologies and renewable energy options. Clause 6 of the Bill grants a waiver of:

“...value added tax on new equipment for a manufacturing company

which utilises alternate energy technologies and renewable energy options.”

Renewable energy options will include—

“(2)(a) gasifiers using biomass; and

(b) renewable energy harness using wind, solar or water.”

This measure is again targeted at the manufacturing sector and is in keeping with Trinidad and Tobago’s commitments to promote and incentivize renewable energy use and adjust its carbon footprint in the world.

And I just want to say, Madam Speaker, that at the committee stage I will be moving a small amendment to indicate that the Minister responsible for Energy and Energy Industries will certify the alternate energy technology and renewable energy options. You have to have someone to certify this, because again, there is potential for fraud, people could claim that they are using alternative energy or renewable energy and it is not so. So I will be publishing, circulating—sorry, circulating and moving a small amendment at the committee stage to just indicate that it is the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who will certify this new equipment which utilizes alternate energy technologies and renewable energy options. And again, this is consistent with our commitment to move towards green energy, move towards reducing our carbon footprint, and move towards fulfilling our commitments to COP 26, 27, and so on.

Clause 7, the commencement date, sets the commencement date for all clauses of the Bill to come into effect on January the 1st, 2023, except clauses 1, 2, and 3 which will come into effect on the date of assent. How much time do I have, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Your time expires at 2.54.19.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I think it is important I give some information,

some might call it learning, on how one should approach energy taxation. There are a lot of people in this country who pose as experts, but they are not. So let me give some information on how one goes about designing a petroleum tax regime. Now, a petroleum tax regime has to take into account the prevailing fiscal environment. A petroleum tax regime in an environment of high oil and gas prices—we are talking here about oil—has to be different to a petroleum tax regime in a period of low oil prices. Similarly, a petroleum tax regime in a mature oil province such as Trinidad and Tobago, has to be different to a petroleum tax regime in a brand new oil province such as Guyana for example. We in Trinidad and Tobago have been producing oil commercially for 100 years.

There is quite an argument actually as to where the first producing oil well was ever drilled in the world. Some say it was done in North America, but we in Trinidad and Tobago know it was done in Forest Reserve in the 19th Century. So we in Trinidad and Tobago have the distinction of being an oil producing country of 100 years, commercial, that is, and also being the country in which the first producing oil well was ever drilled. As I say, that was in Forest Reserve back in the 19th Century, 1857, I believe. So when one looks at oil fields, the costs involved in developing an oil field are largely incurred at the beginning of the project, and other sunk costs. As one moves along, one realizes at the beginning of a project there is no certainty as to the outcome. There is no guarantee that oil will be found in commercially viable quantities.

So when you are designing an oil tax regime, at the exploration stage it should be geared to incentivize oil companies to put their capital at risk. If investors believe that the balance between risk and reward is unfavourable, in other words that the taxation regime for exploration is skewed in favour of Government and, therefore, not economically feasible, they simply would not participate. And

as my ministerial colleague from Energy and Energy Industries is always telling me, oil in the ground is of no use to anyone. So when you are designing the tax base at the exploration stage you have to understand that you have to motivate oil companies to put their capital at risks.

Now, once the exploration and development costs have been incurred, investors often have little choice but to try to recover their investment as long as they can cover their operational and variable costs because it costs so much. It costs hundreds of millions of US dollars quite often to drill one well. So once investors have put out that expenditure, quite often they do not have any choice but to try and recover their investment. So as you move along, the tax base is less sensitized to variations. In a mature oil field this is all quite different because costs are invariably higher than in new oil regions. It costs more to produce oil in Trinidad and Tobago than in some of the new oil provinces. The oil is more difficult to extract. You have to use secondary methods of recovery, injecting gas into the field for example as is taking place in one of our oil fields, to push the oil out, whereas in a new province the oil may come out on its own under pressure.

So again, investors have to be very careful about how they deal with a mature oil field. Because not only are you putting huge amounts of capital at risk, you also are going to spend more money than an investor would spend in a new oil region. On the flip side, you have lower risks because the oil has already been found. It is there. You know it is there. So that your problem is to produce it. You have gone beyond the exploration phase now, you are into the production phase. So the challenges to construct a fiscal regime that rewards investors for the higher degree of difficulty associated with mature oil fields and also with difficult areas such as deep water. So when you look at our tax regime, for example, you will see over the years the tax rates in the deep-water areas are lower than in the

shallow water because more risk, more expensive, and when you look at the mature fields as well you see that the tax rates are lower because more expense in recovering the oil. You have to use secondary recovery and so on.

So when we decided in Trinidad and Tobago to design a fiscal regime that would deal with our biggest problem, which is decline in production—because if you look at our oil production, go back 10/12 years when we used to produce 150,000 barrels of oil, then it went down to 130, 120, 100, now down to an average of about 60,000, our biggest problem is maintaining the current level and increasing it.

2.50 p.m.

And quite often you will find that oil companies will predict significant quantities of oil—Ruby field is a good example—and then it just does not work out because of geological problems, such as sand coming into the well and so on. So that, in this Bill, we are seeking to continue the process that we started, with raising the rate of supplementary petroleum tax for onshore—small onshore producers. We started it. We sent it to \$75 for SPT and then we limited it to 2,000 barrels and we put a time limit. Time limit gone. Volume up to 4,000 barrels. We started the process.

We are now continuing it, looking at supplementary petroleum tax in the shallow water marine areas. Again, reducing it with a sliding scale. Again, all designed to motivate companies to take risk. And then we decided we would extend that from new fields to existing fields, again, encouraging companies to drill. Because if you do not drill, you cannot get oil, and that is a feature of Trinidad and Tobago for years, not now; 10/20 years, problems in terms of accelerating drilling. You have to drill. With our geology, you have to keep drilling to continue oil production to maintain your levels and increase them. So

that, that is why we now put in the concept of a new well in an existing field. That is phase two.

And phase three, which we are working on because it is complex, is dealing with incentivizing work overs and replacement of plant and equipment, pumps, compressors and so on, all designed to boost production. So the third phase of our development of our energy tax regime, the oil tax regime, in order to motivate oil producers to drill and produce oil and increase your production, we will be looking at not only new wells, but looking at increasing production in existing wells.

And the problem with SPT is that it is a tax on gross, even though you can deduct the petroleum profits tax from the SPT. What the oil companies tell us, and I think they are right, that when you hit that threshold your tax burden goes up and it makes your investment—could make your investment unattractive to bankers because all of this requires money. So that when an oil company is seeking to get capital to do an exploration programme or to increase its production, it has to get finance. And what I have been told is that bankers take a long view of oil prices. They do not look at the current price. They do not look at \$60 or \$70 or \$90. They will use a long-term average, maybe \$50/\$60, and they will look at the viability of a project in the long term at that price, that lower price. And the SPT has proven, with the maturity of our fields—when they were young it was not so bad. But with the maturity of our fields, the SPT has proven to be a bit of a disincentive. And this is why we are reducing it now for the shallow water and we have already reduced it for the onshore. So this is a work in progress. So this is phase two of our development of the petroleum tax regime.

And phase three, we will be looking at ways of motivating oil companies to produce more oil from existing wells and also motivating the big oil companies to get involved in exploration in the deep-water blocks, where there is a lot of

uncertainty, as I said, and there is no guarantee that the hundreds of millions of dollars that are invested will achieve a commercial return. With those few words, Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this Finance Bill (No. 2) of 2022, one that introduces fiscal measures on various aspects of public activity.

Madam Speaker, this is the second Bill, Finance Bill, brought before this House that seeks to legislate on recent budgetary measures as proposed by the hon. Minister of Finance. But we are here once again, just two months ago, to legitimize a series of what we see as failed economic policies and we are here to legislate them into action as of January 01, 2023.

Madam Speaker, I would like to critically examine all of the action items in the Bill, but I would first like to say that the Bill before us here today can best be summed up in one sentence: Too little, too late.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray: For the past seven years, this Minister of Finance has presented one empty budget devoid of substance after another. The measures being adopted today continues along this road of ideas which will not solve the problems facing our people today, Madam Speaker.

Now, as evidenced with this Bill, they are now panicking desperately, trying to keep the economy afloat after they have steered it straight into an iceberg. This Government has spent the past seven years attacking businesses, calling public sector workers lazy and demonizing our young people, Madam Speaker. And as a result today, Trinidad and Tobago is in the worst state of its economy in our lifetime, the worst job market in our lifetime, both coupled with the worst crime

rate in our lifetime. Madam Speaker, failed governments lead to failed societies, and this failed Government is failing everyone in our nation, from pensioners to students to public servants.

Madam Speaker, let me now dissect this attempt by the Minister of Finance to stem the bleeding after they have almost damaged or killed the patient before them. Let us treat with the measures that directly impact business and finance. So, Madam Speaker, if I were to turn your attention to clause 4, which seeks to amend the Corporation Tax Act to provide for an apprenticeship allowance for a company that hires a secondary school graduate in an approved programme. This proposal, Madam Speaker, stems from an announcement, as you would know, made by the Minister of Finance in his budget address on the 26th of September.

So, Madam Speaker, the Government has taken two and a half months to turn a budgetary promise into a legislative measure. Since this allowance is due to take effect from January 1st, there is limited time for the administrative workings of this programme, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is yet another example of government slothfulness in handling national affairs. I suspect, Madam Speaker, that this programme may bear the same fate as the university graduate programme, which was stillborn, never getting off the ground.

Madam Speaker, with such a pedestrian pace, it is no surprise that the Government did not respond in a timely manner when the nation was drowning in floods, Madam Speaker. The Government has adopted this initiative of a work apprenticeship allowance, without outlining a policy position, a context or a rationale for the programme, Madam Speaker. Such a working document should have been issued or developed by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour. Madam Speaker, the absence of policymaking is a failing of this Government with respect to many budgetary and other measures that it has

introduced throughout the last seven years. Proper governance, Madam Speaker, indicates that there must be a driving theory, an overarching strategy behind any programmes initiated by the Government.

In the Minister's budget presentation he said that he was seeking to provide people between the ages of:

“...16 and 25...with relevant experience and exposure to the...”—work environment—“world of work.”

But, Madam Speaker, the Minister has created an environment where he is going to saddle companies with a requirement for NTA accreditation and is going to drown businesses in unnecessary red tape, Madam Speaker. This will further disincentivize most companies from pursuing the incentive as offered by the hon. Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, apprenticeship training is a worthwhile undertaking and we do not oppose to it. But a defined policy would have left the conclusion that there must be a targeted approach for these programmes, Madam Speaker, aimed at achieving a more desirable result. This apprenticeship programme, Madam Speaker, is being introduced at a time when the national jobless figure is thinking around 150,000. It is the worst rate of unemployment since the early 1980s, again, under another underperforming PNM Government. So the introduction of this one-year programme is really a golden opportunity to utilize skills to meet the employment market needs. But the sensible approach, Madam Speaker, would have been to focus on economic sectors in which the Government is seeking to develop and grow into high-earning export earners.

The apprenticeship programme should be right-sized into the Government's economic plan, if indeed they have one. For example, Madam Speaker, with the decline in the energy sector, there is a current surplus of specific engineering skills.

In fact, many of our petroleum engineers have had to look elsewhere since the shutdown of Petrotrin, the curtailments at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and various other downstream sectors. So apprenticeship in these areas may not yield the benefit, as suggested by the Minister of Finance. But the apprenticeship programme should really focus on areas where we see an economic opportunity to drive us into the future, so it can be more focused and part of a policy that should have been stated here today, which is absent in the Minister's delivery today, in terms of how he plans to execute and how it is going to benefit us going forward, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, after seven years, there is still very little incentive or policy pathway towards the economic diversification, which we all cry out for in the country. So, again, with this programme, as instituted by the Minister of Finance, it appears that the Government is shooting in the dark once again, with a scattershot approach, hoping to hit something eventually. This is the typical *vaille que vaille* approach, Madam Speaker, that many programmes of this Government, this administration, seems hellbent on going down that road. It is really a slapdash approach to a measure that really could have had a valuable impact into a new economic direction for Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, as we go on, clause 4 also provides for the exemption of approved small companies:

“...as defined in the Corporation Tax Act from the payment of corporation tax for a period of six years commencing 1st January...”—2023.

“Sections 16A(5), 16B(1), 16C, 16D, 16E, 16H would also be amended to remove...”—any—“references to the Small Business Development Company Limited and the Industrial Development Corporation”—and as the Minister said—“in light...that these...”—companies—no longer exist.”

The Minister of Finance, he:

“...shall have the power to designate an entity to replace...”—these two companies as identified by the Minister of Finance—“respectively by Order of negative resolution of”—the—“Parliament.”

Madam Speaker, with regard to the waiver of corporation taxes for six years, starting in 2023, for companies designated under the SME arrangement, this may very well be a slap in the face of our small business sector, Madam Speaker. And this is why. The Government has basically run a slight of hand on these SMEs by offering them a waiver on corporation taxes, but they are taking it back in higher fuel costs, the proposed doubling of commercial rates of electricity and water that is coming down, and the increase in security—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(1), I did not talk about electricity or water. And that is not in this Bill in any clause, anywhere, anyhow. Relevance.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, you know, I have given you a little leeway but please remember what this Bill is about. I think I understand where you are going but, you know, continue.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we are being asked to approve, in terms of the requirement of the Minister to bring legislation via negative resolution. Madam Speaker, no law, no matter how simple it is, in our respectful view, should ever creep up on the citizens of this country in the dead of the night; not even simple ones. The Minister will bring a new entity to replace the Small Business Development Company and the IDC. What benefit would this new entity bring to Trinidad and Tobago that these two dissolved organizations did not? That was not expressed by the hon. Minister in his delivery today.

If the Government, Madam Speaker, works at their typical speed, this new company may take several months or even years before it comes into fruition. The

country, I believe, Madam Speaker, deserves to know the benefits of this new company in our industrial development and especially to our small businesses which are struggling at this time. What is the remit of this company and what are the benchmarks that we are going to test them?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance, I would just like you to display the same sensitivity that you wanted when you were making your presentation. I am being disturbed now. Please continue.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, another measure in clause 4 pertains to a one-time tax credit to manufacturing companies in the acquisition of new machines and the setting up of production lines in 2023. Madam Speaker, a one-time tax credit of \$50,000 to incentivize manufacturers to invest in new equipment has to be the joke of the year. Manufacturers that I have reached out to, Madam Speaker, have said the mere cost of upgrading in their production line can take them anywhere into millions of dollars. And \$50,000 is no incentive at all. So I query, what is the purpose, what is the rationale for using \$50,000 to really get our manufacturers going?

Now I would hope, Madam Speaker, that the incentive could be revised and, perhaps, increased and extended for way beyond one year. And why I am saying beyond one year, a lot of the manufacturers who are looking to upgrade their plant and machinery in the production line, those replacement equipment, they are on backlogs for almost up to two to three years because of a shortage of global components. So I'm hoping that the Minister will, perhaps, look at increasing the incentive to really get the manufacturers going because we are depending on the Minister himself who said how he has seen an incremental 15 per cent increase year on year, which is good news. Let us give them a further incentive and let us increase the timing. Because they have to wait for their plant and machinery to be

manufactured because of this global shortage of components, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this is an opportunity for the Government to respond to the appeals of the manufacturing sector, as it really works, and they really work hard, towards doubling exports in the short term which augers well for the country, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I noticed there are eight areas of activities that would entitle a manufacturer to access the stipulated tax credit. I believe further targeted incentives should be provided to better facilitate our manufacturers in achieving their desired goals. While product development is one of these categories, Madam Speaker, further emphasis should really be placed on research and in order to give manufacturers a boost in its international competitiveness, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Maybe this Chamber has a greater echo than the one we are accustomed to, but there is a lot of noise. I am having difficulty in hearing the Member for Mayaro. So that, if it is acoustics, then I ask Members to according their volumes accordingly.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, while this tax credit would have some impact—I do not doubt that it would have some impact—there is an overdue need to introduce measures to assist light manufacturers, agro-processors and other SME manufacturers. Good-producing SMEs are a tremendous economic asset to our country, Madam Speaker. So SMEs must be assisted in building capacity through modern processes and appropriate expertise. Now, nothing in the legislation as produced by the Minister today, Madam Speaker, speaks to those items. And that is where my concern is; that we are

touching some surface items but there is no meat at the bottom of it to really take the sector, take the industry forward. This is why I am appealing to the Minister of Finance, that he should relook at these things and let us give it some more body, some meat, to allow more manufacturers because that going to drive growth. It is going to drive jobs. So we want to see it, but we feel that it does have enough meat inside of it is, as exposed by the Minister of Finance today, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, manufacturers are hard workers and they do well against great odds that are presented by global conditions and, perhaps, some Government slowness in processes and so on, but they do well.

Madam Speaker, as I go on, I want to look at the tax credit for EMIs and PSPs. Madam Speaker, the Government proposes that electronic payment providers and/or what you call the e-money issuers will be entitled to the one-time tax credit up to a maximum of \$50,000 as well. But, Madam Speaker, in observing the economic climate and the business climate over the last two years, during the pandemic, many businesses have either gone entirely online. A lot of the small businesses went through Facebook. You would find that they started online trade on Facebook and so on, or at least they would have invested some money in their digitization process. But there are many examples, Madam Speaker, of persons who were forced to shut down because of a lot of the lockdown measures imposed by the State in their fight against COVID-19. But, Madam Speaker, one of the challenges for those businesses is that the online payment, the world over, has improved because of the pandemic as well. But the difficulty that, on the one hand, the Government has imposed this online sales tax, which is a disincentive for our digital market, our digital producers which, in some ways, can affect the volume of the business for these online small businesses. So I am seeing another area where one hand you give and one hand you take.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the bigger issue here in Trinidad and Tobago, again, it comes back to the framework that supports the facilitation of electronic money and the process for payments electronically. Just recently, Madam Speaker, you would have seen on the news where WiPay, they departed our shores with some not too favourable comments and they went and set up shop in Jamaica. So when you look at—you have these companies that want to move forward but yet, because of the systems in Trinidad and Tobago, they saw it fit to move to another jurisdiction. Nothing in the legislation that has been presented today, Madam Speaker, addresses the issues that were raised by WiPay as to why they left our shores, Madam Speaker. So we are not addressing these things. I do not think any of the legislation brought here today is addressing those matters as well.

Madam Speaker, the measure itself, as proposed by the Minister of Finance, falls short of the standard for effectiveness, in my respectful view. It is equally vague, in that, it fails to clearly identify essential parameters, such as who would be included as electronic payment providers and e-money issuers? Would there be a need to be registered? The need already exists for the e-money issuers, I believe. What would be the basis of the computation of the credit? And who ultimately benefits from this measure? So, Madam Speaker, those are my concerns with regard to the issue around the e-payments and the e-money.

Madam Speaker, I would like to turn quickly to clause 6. While we are on the matter of manufacturing, Madam Speaker, clause 6 provides for zero-rated VAT on new equipment for companies that utilize alternate energy, renewable options. Now, Madam Speaker, such companies are expected to engage in wind technology. There is a new process called forest thinning, agricultural waste, biogas, geothermal services, low impact hydropower and solar energy. Now,

based on these renewable energy options listed, I am sure that the Government is comprehensive with respect to the relevant components. But the Minister must ensure that this is an all-inclusive listing. Why?

This field of renewable energy, Madam Speaker, is a dynamic one for, you know—in the world and concepts for our manufacturers. They really deserve the country's appreciation and support and encouragement. The playing field for that, Madam Speaker, should also be made to be more attractive and more and more manufacturers would be enticed into entering this state-of-the-art type of arena. And since this is a modern industry, Madam Speaker, the Government must ascertain whether manufacturers require other forms of official assistance.

Now, I have not seen any documentation in the public space. I have not seen any newspaper articles where the Government has had meaningful and useful conversations with the manufacturers and their organizations with respect to how do we move them into this phase of renewable energy. Nothing in the Minister's delivery today spoke to that, and I refer to that, you know, there is no meat. Perhaps, other speakers on their side may get to that and we will await to see what they say on those matters. But, Madam Speaker, there is absolutely no denying that the value of investing in alternative sources of energy. But the Government must really have a holistic appreciation of the needs of these manufacturers to take it forward, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I feel that manufacturers would need a bit of handholding as we push them into this arena of renewable energies, Madam Speaker. So while the zero-rating of the VAT, you know, it is simple and an obvious response, there definitely may be need for other deep-rooted and other essential forms of aid as well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, if you allow me to just revert back to clauses 2 and 3,

which refers to the interim pension payments to officers of the defence force and the police service who retired compulsory, I wish to advise the nation or to remind the nation that this measure, in my recollection, has been on the table since around 2018.

The Government, Madam Speaker, has taken four long years to bring this measure before the House today. But during that period, Madam Speaker, from 2018 to today, 2022, our retired hardworking and committed soldiers and police officers may have been denied, many of them, because of the bureaucracy involved in getting pensions—you know, if they are denied their monthly pensions. I wonder if public servants reach retirement age overnight. I am sure every state enterprise has a listing of all the employees, one year before or even two years before, that these individuals are going to reach their retirement age at that time. And why is it that there is such a long delay at the time of your retirement, knowing fully well that we have the data when these people are going to retire?

3.20 p.m.

Madam Speaker, let us look at what the Government's plan is to deal with this particular issue. And as mentioned by the Minister of Finance today, officers of the TTPS and TTDF, we are going to give them \$3,500 payment in lieu of awaiting for your plans to be processed or our paperwork to be processed. But, Madam Speaker, one of the things that I noticed in the law, is that you are saying, when you start to pay these officers, there is the potential for somewhere down the road to realize that you are not entitled to payment. How could you get to a retirement age in an organization where you spend 33 years—what is possible, somewhere down the road, as your pension starts to come—that \$3,500—that will deny you now and now you have to pay back the State all this money? I find that a little bit worrying that you have this data, but you may end up in that particular

problem, and I would probably like the Minister to explain a little more about that in his winding up. Madam Speaker, that will be like a penalty to our public officers who would have spent 30-odd years, giving service to the country, and then for some unknown reason, we ask you back for all the money, two years after. That could put these pensioners and their families in severe financial difficulties as well, Madam Speaker. So, I look at that part of the clause with a bit of concern.

Madam Speaker, if you were to look at the cost of living, under this administration, over the last few years, it has gone up every year.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Mayaro, you have four minutes left of speaking time, ordinary speaking time. You are entitled to 15 more minutes extended time, if you so wish.

Mr. R. Paray: Yes. I will take it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please, proceed.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: And I want to remind the Front Bench about the acoustics—remind you all about the acoustics. Continue.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, Madam Speaker, so I was just on the position of the cost of living and this \$3,500. When you look at, you know, food has gone up almost 60 per cent over the last few years, how beneficial is this \$3,500 when you have public officers who may have retired, but they still have medical bills, pensions to pay too and children in university who needs payments to their education fees? So, it is really a difficult place, even with a \$3,500 that, you know, these retired officers who have spent 30 years, 33 years of dedicated service, and now many of them have to look to buy a taxi to augment whatever money because they have these bills to pay.

So, I thought the Minister would have come today to put legislation in place

to fix the issues that cause this slowness, this slothfulness in the processing of these pensions, Madam Speaker, rather than bringing a bandage or a plaster. Nothing in it is incentivizing the system to move faster and a little more efficient. I thought that would have been good legislation to bring today to make sure that within a year time we could solve that problem of the slowness and the movement of getting pensions done, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I also feel that a firm date of payments should have been announced in terms of when our retired public officers who are going to be benefiting from this, when are they are going to see this money. Is there going to be a retroactive payment for those since it was announced in 2018? Perhaps, is there going to be a retroactive back pay for those retired officers, as well, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, what about our retired officers who may have passed away and will not benefit from this? Is there something in place for their families, you know, while the paperwork is still being processed? And I know a few of them like that, personally, who have reached out to me, Madam Speaker, to get them some assistance from the Treasury Department who process these things. So, Madam Speaker, while it is an attempt to help, but I thought the time spent today could have been bringing legislation to let us fix the problem rather than put a plaster over it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, again, this just speaks to the alarming rate of red tape that we have to deal with in this country and that is something that, you know, any Government must address if we are going forward to bring efficiency. I know the hon. Attorney General, the Minister of Finance, we keep speaking about the digitization process and, you know, making things go faster. But every year it seems we talk and talk about it, but we see no real improvement in that area, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, our police officers and TTDF officers, they

are deemed essential workers under the law and we must treat them as such in their retirement days, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like to briefly speak a bit on clause 5. I know my colleagues who are going to come after me will interrogate more deeply the clause by clause, but I think it is important in responding to hon. Minister of Finance, I make some commentary on what he has presented today. Madam Speaker, the purpose of the measure under clause 5, according to the Minister, is to incentivize the crude oil production and sustain the current level of hydrocarbon reserves. So, in essence, it is of good intention what the State wants to do. It is something that we have been clamouring for many, many, years on our side of the Bench. It is a little bit too late but, nonetheless, it is here. But, it is really an understatement, Madam Speaker, that this is an attractive fiscal package, and that it will really excite prospective investors into this critical part of our economy. I do not feel, we do not feel that this 5 per cent increase, across the board, or decrease in some areas, is really enough to incentivize our energy sector at this time.

Madam Speaker, meaningful exploration and production incentives are crucial and, we agree with that, especially taking into consideration we have a large amount of ageing fields, where we have to coax the oil and gas to come out. But, definitely, we have to look at a bigger incentive package to get them to spend that money, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Minister would need to explain how this tax benefit would assist since there is little or no, as far as I am aware, any type of investment opportunity in the deep-water acreage, at this time, and that is the simple truth of the matter. So, we want them to go into deep-waters. We feel that, you know, there is some untapped energy reserves inside there, but I still feel that the investment is not enough to get them into the deep-waters, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this Government really, you know, they sat on their

hands really for the last seven years in dealing with this matter, and I am sure my colleague, in his contribution, the shadow for energy, will deal with this matter in a little more detail.

So, Madam Speaker, as I continue, in reflecting on the entire package as presented by the Minister today on this Finance (No. 2) Bill, really there is nothing that provides hope for economic improvements in the upcoming year. The matters in this legislation are, in my respectful view, Madam Speaker, a hodgepodge of bookkeeping issues, and a lot of the undertakings are not properly thought out. As explained in my contribution today, and many of them are overdue, things that should have been done many, many, years ago, the Minister is now bringing it here at the eleventh hour, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, what the country needs are essential measures designed to grow our GDP, reduced employment and deal with the matters of inflation. The Government must focus on boosting our output of goods and services, returning energy to its capacity production, reducing the food importation Bill and bolstering consumer confidence, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we hope the Government would constantly review all the taxation matters, in particular, and return to our Parliament to revamp them in order to achieve the benefits that the Minister is really hoping to accrue.

So, Madam Speaker, lastly, I want to say that after seven years, the only real measure that would help the people of Trinidad and Tobago is, if the Government takes stock and listen to the people of the country, please look at our sectors that are dire in need of help and let us put some more meat and strategy into some of these ideas that are being brought in these Bills, going forward. So, with those few words, Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Minister. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I hope the acoustics improve during the next 45 minutes. Madam Speaker, just to assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that despite what they may have just listened to from my colleague on the other side from Mayaro, very little of what was said there actually reflects the reality that could be found both legislatively, as well as via Government's policy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: I would like to start with the proposition that was just proffered by the Member for Mayaro that he was hoping today, the Minister of Finance, would have brought in this Finance Bill legislation that pensions—in this case, this Bill is dealing with pension payments to the defence force and the police service via amendments to the necessary regulations—that there would be legislation that dictated that pensions be paid on time. I would forgive the Member for Mayaro for not knowing, but the population should know that that is, in fact, the existing legislation. The existing legislation in Trinidad and Tobago dictates—there is an obligation that public servants, upon retirement, are paid their pensions within an immediate period of time and, in any event, within three months of their date of retirement. That is the law.

So what you have here is a continuation of a government policy that came in 2018, because this is a Government that is pragmatic. This is a Government that accepts the reality, and we know despite the legislation being very clear that public servants are to be paid their pensions within three months of their date of retirement, it is not happening. So rather than sit back, as others have been done, because those who were there from 2010 to 2015 had no interest whatsoever in

helping public servants in accessing any money towards their pension upon the date of their retirement.

In 2018, this Government took a decision let us, at least, ensure that public servants, and now today we are including the defence force and the police service, have access immediately to a payment of \$3,500 upon their retirement, and that is PNM policy in action, not old talk.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: So, Madam Speaker, what we recognized is that there are difficulties. There are difficulties on those who have served the State for a number of years through their public service careers, and at their date of retirement, they are not accessing. And the reason for that is, because there exists in the public service, a system that when people move from Ministry to Ministry, from post to position, their file—it all depends on a physical file. So, just for the population to know that sometimes that physical file does not get to the necessary pension office or when they are auditing it, there are documents missing and this leads to the delays. Because the law, as I have said, and just to close off on this point, the law that exists already is that you should be paid your pension within 90 days, three months, of your date of retirement.

There was also another point made by the Member for Mayaro on this particular point, where I assume is the acoustics in this Chamber, he did not hear what the Minister of Finance said too clearly, that he said that the Minister of Finance was talking about taking back the \$3,500 from persons. There was no such statement made by the Minister of Finance. If there is a miscalculation, as happens sometimes with public servants and the calculations of their salaries and what flows therefrom, there are options available to the State. And, very often, as a Cabinet, we have taken decisions that you make it personal to the persons as

opposed when a mistake is discovered many years later of pursuing the repayment of overpayments. So, I give those police officers and defence force officers an assurance that this Government is not looking to take back any money from them. It is quite the opposite, and this Bill here today and those specific provisions are, in fact, being passed in order to assist them, because we do recognize that after many years of service, that our police officers and our defence force officers should have access to some level of their pensions. And whilst via legislation you cannot do better than putting time frames, we have taken a pragmatic measure for them to be able to access this \$3,500 immediately.

Madam Speaker, I heard and, again, it could be the acoustics in the Chamber—I may have heard it wrong—but I heard a quote from the Member for Mayaro and I wrote it down.

“You have to coax the oil and gas to come up.”

I want to put on record that if this is, in fact, an accurate reflection of what the Member for Mayaro said, it surmises UNC’s energy policy at work. I would like to ask the UNC, how exactly is it that you coax oil and gas to come up out of the ground? And now to give the assurance to the population of Trinidad and Tobago, rather than stand at an oil well or a gas well and say: “Come oil, come gas” which is what I imagine the UNC tried, because they failed miserably in that period between 2010 to 2015, we have taken active measure to incentivize the gas and oil producers in Trinidad and Tobago. Because, you see, Madam Speaker, it brings me now to the meat of what my contribution will be here today, is to remind the population that we have been exploiting oil for over 100 years.

In fact, the Minister of Finance, was just showing me, it was in 1912, the first oil well began to produce oil in Trinidad and Tobago. We have been exploiting gas for decades. These are the declining resources. So, I heard in

passing that we should be doing more to increase production, and I give the population the assurance that the Government has been doing and has been actively working with all of the stakeholders to increase oil and gas production, but it must be understood in the context we, as a mature province, we have declining reserves, we have declining oil and gas in the ground. So, no amount of standing on the bank saying “come, come, come” is going to help. It is what you do actively?

And this week alone, because you see it is not about talk. It is not about a former Minister of Energy, who destroyed the energy sector between the period of 2010 to 2015 without a doubt. It is not about doing those types of incentives that bring no revenue to Trinidad and Tobago. That is a fact. What we have done, and I could just point to this week alone, at the start of this week, you had an announcement between the major shareholders of Atlantic LNG that we have agreed the commercial terms to the restructuring of Atlantic LNG, and that is a deliverable by a PNM Government. That is something that has not been done anywhere else in the world, and I say without fear of contradiction. But rather, during that period, you had the negotiation of one energy deal that completely decimated the energy sector and led to billions of dollars in claims, and also led to the first loss that NGC has ever had in its history, as a result of the only energy deal negotiated by those on the other side. So thanks, but no thanks, quite frankly, we will always listen. But, fortunately, we know what advise to take.

My friend from Mayaro also touched on deep-water. It is accepted that deep-water is the next province, and the hopeful province for Trinidad and Tobago. But, again, we have announced, and I would make the announcement here, again, so it can be on the *Hansard* that the Cabinet has decided with the recent deep-water bids that we are going to negotiation—the Government will negotiate with the

consortium that is BP and Shell, who are putting bids for the deep-water blocks that they have identified, and that is how the Government is going to get it done. We did it with Manatee when we de-linked the Manatee Field from Loran. That is going to be the single largest gas producing field in decades done by us.

When the Members look at the Bill in front of them today, and it talks about renewables, again, I am happy to come here today, Madam Speaker, and announce that Trinidad and Tobago has, this morning, via the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, working along with the Ministry of Public Utilities, I could now announce that we have signed today all of the necessary agreements for 112.2 megawatts to produce by solar power in Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young:—making it, quite rightly named “Project Lara”, making it the largest solar renewable project—electricity production via solar in the English-speaking Caribbean and throughout the whole region, second only to one project in the DR, and that is what a PNM Government has delivered.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: So, what we have done here today is we have brought some incentives to try and spur on and push forward smaller solar projects and more will be coming. Because, you see, Madam Speaker, what this Bill is here today to do is to incentivize in certain areas in the energy sector. But I am happy to say that we have delivered, and I look forward to the completion of the construction of this 112.2 megawatt project, which is a first for Trinidad and Tobago. Again, it puts us way ahead of everyone else. It benefits the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in that, we are doing our part towards the reduction of carbon and the reduction and an attempt to pin back on the global climate change that is taking place. It frees up natural gas where we have lower production that we can now sell that natural gas

and earn important foreign reserves. And then what it also does, it allows us in the energy sector to use this green renewable electricity to produce green hydrogen or other green products again, keep Trinidad and Tobago at the forefront of the global energy transition that is taking place.

Madam Speaker, I would like to tell the population and, in particular, those in the energy sector who are into oil and gas production and, in particular, oil production that what you are seeing here today is the first step by the Government as announced by the Minister of Finance, in the recent budget, towards working with the industry to increase oil production. So, what you are seeing here today, Madam Speaker, with respect to the SPT, is us trying to find the first step and the first way to increase oil production. But, again, the population must understand that, unfortunately, we are a mature basin. We have been exploiting the oil for a while, so we are not going to get back up to the levels, unless we have a massive find and massive fields of the 100,000, 180,000 barrels a day again. So what we need to do now is look at the existing oil reserves and how can we work with stakeholders to get that out of the ground. And, today, you are seeing the first step towards that as we amend the legislation with respect to SPT, and we expect that these amendments will assist those who are already invested in Trinidad and Tobago, taking their decisions to drill new wells in existing fields to get more oil production, and those wells in existing fields, would be exempt from certain levels of SPT.

Madam Speaker, I would like to also use this opportunity, as we are talking about production and we are talking about the incentives to be given, to remind the population that it was the policy that was past post-2012 to 2015 that led to our largest gas producer in Trinidad, being able to say, in 2015, that Trinidad and Tobago would earn absolutely no revenue from the exploitation of the gas, and that

is the UNC incentives, that is the energy policy the UNC way.

So whilst I have heard the former Minister of Energy talk about what he did and what it was that spurred production that is partially true. But then do they not tell the population, by those single acts that they took and the incentives that they passed, it meant that there would be no revenue to be gained by us, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, for the gas that is produced. And I am happy to report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that as a direct result of the intervention of this Government in 2018, and the renegotiation of energy prices, the renegotiation of energy contracts that, to date, I can report as at September 2022, the end of September 2022, as a direct result of what we renegotiated and the new prices we negotiated, the terms we negotiated in our gas industry, we have earned \$11.8 billion for the people of Trinidad and Tobago from 2019 to date.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, \$11.8 billion that would not have come to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, had we left what was in place by the previous administration between 2010 and 2015. So that is the Government working for you. So, you see, whilst others have to manufacture misinformation and spread disinformation, we are busy putting our heads down and working, and it is a perfect opportunity to thank all of the dedicated public servants at the various Ministries—the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and Development and other Ministries that have come together as we go out there and we bat for a better Trinidad and Tobago to be able to produce these types of results.

Madam Speaker, what you are seeing here today is the start of innovation in the energy sector to try and spur an increased oil production. Because, you see, we do not believe in just coaxing oil and gas out of the ground. And, I mean, I really

am interested in speaking to the Member for Mayaro to understand how well that coaxing works, and how it is they intend to coax, because we are always willing to listen and if it makes sense to work towards implementation. But what you have is a Government that from 2015 to date, has been working very, very, closely with the stakeholders. And, through you, Madam Speaker, I can report to the population today that there remains even more good news within recent times that we have, through the work that we did, with one of the independent oil producers, Perenco from France, that came into Trinidad in 2017, due to the work that they are doing with the Government and the incentives provided, et cetera, I am happy to say that they managed to actually double their oil production in the Teak, Samaan, Poui fields on a certain well, but what they were able to implement by the use of new technology. And these are some of the things that we are doing in the energy sector to encourage.

We have also had excellent results by Touchstone. These are some of the producers we expect to benefit from the passage of this Bill today, that they have also been able to keep their production at a steady rate. And then also, even more good news, to come, hopefully soon from Woodside. I recently was in Houston, and met with the CEO of Woodside which is a large Australian outfit that bought out BHP's assets in Trinidad and Tobago, bought out all of BHP's petroleum assets globally. And in that meeting with Ms. Meg O'Neil from Woodside, I am happy to report to the population that singular meeting and the discussions we had, tying it into what happened on this Tuesday in the restructuring of Atlantic LNG. And, for the first time, Trinidad and Tobago will allow, out of Atlantic LNG, in years to come, third-party access to the infrastructure at Atlantic LNG that has spurred Woodside to focus fully on investments here in Trinidad and Tobago. And, currently, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industry is working along with

Woodside and their technicians analyzing, appraising and looking to bring that gas to market from the deep-water. So, again, that is the PNM policy at work. That is the implementation of PNM understanding of the energy sector and the respect—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young:—the respect that is paid to PNM Ministers when they go and meet with these global CEOs and presidents and are able to sit at a table and have conversations with them, and then to spur the investment in Trinidad and Tobago. So much so that any goes to read Woodside's recent reports, they should read it with an amount of pride that Trinidad and Tobago is featuring in that report as Woodside are stating to the world that they intend to invest in the Calypso project to pursue the Calypso project. And in my discussion with Ms. Meg O'Neil, we are looking to bring that to market as soon as is possible.

Madam Speaker, this Bill, I would like to repeat, is really the first step towards incentivizing the oil and gas exploration and production in Trinidad and Tobago. And, through you, Madam Speaker, to just signal to the stakeholders out there, in my discussion with the Minister of Finance, we have agreed that we are going to look at alternative models, alternative formulas that we believe can help spur, in particular, the oil production.

I would like to say that what it is going to be based on, I believe, is that if a company can show that through the advancement of technology, the investment in new wells, the investment in new exploration, that their production has gone up over a certain percentage—because, of course, as you are producing wells, they are declining even when you bring on other wells, your overall production may just stay stable. But if we can get higher increases, we will provide further incentives. That is something that we are looking at and that we will continue to look at.

3.50 p.m.

Just to let the population of Trinidad and Tobago know, that with respect to the deep-water and with respect to other production sharing contracts, we do not intend to do it via legislation. What the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has been doing is meeting with all of the upstream producers, inviting them to find areas of stranded gas, inviting them to use technology, inviting them to use their innovative ways that if they find additional gas, additional pools of gas, come in and have discussions with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. We are prepared to renegotiate. We are prepared to look at the production sharing contracts, the commercial terms in those contracts to find ways and innovative ways, outside of the box ways, that we will be able to work along with them to increase production and for them to take whatever risks they may have to, to get to those stranded pools of gas or other fields of gas that before they may not have been able to pursue because of the existing terms. Those types of things are not done via legislation. The time for that has passed unfortunately, and what you are seeing is a Ministry of Energy and a government that is willing to work with the stakeholders in the industry to find the right, as I call it, “sweet spots”, and the right formulas to make it worth their while to expend the type of capital that they need, continue the investments in Trinidad and Tobago and to continue the production.

So, Madam Speaker, any objective individual who understands the industry, and even those who do not understand the intricacies of the industry would be able to give Trinidad and Tobago on the energy sector, despite what the naysayers say, a passing grade at least for what has been taking place in the energy industry. I would also like to put on record that for the last fiscal and the close-off of the last fiscal was a direct result of the revenue earned, not only from oil and gas but also from the pet-chem sector, not including the service industry in the oil and gas

sector. Out of the \$53-odd billion that were earned in revenue, \$29 billion of that came directly from the oil and gas companies and the pet-chem producers, and that shows the importance of the energy sector. And it is why the Minister of Finance and myself will work together with our respective Ministries to continue to find the formulas and the methodologies that would spur in production in these areas and derive the best type of revenue for Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, whilst, unfortunately, due to the maturity of our basin and the province, we are seeing production go down. I can assure the population of Trinidad and Tobago, we have managed through higher pricing, higher and better terms of pricing that we have negotiated, to ensure that the revenue has continued. We are also looking and working with all of the stakeholders to see how we can increase production, and also areas that are yet to be discovered, how we may incentivize those who are willing and who have the capital to get in there and do the necessary work. Madam Speaker, with respect to the other clauses of the Bill before us, I am sure that the other speakers would touch on it; I would just like to say that again, when I heard the previous speaker talk about the incentives that are being provided for small companies and the incentives for the apprenticeship allowance to companies, that that would somehow deter businesses and businessmen from investment. Again, that philosophy, that proposition, that submission is one that I cannot understand. And just to explain it to the population, the Government took a policy decision to do two things with respect to clause—that is now being implemented by clause 4 of this Bill. One, is to provide an apprenticeship programme for young people who are coming out of school. So I heard the attack on it by the former speaker, to be that you must now have a certain grade and a certain level.

It is an apprenticeship programme, so the first thing we are looking to do and

the Government policy behind it, is to give young people who have certain qualifications the opportunity to work. How do we do that outside of a government system, you incentivize private sectors. That is, if you employ apprentices in these areas, from the ages—I think it is between the ages of 16 to 25, they would get an allowance that is equal to 150 per cent of the actual expenditure incurred by a company. So in other words, you hire, as an apprentice, someone, and you are paying them \$1,000, you are going to get the recovery of 150 per cent of that \$1,000. So for every \$100 spent, you can write-off \$150 as the expense. That must provide an incentive. And what we have had is a lot of success with some of these apprenticeship programmes where you have young people who are willing to apply themselves who get that opportunity, they are then taken up in full-time employment by the people with whom they do an apprenticeship; both of them stand to benefit from this programme.

So rather than have the naysayers, and, unfortunately, as the Member for Parliament was trying to throw a wet blanket on it, it is an excellent programme and that is the Government policy behind it. Madam Speaker, what you are seeing here as well, back to the incentives for the energy sector, is we have identified that in the shallow marine areas, this is where what we are going to do is decrease the base SPT rate from 25 per cent to 20 per cent in respect of petroleum operations in a new field. But as I have discussed with the Minister of Finance very often, often in the offshore—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, you have four more minutes remaining of original speaking time. You are entitled to 15 more minutes extended time, if you so wish, to complete your contribution.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am not going to utilize my additional time. I know it is the time of World Cup and everybody wants their

additional time and extra time.

Madam Speaker, so what you are seeing here is we recognize in marine areas, you very well may be drilling new wells in existing fields, so we have captured that. So, Madam Speaker, we also have here certain incentives for companies that are bringing in new equipment from manufacturing companies which utilize the alternate energy technologies and renewable energy options. We are encouraging people to do that from a number of perspectives, and I think it is a good incentive respectfully, Madam Speaker; one, let us utilize the existing technology; two, what it does is it decarbonizes and cleans up the whole production of electricity, and therefore that is going to be your contribution towards the reduction in global warming.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to say, I fully commend this Bill to the Members of the House today. I look forward to the support for it. And I would like to just ask the Members of this House, it is not necessary that when a Bill is a good one or incentives are a good one, for you to try and invent ways, make up ways, spread disinformation and misinformation to try and water it down, because as far as I am aware, and certainly us on this side, on the Government side are aware, and the way we practice our principles, it is one Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: And what we must do here is for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago, and it really bothers me as a citizen to see the behaviour sometimes of some of the persons who hold themselves forward as leaders and those who want to lead this country, and, in particular, I would use this opportunity in my closing to just completely distance ourselves on this side from some of the type of behaviour I have seen taking place outside of this House and the type of language used to describe the Member for Diego Martin West by the Member for Princes

Town. It was despicable behaviour and a behaviour that is unbecoming of any parliamentarian to stand up and to talk about somebody's parentage.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, 48(1), please.

Hon. S. Young: So thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I go, I end by criticizing the behaviour of the Member for Princes Town. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I join this afternoon's debate on the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2022, moved by the Minister of Finance this afternoon. Madam Speaker, before I get into my contribution and rebuttals, you know, I would just like to bring the attention basically that this Bill, Finance (No. 2) Bill, as the Minister of Finance had said in his opening, it is seven clauses, my colleague for Mayaro would have gone through in some detail in some of the other clauses and I want to compliment him for a fine job that he did here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: Madam Speaker, I would confine and I will explain what the Member for Mayaro meant by saying, "coaxing", so I will explain that later on in my contribution. I saw the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries perked up. So, Madam Speaker, as I said, this Bill has seven clauses and I will confine my debate specifically to clause 5, Madam Speaker, on this Bill. Clause 5 talks about, in a nutshell, in a summary, revisions to the Petroleum Taxes Act in clause 5, Madam Speaker, and I would go into more details. Clause 5 has basically four parts, (a), (b), (c), (d). It talks about investment tax, incentive. It talks about a profit, petroleum profit tax reduction and changes to the supplemental petroleum

tax, SPT, as it is known, on a new Schedule. Madam Speaker, I want to get into a couple of the rebuttals by the Minister of Finance firstly, and then I will get into the rebuttals of rebutting some of the comments made by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Madam Speaker, in respect of the Minister of Finance in his remarks, I would just want to use some of his catchwords that the Minister of Finance used, and I agree with it. I agree with it. The Minister of Finance used in piloting this Bill, especially clause 5 which relates to the energy sector, the Minister of Finance used like words to the effect of "motivate, "encourage", "incentivize", and also the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries also used those words, and we agree—I agree with those words, Madam Speaker. But I want to ask the Minister of Finance, you see, the Minister of Finance for the past seven years, even back in his first budget speech in October 2015, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance at that point in time, and consecutively after has brought in his budget speech that the Minister of Finance and his government would reform and incentivize the energy sector, and it literally took seven years to the date—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—that we are now seeing some sort of incentivization and incentives to the oil companies and the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker; seven years, seven years. And if you go back to nearly every one of the Minister of Finance's budget statements for the past seven years, the Minister had promised and gave the undertaking that the fiscal—the petroleum fiscal regime would have been reformed, Madam Speaker. So we are happy; I am happy that finally these incentivizations or the changes in the petroleum tax regime is coming to place today, and I will get into—and maybe in my contribution I will get into it later, Madam Speaker. Maybe it is a little bit too late, but the proof is in the

pudding.

I want to go to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries always seems—and I mean this with no disrespect to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, always seems to blame the PP government between 2010 and 2015 in the energy sector—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—as if we did nothing—as the PP Government did nothing in the energy sector. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries went so far this afternoon and he used a very strong word on our colleague, the past Minister of Energy, Kevin Ramnarine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: And the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said, “He destroyed the energy sector”. That is a very strong word, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I just want to say before I get into that word and give some facts because it needs rebutting, Madam Speaker. I just want to put some facts on the table in the Parliament here this afternoon. For seven consecutive years under this Government, this country has seen zero growth in the energy sector—zero growth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: That is a fact, zero growth, Madam Speaker. We have seen under this Government, GDP in the energy sector has fallen by some—a number about 28 per cent between 2015 to 2021—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—and this is the CSO numbers, Madam Speaker. Under this Government for the past seven years, unemployment in the energy sector has fallen by something of the number of 53 per cent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: Twenty-two thousand, five hundred individuals were working in the energy sector in 2015 when we demitted office and to date, in 2022, based on CSO numbers, the number of employees in the energy sector is 10,600, Madam Speaker. Even rig days have collapsed under this Government in the past seven years.

Madam Speaker, if it was not for the PP Government, led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and the past Minister of Energy, Kevin Ramnarine—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—and the incentivizations that we gave this country, Angelin and Juniper would never have been born, Madam Speaker. And those two projects, the Angelin and Juniper projects, which gave a big lifeline to this Government and our country, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—based on the good work that the PP Government did between 2010 and 2015. So I listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries mentioned something here, Madam Speaker. He mentioned about NGC experiencing their first loss since as a state company, Madam Speaker—underneath them, eh, underneath this Government. And I want to remind the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the Government—the Minister is now saying that NGC was faced with \$1 billion in claims for gas supply. That is not the area, Madam Speaker, I want to talk about an area that Minister Young, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries mentioned, it is about the Mitsubishi plant, CGCL, and blames the PP Government for the billion-dollar loss by NGC under their period, under this period under their stewardship. Madam Speaker, Minister Young, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries at the time boasted in the 2018 budget debate that this Government had

saved taxpayers when they renegotiated the CGCL deal, Madam Speaker. So how are they now blaming us for a billion-dollar loss on the NGC if the renegotiations that they did—maybe they did some bad renegotiations to that contract—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—that caused the losses at NGC, Madam Speaker. There is much more I could say rebutting the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Madam Speaker, and I want to also, before I move on, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, based on this Bill, talked about solar plants, Madam Speaker, and the Minister mentioned that, I think this week, that there were no terms and conditions between Public Utilities, the 112 megawatts solar plant project will be coming on stream.

I want to ask the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, what location that solar energy plant will be located, because from what we understand, they have issues with the location of that plant, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker 48(1), I did not see any clause relating to what the Member is talking about.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Okay. So just one minute. So, I am giving you some leeway because you say you are doing a rebuttal but, you know, just do not go too deeply into the matters to widen this debate. Okay?

Mr. D. Lee: I am guided, Madam Speaker. So we would also like to hear more about that solar plant and that 112 megawatts, because I have a question in Parliament that has to be answered. Madam Speaker, as I get into my substance of my debate, as I said, this Bill in clause 5 has four parts, (a), (b), (c) and (d), Madam Speaker, and again I want to mention that the Minister of Finance for the past

seven years has been talking about restructuring the taxation in the petroleum sector and today we are seeing some of that.

I want to turn to clause 5(a), Madam Speaker, it is the investment tax credit, and clause 5(a) proposes an increase in the tax credit from 25 per cent to 30 per cent. When one reviews the Petroleum Taxes Act, section 26(3), it states that all development being undertaken to obtain this tax credit must be approved and certified by the Minister of Energy. In coming out of a document when this was announced in the budget, Madam Speaker, Ernst & Young, a company well renowned, had a comment in their budget review in 2023 about these approvals, and they are asking, and we are asking also because it is a concern, because it has been there before, and their concern basically, while the proposal is welcome, historically obtaining such approvals from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has proven challenging. So, Madam Speaker, while we are happy for the tax increase from 25 to 30 per cent, we are also asking, through you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, that given that, you know, we are trying to incentivize and have increased oil production and gas, oil and gas in our country, Madam Speaker, I am also hoping that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, through his Ministry would put things in place to ensure that approvals are given on a timely and fast manner.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn to clause 5(b). Clause 5(b) proposes to reduce the petroleum profit tax from 35 per cent to 30 per cent in operations in deep water; a reduction of 5 per cent. The first issue that we have with this is its provision. It will only apply to companies holding exploration and production licences and will have no impact in our view on those holding production sharing contracts, Madam Speaker. Again, Ernst & Young in their review of the budget in 2023 when it was announced, their statement is, and I quote:

“...whilst the reduction of the taxation rate is...welcomed...only companies engaged in petroleum operations under...Exploration and Production Licence will benefit...”

Madam Speaker, I want to—and I ask the Minister of Finance in his winding up, the majority of deep-water acreage is under a production sharing contract regime. Therefore, the majority of these companies in deep water, in our view, will not benefit. So I am asking the Minister to give some consideration and maybe look at the whole production sharing contracts and see how it could benefit companies who are in that area.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn to clause 5(c), which talks about the changes; 5(c) and (d) talks about the changes of the supplemental tax, SPT, Madam Speaker, and under the new area or the new incentives brought here this afternoon, there is a whole new Schedule, Madam Speaker. In the old Schedule we had columns A, B, C, and today we are now instituting a new column, D, in the SPT, new wells, and column D is “New well in Existing Field”, Madam Speaker, and there are different rates. Now, SPT has been a tax that for the past seven years that I had mentioned, the energy company has been crying out for changes in that SPT model, Madam Speaker. And I just want to state the history—a little bit of the history of SPT, and it is on the website in the Ministry of Finance. And just for the record, the Supplemental Petroleum Tax was introduced by Act 5 of 1981:

“...the...(SPT) has been amended on several occasions. SPT is imposed on income generated from production of crude oil net of royalty and over-riding royalty.”

And I just want to quote:

“Although the tax was imposed on crude oil sales, companies involved in both oil and gas activities benefitted from the allowances since they were

broadly applied to exploration and development field activities. This significantly contributed to the development of the natural gas industry in Trinidad and Tobago.”

So, Madam Speaker, the SPT is an important tax. It raises revenue for the country but it can be also a deterrent for oil companies investing further. And, Madam Speaker, so we are happy today, but I want to turn to something that has caused me some concern about the SPT, Madam Speaker. We are here today, Madam Speaker, in Parliament; it is a simple majority Bill, it will be passed, and today we are talking about the changes in the SPT regime. Now, Madam Speaker, there is something that is disturbing to me. My colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, at a point in time when she was in the Senate, back in 2020, as a Senator, my colleague raised an issue in the Senate about SPTs, Madam Speaker, and it is interesting here today and it has a lot of meaning or clarity that I need to get, Madam Speaker. So at the time it was Sen. Haynes, on the 1st of May, 2020, the Member raised an issue of Heritage being given a waiver; as the Member called it, a “bligh” in SPT for two years. The Member raised—there is a letter dated the 17th of the third, 2020, by the Minister of Finance, and basically the history of this SPT, Madam Speaker, was the Minister of Finance through Cabinet gave a waiver to the Heritage company for two years not to pay the Supplemental Petroleum Tax.

Now, as the Member for Tabaquite would have said back then, “The devil is in the details”. Now, based on the financial report back then, there was a notation in the financial report by the then auditors. I think it was PKMG, where they mentioned that Heritage had gotten this letter from the Minister of Finance “waivering” them, the Heritage company from paying SPT.

Madam Speaker: I want you to quickly tie that to what is here because all this is

about the calculation of the SPT and so; tie it very quickly.

Mr. D. Lee: All right.

Madam Speaker: Okay? Please.

Mr. D. Lee: What I am trying to tie in, Madam Speaker, is that we were under the impression that SPT—we had to come to Parliament to amend the supplemental petroleum tax rates, and we were surprised that the Cabinet could have done that on their own in waiving SPTs from companies.

Madam Speaker: Member, I now stand on Standing Order 48(1), let us deal with what is before us here, please.

Mr. D. Lee: Okay, Madam. Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, let me ask the question another way to the Minister of Finance, do we need to come to Parliament to amend the petroleum SPT tax regime or can Cabinet on their own, without coming to Parliament, amend the SPT regime. Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: So, Member, again, that does not arise out of what is before us. You may want to ask your question at some other time but, please, please move on.

4.20 p.m.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to come back to the incentives and expand a bit on these incentives in clause 5, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in the incentive for deepwater profits and the incentive package in subclause (a) and (b)—clause 5(a) and (b), Madam Speaker, I want to—there is an article, Madam Speaker—and I really ask if these incentives are a little bit too late and the timing is wrong, Madam Speaker. There is an article on 16th of October, 2022, by an international oil magazine called *OilNOW*. And the article says—and the heading of that article, 16th of October, 2022, and the article says—written by Arthur Deakin, Analyst at Americas Market Intelligence, AMI. And the header of that article is:

“Unappealing fiscal terms, mature gas fields placing Trinidad at risk”.

And that has a direct link to these fiscal measures on the incentives that we are being asked to approve here today, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, that article basically, by Arthur Deakin of the *OilNOW* publication, talks about that:

“T&T has been struggling with the declining gas reserves, a result of having mature gas fields...”

—which the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries mentioned and also the Minister of Finance.

“...unappealing of fiscal terms, and overshadowing discoveries in neighbouring countries like Guyana and Suriname.

The country...”

And I quote:

“...was one of”—meaning Trinidad and Tobago—“the top exporters of oil and liquefied natural gas...in the Caribbean and Latin America region.”

We were at one point in time, in 2021, Madam Speaker, ranked sixth in—

“...sixth biggest LNG exporter to Europe...”

But since then, according to this article, and we agree with it, the numbers have been declining, Madam Speaker. And that is why I think the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries brought these incentives to incentivize the oil companies to increase their production based on the rates that are being passed here today, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, even back in October of this year, the *OilNOW* publication had a concern with our gas and oil industry, Madam Speaker. And I just want to add—I will end the article with just one quote:

“With the global energy crisis in full swing, T&T has been looking to team up with its neighbour Venezuela to revive its LNG export sector. The idea

brewing is to export gas from Venezuela to Trinidad by pipeline to put it through its Atlantic LNG facility”—that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries just mentioned a while ago about the restructuring of that entire Atlantic LNG plant facility—“for onward delivery to international markets.”

Madam Speaker, as I end he says—the writer says:

“...unless sanctions on Venezuela are lifted, or a major gas...”—find is found in Trinidad and Tobago which—“both are rather unlikely – Trinidad will continue to see a decline in its oil and gas industry.”

These are not my words. This is not the Opposition’s words, Madam Speaker. And we are hoping that this is not so, Madam Speaker, because we are patriots of this country.

Madam Speaker, so with the deep-water profit and the incentive package that is being offered here today, we are hoping that the oil companies actually buy into it, and really hope that they can use it, that incentivization, to assist them, Madam Speaker.

I would also like to ask, Madam Speaker, when I said the incentives are a little bit too late, if these incentives were brought earlier in the past three years, Madam Speaker, at least three or four years ago, I am asking, we had two—and with this Government, we had two failed bid rounds, Madam Speaker, one in shallow waters and one in deep waters, Madam Speaker. And it is a direct link that because these incentives were not in place that the oil companies did not see the importance or did not want to take the risk of investing in Trinidad and Tobago based on the lack of incentives that were in place. The best incentives that they had were under the PP Government when we were in power, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to ask a couple of questions as I will not be long any— I think I have said a lot, Madam Speaker. I will not be long. And I

want to ask, and it is pertinent on the whole oil and gas industry in our country based on the incentives, is the window closing for this country, Madam Speaker, in respect to oil and gas? And the question we must asked, are these incentives too late? Are these incentives potent enough to attract investors? Therefore, the question that we have to ask the Minister of Finance, are these incentives potent enough to ensure our standard gas is monetized? Are these incentives potent enough to attract investors from going to more favourable provinces than investing in Trinidad and Tobago's oil and gas sector so that we can monetize our oil and gas before the window of demand is closed? But are these measures implemented here today by the Minister of Finance strong enough to encourage investors to increase production of our oil and gas?

And refer—I relate that to or put that in context by Mr. Driver, who is the CEO of the Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago. On September 01, 2022 on a TV programme—TV6 programme, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member, you have three more minutes of original speaking time left. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to wind up your contribution if you wish.

Mr. D. Lee: Yeah. I will take the extra time.

Madam Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. D. Lee: And I just want to put it in context with what Mr. Driver said, as the CEO of the Energy Chamber. Mr. Driver reminded us on that programme, the electric cars are renewable energy, the demand for oil and the window for producing oil is narrowing. Mr. Driver insisted that there was need for this oil to produce as quickly as we can, Madam Speaker. And that refers to a quote that the Minister of Finance said about the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. That if you do not bring the oil out of the ground, you cannot monetize it. It has zero

dollars to it, Madam Speaker. And we agree to that. We agree with that.

And we are saying, based on the entire thrust in renewable energy and that window is closing, Madam Speaker, and literally Guyana next door, Madam Speaker—I read an article, at the end of this year, they will be producing over 100,000 million barrels of oil, Madam Speaker. So, we are in a very competitive international market, Madam Speaker, and if we do not incentivize the oil companies properly and quickly, Madam Speaker, we will not be able to monetize, we can say we have oil and gas under the ground—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. D. Lee:—Madam Speaker, but it will have no value to the people of Trinidad and Tobago if we do not bring that to market, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, as I said—

Madam Speaker: Just one minute, Member. I really enjoy when there is banter and, you know, Members are relating well. But if it is disturbing the proceedings, I will ask them to kindly go outside, continue, enjoy, it is nice for them to be collegial and then they can come back in. Okay? Please continue, Member.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, as I come to an end, I just want to remind the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and this Government that one of the best performing governments in energy—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—has been under the PP government, led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the Ministry of Energy, led by Kevin Ramnarine, Madam Speaker. So, while I encourage, I agree with the words that the Minister of Finance used in his opening remarks, motivate, incentivize, Madam Speaker, we feel that this should have been done at least six years ago to—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—have the kind of production, because our production has been the lowest under this Government in the past 18 years, Madam Speaker. And with those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for my opportunity as a Member of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, a part of the Cabinet of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and as Member of Parliament for Laventille West coming here to lend full support to the measures as proposed by the Minister of Finance in the Finance (No. 2) Bill of 2022. And as he indicated, Madam Speaker, today we come here to continue the legislative element, the implementation of the measures that he announced so proudly, confidently and to the benefit of all Trinidad and Tobago when he issued his budget statement a few weeks ago.

Madam Speaker, the very Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in both their presentations dealt comprehensively with the adjustments to the tax regime as it relates to the energy sector. I heard some commentary, feeble commentary, from the Member for Mayaro and, of course, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre just a moment ago; boorish and feeble commentary dealing with issues around the tax regime in the energy sector, a very important sector, obviously so. In fact, I venture to say, Madam Speaker, increasingly important to Trinidad and Tobago.

The management of the energy sector, as the measure in front of us today supports, is to reflect the creativity of the Government in dealing with this increasingly important sector to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to remind my friends on the other side, regardless of what they would say, that the last budget statement and budget document would have shown that we reduced substantially—we, Trinidad and Tobago—the deficit that we were faced with for many years.

Inside of those figures, Madam Speaker, there was an \$11 billion consideration, new money that came to this country to our coffers as a consequence of that creativity and vision and the ability of the Government, led by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and before them, Minister Franklin Khan, over a period of time since 2015—

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Hon. F. Hinds:—to regain the respect and the trust of the international community, particularly the players of streamers in the energy sector. So it was a combination of creativity and the earning of respect for the people of Trinidad and Tobago under those visionary, creative energies, so to speak.

Madam Speaker, you would have heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much. You would heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in particular, make reference to the restructuring of the Government's portfolio in the energy sector. We began many years ago, 1995 I think it was, with an investment in Atlantic LNG and that vision continued, our engagement continued. It generated the bulk of money that we earned over those years to give the standard of living, the quality of life that Trinidadians and Tobagonians have grown accustomed to as a result of it. And recently, this Government, notwithstanding what they would say, in its creative manifestation, and some of the opinion shapers in the newspapers, the bottom line

is we have now restructured the portfolio, bringing across the board benefit and advantage to Trinidad and Tobago, the potential to earn more money in the gas business, gas found in Trinidad and Tobago, in our territory, and we now have an eye in the context of that creativity on gas outside of our borders to manage our plans, our great visionary plans for the future. Creativity, good sensible management.

So much so, I sat for a few moments yesterday in front of my television and saw the representative of the Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago—not the UNC, I “doh” expect anything good from them—but the Energy Chamber with their expertise, their experience and, of course their concerns because they are stakeholders in all of this. I saw “Dax” Driver, their leader and spokesman complimenting the Government, supporting what the Government has done in these regards and it is the likes of them that I am prepared to listen to, not the Member for Naparima. If we are talking about dead and cemetery, I might hear him. Not the Member for Mayaro. I would listen to the experts, those who have an interest, financial, beneficial interest. The Energy Chamber is the best spokesperson on this matter in that regard and they were quite proud, quite happy, quite pleased, praisingly so on the Government in the context of what the Government has recently done.

And the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I know, you know, they have not, at the general level, absorbed how great this thing is and how we will earn more money now. We did not give away our shirt like the UNC caused us too, where we were not expecting any revenue from oil—from gas drawn from our—the nation’s gas veins, and we would get no revenue until 20—I think 2026, and we were faced with that in 2015. So we have done particularly well. But I am not surprised about the UNC’s contribution to all of this because they are just generally negative.

They are just generally obstructionists and I know they do not want anything good for Trinidad and Tobago once this Government is in power, in office.

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very warmly. That is the point I was making, obstructionists, obscurantists—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Go ahead. Go ahead. No problem.

Hon. F. Hinds:—and modern day, if I may use a biblical term and no one could take that away from me, modern day pestilences.

Mr. Charles: I stand on 48(1)—

Hon. F. Hinds: What?

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just now. Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. Members, we do it in a certain fashion. All right? You stand on a point of order. Let us keep it to the point of order. Right? Keep it to the point of order—

Mr. Charles: 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—and I will assist you.

Mr. Charles: 48(1), relevance to any clause—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Mayaro in his turn commenting on the tax relief that the Minister of Finance offered this Parliament today, tax relief for companies, you know, the

Member for Mayaro, representing the UNC as fulsomely, as wholesomely as he does, got here today to tell us that this tax relief offered to businesses by the Minister of Finance in these measures would destroy, would wreck businesses. I tried all how to understand how he arrived at that. And I simply came to resolve it by saying he is a UNC. That is it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not surprised at him either, because I would have told this Parliament before and I must remind you today, on the Sunday before a budget statement a few weeks ago, the Member for Mayaro and others of the UNC loudly and glibly and scandalously predicted, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(8). This is not about—this Motion—the debate here is not about the Member for Mayaro and—
[Inaudible]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Thank you, Member. Again, Member, you are responding. Proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much—and told this country deceptively, in anticipation of the budget statement, that what the public of Trinidad and Tobago could expect tomorrow, Monday, from the Minister of Finance was a thousand new taxes to pain you, to take away your money. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Minister of Finance was finished and he came to his last full stop, I took note, not a single new tax. As a matter of fact, it is tax relief and it is a tax relief that is this bringing us here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: So, I am not surprised at the UNC, you know. I am not surprised at all. As I say, obscurantists, obstructionists, modern day pestilences.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the measures in front of us today has to do with two things or two issues in my view. One, very importantly, is the Government

recognizing the work and importance of some of its employees, public officers in the main. And for me, as Minister of National Security, this is about the Government doing something to alleviate the stress and the burden of some 90,000 public officers and some 50,000 workers or public officers in the public sector more widely and more generally. This is about the Government showing love and concern for a large cross-section of a very important stakeholder in the economy, public officers. This is as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about remuneration and/or reward for work done. It is about welfare; the welfare of these workers.

The Minister of Finance explained that when a public officer retired from the office and would have received his or her last salary, they are entitled, in the arrangements under law, to receive pensions and/or gratuity depending on the nature of their engagement, because you have some contract workers. And the circumstances, unfortunately, are that it could take a long time—the records have shown a long time, sometimes years, unfortunately, before the public officer is entitled to receive—or not entitled to receive, begins to receives his entitlement. And the Government, expressing concerns for the welfare of the people—and they are those on the other side and in this country who will try to give the wrong impression that this Government “doh care about nobody, and doh help nobody and doh do nothing for nobody,” that folly. But the Government said, look here, we understand this and we decree in the first place and came here to the Parliament for its support—and they voted against it, by the way—that when you retire from work you begin immediately to receive \$3,500 as an interim payment to keep you going. So you could buy your newspaper, you could buy your gas, you could go to the grocery, keep the thing ticking over until the gratuity is settled or the pension begins to be paid. You “cyah” get it more loving and more caring than that. And that is what the Government said. The Minister of Finance made the

announcement and, of course, it had to be actually implemented.

For the prison service and the fire service and immigration and the general administration in national security, there was no issue because they came under the public service regulations and they could implement that measure without more. In the case, however, of the police and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, based on their structures and their regulations that govern them, both would have required this parliamentary intervention, amendments to the respective regulations. The defence force regulations, on the one hand, and regulations—the police regulations on the other. And the amendments had to come. And therefore, clause 2, the measure in front of us today as clause 2:

“...would amend the Defence (Pensions, Terminal and Other Grants) Regulations, Government Notice No. 38 of 1968 made under the Defence Act...to allow for the payment of...”—this—“interim pension of three thousand, five hundred dollars per month to officers who retire compulsorily from the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force.”

And, of course, in clause 3:

“...the Bill will amend the Police Service Regulations, Legal Notice No. 145 of 2007 made under the Police Service Act...to allow for the payment of...”—the said—“three thousand, five hundred...”—to those—“who retire compulsorily...”

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of more general applicability, this means a recognition for all of the arms of national security, their hard work. In the case of the police and the defence force, very dangerous work sometimes. Those of us who know, know. For an example, this nation would have read that only yesterday in the north eastern division, a senior superintendent leading that division called Maharaj, led a large party of police officers and carried out the very dangerous

work in a major anti-crime exercise in the Movant area which I represent—myself and Member of Parliament Leonce—as a result of the upsurge in certain things there, gang activity and so on and murders, and it yielded a large cash of camouflage uniforms, bulletproof vests, 5.62 ammunition—7.62 ammunition, sorry, weapons of all. I mean, it was a major operation resulting in a major find.

And the point I am making, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that these officers need, like any other worker or human person, to be motivated, to be encouraged, to be willing to go the extra dangerous mile and to know that their welfare is being considered by the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is that I contend that is so important about the measures in front of us today. Because we cannot pay the police, we cannot pay the soldiers for danger that they face and the work that we call upon to do. We cannot really, really pay them. A lot of it has to do with morale. A lot of it has to do with patriotism. A lot has to do with the rectitude of the moral position of right against wrong. And therefore, these intangible, psychological influences are bolstered by the knowledge that the society cares and appreciates the work that they do. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see these measures in that context. I see that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, sadly, we do not get the pension going as promptly as we should. Sometimes records cannot be found. Sometimes the officers would have moved from one area of work, another Ministry, another place and the records got—and this is the reason why the Government's digitization effort, and demonstrated in the establishment of the Ministry of Digitization, is so important. We are doing something about it with this measure—these measures in the very short term. And in the longer term we expect the digitization of the records to resolve the problem that led to us attacking this mischief as we have described it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was only yesterday that I sat with the members of the

protective services committee under the auspices of the Ministry of National Security where we gave instruments to two members continuing their service, dealing with compensation and the welfare of the officers. A decision was taken in this country to make \$1 million available to any officer who losses his life in the execution of his duty. But that committee does not only deal with that simple element. It deals with compensating members of the protective services if they are injured in the execution of their duty in any form or fashion. And I welcome those two new members to continue service. I thank them all for it. And I took note of the fact that \$10.2 million was paid in settled claims by that committee between the years 2015 and 2019, the period under review that we dealt with yesterday.

4.50 p.m.

So as I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a psychological effect, a benefit for the soldiers and the police and all other elements of national security. We have an important policy and an important implementation of a Firearm Retrieval Programme in Trinidad and Tobago where we call on the police service, supported by the defence force, the Immigration Division, the Customs Division, because they play a very important part in our border security elements, which is the highest priority of the Ministry of National Security, border security. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Firearm Retrieval Programme is intent to present sustained attack on the criminal community and to take away the guns from them.

I read in today's paper, right in Couva, only yesterday, some councillor, poor man, going about his business—well I gather that he operates as a Justice of the Peace, from the report that I read in the newspaper. I have not gotten any formal report on this matter. But I saw in the newspaper he was conducting his business and in came a criminal who pretended to be a client, whipped out a gun and it evolved into a home invasion of the most sordid type. Took his man's

personal effects, money, jewellery, whatever they could find, and took the man's vehicle and left the scene with it. Very, very sad. Very unfortunate. And it is to the police and the defence force that we turn to protect us from the likes of those kinds of interveners, criminals. It is these officers, so their welfare is very important.

Yesterday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an assistant Commissioner of Police reported to me, and they are overseeing the searching of some containers on the port, and we discussed at great length the measures in clause 2 of this Bill, sorry in clause 3, which relates to the police and the assistant commissioner in the context of that, caused me to see why this measure is so important in boosting the confidence and the energy and the drive of our officers, pointed out that in one of the containers that was seized, well that was on the port, that is on the port, that was due to be transhipped out of this country, full of copper wire resembling that of, or that lost by TSTT. Full! And I took note of the fact that using these police officers to the nation's benefit, because it is only the police could do it, we were able to put a stop to the bleeding, the threat to national security that that activity led.

They found parts as well resembling compressors and stuff that was taken from the oil and energy sector, which the Minister of Finance came here with today, adjusting the taxes that relates to the energy sector. The supplementary tax and what have you. So we take comfort that the police, along with the Customs, along with elements of the defence force, were able to intervene on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and put a stop to it, and the Government promised that we would bring, and even the scrap iron dealers are expressing appreciation at the fact that we are coming before time, the Attorney General took control of that, and we are now regulating that industry that was abused by some, leading to the

export of copper. And this is not just a Trinidad problem. We see it in Jamaica, we saw it in, I think, Kenya. We saw it in the United States. A major issue. And when we were dealing with that, just like we are dealing with these measures here today in this Finance (No. 2) Bill, the UNC jumped in, screaming from the top of their voice, trying to be obscurantist and obstructionist as usual.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we depend on the police and the TTDF and other such agencies to protect us, and these measures are designed, clause 2 and clause 3, in particular, to protect them. To let them know that we are willing to take care of their welfare. And that is also very important, because I think everyone knows, not everybody agrees, that we have had public officers, including police and soldiers who have been found wanting in terms of integrity, and in terms of upholding the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. In other words, breaching the laws. And there are those who say, well you do not pay them properly. I do not agree with that. When I joined the police service I was earning \$476 a month and it never occurred to me to do that. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1), what is the relevance of all this unravelling here about—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. And there are those who believe that there is a need for greater income that prompts some public officers to become corrupt and to accept the bribes of those who offer them. These measures, at least in part, renders that argument a feeble one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are short-term measures. What is necessary, and I think the Minister of Finance certainly alluded to it in his wide-ranging opening comments and presentation for this Bill, training of public officers so that they will understand need for efficiency, and the skill in computing the pensions and

gratuities of retired officers or personnel. Better records, I alluded to that early in the context of digitization. But what is also required, I might say, on top of these measures in clause 2 and clause 3, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is good old passion, love, care and hard work. Hard work. Getting inside of the files, understanding that when your brother leaves the service he has needs. He would have given 40 years, 42 years' service. It is not to be treated lightly. I know of a particular case now where an officer has been writing to me, coming to my office, and I shared it with the police service hoping that they will get pass that quickly, and I understand they are working on it. For years he left the police service. He discovered now that he was short paid, his calculations were incorrect, and he is now trying to rectify them. I get several letters like this.

So it is about the discomfort and the pain and the loss that they are trying to address here. This is not just about money. This goes a very long way, and I agree with the Minister of Finance that we need to improve how it is done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member you have two more minutes of your initial speaking time. You have an additional 15, you care to avail yourself?

Hon. F. Hinds: Most certainly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. So the computation, the payments of these benefits, part of the welfare of the officers, and they are all for those reasons very important. As I indicated, it is motivational and it encourages the officers to work in the interest of their country.

But my friends on the other side, rather than pray for peace and take action to create an environment of peace, they actually celebrate some of the trouble. I hear—in the same article I told you I read about that councillor in Couva, they interviewed the Member for Couva South, and he spent half of his time, in fact

three quarter of his time, complaining and talking about murders and all kinds of things. And talking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would not believe it, about we are heading for 600 murders, like he is ah seer-man. “Dey cyah” wait to celebrate these things rather than pray and work for peace in this land. But we on this side we understand what our roles and functions and responsibilities are, and we will continue to provide the resources for these officers of the police service and the defence force, and continue to encourage them, and continue to appreciate what they do so that they could go out there and do it. Because I, unfortunately, much as I would like, I cannot do it, because it is not my role and function.

So the best we could do is look out for them, give them the resources they need. Share encouraging and uplifting words, rather than like my friends on the other side, cheer on the next murder and say, “Ah ha, ah ha”. Wickedness. And that is what they do. That is what they thrive on, because they believe it will yield an advantage.

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(6), he is imputing improper motive of us on the other side here. We do not celebrate, we do not cheer, and we do not do what he is saying at this time. Right! We sympathize with those on the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Okay Member I hear you. Hon. Member on this occasion I will need you to rephrase. Kindly rephrase what—the last thing you said.

Hon. F. Hinds: Well we are here to celebrate. They give me the impression that they celebrate, and that is subjective, and I believe I am right, but I will move on from there. Mr. Deputy Speaker, having absorbed the wisdom, the beauty, the benefits of clauses 2 and 3 which will allow the amendment to the defence force regulations and an amendment to the police service regulations respectively, in the

interest of those officers as an act of conscientious goodwill and understanding on the part of the Government, I want to bring us to the—bring to our attention as well, clause 4, which does not deal with national security in a direct way, but it does very indirectly.

Because clause 4 would amend the Corporation Tax Act by inserting a new section 10W to provide for an apprenticeship allowance to accompany that incurs expenditure in the hiring of a young person who has completed secondary education for an apprenticeship training programme with that company. In short, the Government is saying we will give 150 per cent tax benefit, tax concession to any small business that decides to hire any young person who, having completed secondary school, wants to get some experience, and you get a 150 per cent of what you spend. The actual expenditure incurred by the company up to a maximum of 5 per cent of the total wages and salary bill for that company in their year of income. Oh my god, what vision, what love, what concern for some of our young people, many of whom are being told that there are no opportunities for you. That is not true, but they are being told that.

My friends on the other side repeat that regularly. But this Government established, and I had the honour to lead it at its birth as its father, the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, which is expanding itself and its reach to the 500 or so young persons affected in its purview. Because they cater—the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, for young people between the ages of 10 and 35. Many of whom come out of secondary school—you know, I left the figures on my desk. But if 17,000 youngsters came out of secondary school, many of them lacking the experience and the know-how, and the wherewithal to make their way in the world, depending on us to lead them, so the Government has intervened. Many youth programmes, developmental,

psychological and otherwise, after secondary school, eh, on which billions is spent. And we are saying to the private sector—but this is not the first time, you know. When we established the OJT, the On the Job Training Programme it was with this in mind.

Same set of circumstances, you come out of school, have your passes, you want a job, the employer wants experience, we will put you in an environment where for two years you could get experience. You get a stipend, your résumé is enhanced and you come out there fit and ready to really give a contribution and earn your keep, and make your way in this business, in this world, in this marketplace. Bearing in mind that it is Bunny Wailer, Rastaman like me, who said in song which I should never forget, “if you are living in a marketplace and you are neither buyer nor seller soon you will be subject to be bought or sold”. And I hear my friends on the other side talking about gang and gang and gang, youth and so on. This measure which they may very well vote against, you know, obscurantist and obstructionists as they wickedly are, this measure is designed to encourage the employer to hire one of these young people. Only one. Or if you want to you can hire as many as you want. But we will give you a benefit, a tax relief, when you do. Guiding the youngster away from a pathway that is not so healthy for him or for anyone else.

And that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as wind to a conclusion, is in addition to the fact, I as Minister of National Security attended three passing out parades of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, and one recently of the police service. The police service graduated about 300 young people in the last year. When you join the police service you must be either between the ages of 18 and 35. Young people. For the defence force, 18 and 25 years, I think it is. So the entire, the defence force recruited over 500 of them. So what the Government is setting up

here is in addition to the fact that when you take in nurses, teachers, public officers, police, fire, prison, immigration, all of them, is young people who are given these opportunities. Young people. And this is why when we say from this platform on this side of the House that there are opportunities for our young people, that is not small talk. That is serious business.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for these reasons I would like to commend the Minister of Finance, and I would like to say on behalf of the people of Laventille West, and on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, which I proudly am a part of, that I fully support these measures, because I understand their impact on the morale, on the welfare and the wellbeing of our troops. They have got to know that we are looking out for them. They must not be treated like others. I am not allowed to feel as though this country is behind me leading the Ministry of National Security in the fight against crime and criminality, drug dealing, gun dealing, rape, human trafficking. I do not feel, never was one day allowed to feel, as though this nation is running hard and encouraging me.

On the other hand, sometimes I feel, I hope wrongly, that 70 per cent of this country does not lend that support. But that is not all together correct. I get a lot of messages and words of encouragement from citizens around this country saying, look here, we understand your responsibility and we stand with you, even in prayer, driven by good sound government national security policy, leading this business to fight crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. And when I say 70 per cent I am talking about the UNC by their declared positions included in that, and the criminals obviously do not want no Minister of National Security or the police service to succeed. So inside of that 70 per cent is a commingling of some of unfortunately political opponents and criminals, and that is so kneaded together sometimes it is hard to separate one from the next, like dough. If you make dough

with flour and water, after you make it “it hard” to unravel it and get back water and flour. But at least I might be wrong in my assessment.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to have come here in strong support of the Minister of Finance, and I commend to my friends on the other side, to give your support to these measures. The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and yours truly and our other speakers would have demonstrated comprehensively the wisdom and the need, the necessity for these measures, if only because they were announced in budget, and it requires parliamentary support to give life and effect to them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I wish to thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And immediately I want to put on record based on the contribution of the Minister of National Security, that the UNC has had a proud track record of being a party in government that has given two governments to Trinidad and Tobago. And during those stints in relation to Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, we understood our roles and responsibilities in upholding the law and the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. And at no point in time as responsible citizens, and as Members of Parliament in this House, we take any joy when any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago is killed in any particular circumstance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Minister of National Security did some reflection and introspection on himself and his performance as

the Minister of National Security it had nothing to do with the UNC calling his performance out, or putting—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no clause in the Bill that refers to this. 48(1).

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. I will give you some leeway Member, I know you have now start and may—

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No! Okay. Please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see Members of the Government they like to get into the gayelle but when time to play mass they do be afraid of the powder that is thrown in terms of this shout.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Because if you want to get into the gayelle and you want to posture and you want to make your conclusions, you have a—we on this side, the Opposition, has a duty-bound responsibility to put our position on the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the performance of the Government as it relates to ensuring that citizens feel a certain sense of security, they feel a sense of—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no clause in the Bill that deals with this, 48(1). [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So hold on. Hold on! Right! Now I give you some leeway just now, now we have to get into the debate based on what we have before us. Okay, Member? So you would have had your opening salvo but from now on

in let us keep it with regard the particular Bill.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided. But it is important to note that the Minister spoke about the love and the concern and the welfare that the Government had for the 90,000-plus public officers and officers within the law enforcement component of national security from the point of view of the defence force and the police service of Trinidad and Tobago. But you know what is important to understand, because he attempted to focus on the measures that are part of this Bill that has been piloted by the Minister of Finance.

And for me, if he understood in a proper context what we would call “good industrial relations practices” and also what is termed to be a total compensation package or benefit for workers—who are, in this instance law enforcement officers, from the point of view of police and army, or defence force—the Minister will understand that an interim pension arrangement or an interim pension payment is really not any kind of love and support and understanding the Government’s role and responsibility in relation to the well-being and welfare of these officers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is one about a total compensation package. And a total compensation package is not based on an interim pension payment, it is based on the proper payment and timely payment of your full pension arrangement at the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of National Security, when he demits office, and he is entitled to his pension arrangements, will he take an interim pension package or an interim pension payment to the bank in terms of servicing his mortgage payments, or what he has to deal with, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second Member.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to cope with them in the interim.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Member, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
All right, proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now want to put it to Trinidad and Tobago why this country has had more than 565 murders, because there is no substance from the Minister of National Security.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker 48(1)

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Absolutely no substance.

Mr. Imbert: 48(1), point of order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: All they are trying to do is interrupt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, okay. All right. Thank you. [*Interruption*] Thank you. All right. Again Member, as I told you earlier we are not getting to that particular aspect. You are making your point, but again stay away from the other side of the discourse. Right!

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided, but the art of debating is also about responding based on points that have been raised by Members of the Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: This is the art of debating, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And at no point in time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am attempting to violate the Standing Orders. I am putting forward—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So Member I have ruled, proceed with your discourse.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right!

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And also during the contribution of the Minister of National Security, the Minister of National Security attempted to create a narrative, and if you listened to him very attentively you would have felt that the \$1 million payment to the families of fallen officers—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), that is not a clause in this Bill. This is getting ridiculous.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Listen, Members, please! Again, proceed Member, right, and I will give you some leeway in order to bring your point and I will determine how far you will go.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The issue of the \$1 million payment to the families of law enforcement officers was raised by the Minister of National Security in his contribution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I told you to proceed. I have recalled I told you I will tell you the length of how far you will go.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And I am putting it in the context of having raised it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister attempted to create—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence!

Mr. R. Indarsingh: The Minister attempted to create a narrative that that initiative becoming a reality was a vision of the Government that he belonged to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I just want to put on the record that that \$1 million payment that the families of fallen officers, law enforcement officers received today is as a result of a government led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, 48(1). This is about pensions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. Members I know this is the third time that the Minister of Finance would have stood to his feet in order to bring it up. Again, as the Speaker in the Chair I have to rule accordingly. All right. And I do not want to get into the debate, but the point was made and I need to ensure that the Member who is on the floor gives his discourse up to the point as I would so determine. So again Member you can move on to your particular next item now, please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the facts and the truth offends from time to time.

5.20 p.m.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we are debating this Finance Bill which the Minister indicated that when he piloted was intended to give legitimacy to provisions which were announced when there was the presentation of the budget 2023 and in relation to other measures, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That budget was delivered with the theme: Tenacity and Stability in the Face of Global Challenges. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am forced to ask the question, how will the amendments or the respective clauses in this particular piece of legislation here today build the tenacity in the face of the challenges the country continues to deal with and in terms of the citizens?

But more importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, clause 2 of the Bill which seeks to amend the Defence (Pensions, Terminal and other Grants) Regulations, Government Notice No. 38 of 1968 made under the Defence Act, Chap. 14:01, is:

“...to allow for the payment of an interim pension of three thousand, five hundred dollars per month to officers who retire compulsorily from the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force.”

And similar with clause 3 of the Bill which:

“...would amend the Police Service Regulations, Legal Notice No. 145...to allow for the payment of an interim pension of three thousand, five hundred dollars...to officers who retire compulsorily from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and during the piloting of this particular legislation the Minister of Finance referred to the Third Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee and focused on the implementation of the recommendations to the 24th Report of the said Committee on the examination into the processing of the payment of pensions and gratuities of retired public officers and contracted employees, First Session of the 12th Parliament. And this is why the Opposition, the alternative government, will call upon the Government or call out the Government based on their halfhearted approach, and what I will call lazy and slothful approach as it relates to addressing the issues. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, based on all the speakers on the other side you would feel that after this piece of legislation is passed that the woes or what is being attempted to be fixed here this evening through the passage of this legislation everything will be hunky-dory and law enforcement from the point of view of police and defence force will be able to live in a very comfortable manner.

And I want to point out, because the Minister of Finance has been Minister of Finance for the last seven years in Trinidad and Tobago. He is in his eighth year as the Minister of Finance and I want you to listen very carefully, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the 5th of October, 2015, the Minister of Finance stated during his budget presentation and I quote:

“...Madam Speaker...our present public sector pension system is outdated. Before demitting office in 2010 the previous PNM administration had made considerable progress with the assistance of international consultants in

developing a new system of pension for public servant...”

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1). These pension arrangements have nothing to do with the civil service. That is another piece of legislation. We are not amending that law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, Member. Member, again, the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2022, clearly identified the various clauses of what we have to deal with, right. So I would not be able to allow you to continue with regard to that particular. So let us stick specifically for that or unless you have a rebuttal based on the other Members that were—but that was not introduced. So I would not be able to—

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I abide with your ruling. All I am attempting to raise and put on the record this evening is based on the intervention not only of the Minister of Finance but other contributors, other contributors as I said that the Minister referred to a report that I had in my hand. He spoke and focused on the recommendations of that report and I am merely building a case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, based on the fact that the Minister has been the Minister of Finance addressing not only, not only—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, okay, fine, but I want you to stick to the Explanatory Note that we are dealing with today, right. It clearly identified the various clauses and the points that we have to deal with and as mentioned I perused it and we are not entering that into the debate.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided, but I also would like to point out that law enforcement officers have been members of the public service of Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and they have moved.

Mr. Imbert:—point of order.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: They have moved into—

Mr. Imbert: This has nothing to do with the civil service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right, so let me hear your point and then I will determine the further discourse.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yeah, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have moved from being officers—members of the public service or public officers, they have become members of the police service, they have become members of the defence force. And all I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the context of their final pension arrangements, if you go to the Police Service Regulations and you go to the defence force, I have it in my possession, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it points to an avenue where taking into consideration their pensionable years of service in the public service will also add to their final pension in terms of their years of service. And every speaker on that side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in some form or fashion, pointed in the direction of this particular report. And this is why I am saying—because even the Minister of Finance when he piloted this piece of legislation and he elaborated on clauses 2 and 3 of the Bill here this evening, the Minister indicated that there is the need to focus on a realignment of divisions of a Ministry such as the backlog of processing pensions and gratuities. And he also indicated, that is the Minister of Finance, that there was the need to determine for a more efficient record-keeping of pension files and to encourage the Ministries and departments to submit its pension and leave records on time.

And this is why I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they, when I say they, the Government continues to boast about the whole of government approach and a collaboration between Ministries and so on, and this is why I am asking the Minister of Finance today after seven years and having given a commitment that

there would have been an overhaul of dealing with pensions not only to police and—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no mention of civil service pensions in this Bill or even in those regulations he is talking about. 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right. So again Member, I hear your whole explanation, I give you latitude in order to bring it to this point. So again, we are not going further with it with regard to the idea of bringing in the overall pension of Trinidad and Tobago. Okay, but you got your information out so proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you see, in the context of what I am addressing or attempting to address on behalf of the law enforcement officers of Trinidad and Tobago and also from the point of view of the officers within the army, or the defence force, according to the Defence (Pensions, Terminal and other Grants) Regulations which I am reading from, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it states that:

“(2) It shall be compulsory for other ranks to retire...”—that is, I am quoting from the actual Regulations, (2):

“It shall be compulsory for other ranks to retire on attaining the following ages, that is to say:

- (a) a warrant officer or a chief petty officer, at the age of fifty years;
- (b) a sergeant, staff-sergeant or a petty officer, at the age of forty-seven years; and
- (c) a corporal or a leading rating or lower rank, at the age of forty-five years.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my sources have advised me within the defence force that a warrant officer 1 or 2, for example, a warrant officer 2 having attained 20

years of services is entitled to a pension of approximately \$12,000. Secondly, a warrant officer 1, approximately \$11,000; a staff sergeant somewhere in the vicinity of approximately \$8,000; and a Corporal, somewhere in the vicinity of \$6,000, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important that again, we have not heard from anyone on the Government side and I hope in winding up the Minister of Finance can address the issue. All we are hearing about is an interim pension payment, fine, an interim pension payment, but can an officer in the army listening to this debate be in a position to plan his or her life beyond the age of retirement. And where is the operational plan from the Government as it relates to fixing or attempting to deal with the issues identified. It is identified and I have to go back to that report. While they may not want to hear it, it impacts upon the army and the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Which report are you going back to?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: The Public Administration and Appropriations Committee Report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And earlier I think we made a ruling with regard to the latitude you would have been given in order to—with that particular report. So be conscious and be careful of quoting from that particular report, please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the records, I have to, because the records in terms of—has to be submitted. The records of officers have to be submitted to the comptroller of accounts for verification. And it is the—what the Government is attempting to do here this afternoon is attempting to deal with the bureaucracy as they used the term, the bureaucracy, the tardiness and so on, the state—the Minister of National Security boasted about the Government's digitization thrust and so on, in attempting to justify what is being pursued by the Government here this evening in terms of the Cadets and where the—sometimes

the records are in this area, the records are in the other area and so on. And this is the importance of it in the context of what we are attempting to address here this evening.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to also, because I want to read from an article—indicates that—in the public domain, the 30th of September, 2022:

“CoP: Interim pension...”—arrangement—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Title of the article and you give me the date.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yeah, the 30th of September—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. What is the title of the article, please?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Commissioner of Police—

“Interim pension approved for retired police officers.”

This was from *Loop News*:

“Acting Police Commissioner”—that is the 30th of September, 2022—

“Acting Police Commissioner McDonald Jacob said he has received approval to pay all retired police officers an interim pension of \$3,500 immediately upon their retirement.

In an update via the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Jacob said the old systems frustrated police officers over the years and in keeping with the Strategic Plan, the welfare of officers is a top priority.”

And the TTPS further went on to say in this particular article that:

“The Cabinet of...Trinidad and Tobago has accepted the recommendations of the Minister of National Security for the Amendment of the Police Service Regulations to allow—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes of your initial speaking time, you have an additional 15. You care to avail yourself?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right, proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—based on the interruptions of no substance from Members of the Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, that ruling is from the Chair, right. So you avail yourself?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right, proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Young: [*Interruption*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: The public will judge.

Mr. Young: They have.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, please Members.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And that is why every editorial recommended—every editorial recommended the dismissal of the Minister of National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), Standing Order 48(1), dismissal of the Minister of National Security.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So again, Member, let us keep it within the proper time frame. Okay?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided and they have a lot to learn about the art of debating, the Members of the Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: A lot, a lot to learn. In terms of—Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said the issue that was in the article indicated that the:

“The Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has accepted the

recommendations of the Minister of National Security for the Amendment of the Police Service Regulations to allow for the Payment of an Interim Pension of \$3,500 to Officers who retire...from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service...”—and so on.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important to note, whilst this has been accepted by the Cabinet and today it is being debated, that Part XV of the Police Service Regulations under the heading: “Gratuities and Pensions” 183(1):

“The computation and authorisation of gratuities and pensions of officers whose retirement from the Service is known to be impending shall be treated as urgent matters of high priority.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it goes on to say that:

“(2) The Commissioner shall ensure that particulars of service and pay of all officers whose retirement is known to be imminent are furnished accurately to the Comptroller of Accounts”—I want you to listen very carefully, eh—“...the Comptroller of Accounts...”

So everything here that they attempted to say that was irrelevant, that is Members of the Government, attempted to put a spin that it was irrelevant I want you to listen very carefully that:

“The Commissioner shall ensure that particulars of service and pay of all officers whose retirement is known to be imminent are furnished accurately to the Comptroller of Accounts not less than three months before the date on which...officers concerned are due to retire, in order to enable the computation and checking of pensions, retiring allowances and gratuities to be completed by the Comptroller of Accounts and the Auditor General and submitted for authorisation before the date on which the officer’s retirement from the Service is due to take effect.”

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, while I accept the fact that the Commissioner of Police has the responsibility to administrate the operations of the police service, the Minister of National Security during the Minister's contribution attempted to speak about the issue of morale and self-esteem and so on, of the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago. And the Minister of National Security, I am saying, has a responsibility to lead from the front being the line Minister, the Minister with ministerial responsibility to get this working, to liaise, to have an operational plan and also the Minister of Finance has to have this whole of government approach.

They will tell you every press conference there is a whole of government approach, there is a collaboration, and today, based on what we are seeing, an interim pension of \$3,500, and not a timeline about the deficiencies that are referred to in the Joint Select Committee Report being addressed. There is no timeline from the Government. The Government again has—

Madam Speaker: So Member, this is not about the report. And while the Minister of Finance may have mentioned it, not every tangential matter becomes the subject of a full debate. So let us move on.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, thank you, Madam Speaker. And additionally as I move on to the last issue I want to deal with as it relates to clause 4 of the Bill, in relation to the amending the Corporation Tax Act, Chap. 75:02 by inserting a new section 10W to provide for an apprenticeship allowance to:

“...a company incurs expenditure in...hiring of a young person who...completed secondary education for an apprenticeship training programme with that company...”—and the—“...allowance equal to one hundred and fifty per cent of the actual expenditure incurred”—by a company—“up to a maximum of five per cent of...total wages and salaries

bill of the company for that year of income.”

Madam Speaker, in the context of this particular clause, the Minister indicated during his presentation that I am implementing an apprenticeship allowance to encourage businesses to hire persons between the ages of 16 to 25 for short term apprenticeship and so on, for them to have the relevant work experience and exposure in the world of work. And to qualify for this allowance the training programme instituted by the company must be registered with the National Training Agency and the expenditure certified by the company’s auditors and so on. And that the apprenticeship period would be for a period of one year, Madam Speaker.

The quality of apprenticeship from where I stand and based on my experience would take into consideration a robust regulatory framework and social dialogue which can contribute to ensuring, or it can indeed lower or contribute to the lowering of unemployment rates and reducing skills mismatch and enhancing productivity and competitiveness of enterprises. But it is also important that it operates in a legal framework and in that regard too, I want to ask and I hope the Minister of Finance in his winding up can indicate to us whether the National Training Agency has the skills, has the staff and so on, with the necessary expertise to have oversight and monitoring and evaluation of this particular programme, Madam Speaker. Because in the real word, it is a known fact and we operate in Trinidad and Tobago—under the Industrial Relations Act of this country, Madam Speaker, an apprentice is not recognized as a worker. And in that regard too, an apprentice has limited rights in the workplace when he or she is taken on by a company. And I think too, that we have a duty-bound responsibility to ask whether the National Training Agency as I said, has the competent staff to ensure that apprentices are not exploited by employers. I cast no aspersions but at the end

of the day this is the reality, this is the reality and what is the recourse.

Madam Speaker, I am advised and I am advised based on the yellow books too, because what is the—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speak 48(1), we are dealing with a tax allowance. We are not dealing with the whole rubric and framework of apprenticeship programmes. 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Okay, so, I uphold the objection, it is the same pathway that, Member, you were going down with the pensions, okay? So I think the point has been made, let us press on. This is really a financial matter, fiscal matter. Let us keep the debate that way.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have noted your ruling and I have also taken into consideration that the measures that the Minister of Finance has put forward to this House here this evening in terms of the Finance (No. 2) Bill, for myself and Members of the Opposition is really a halfhearted approach to the law enforcement officers. It will not bring about what is expected in terms of how retired officers have to deal with the challenges of day to day living and servicing the needs of themselves and their relatives and their dependents from a financial point of view; from a mortgage point of view; from a health point of view; from an education point of view, based on an interim pension payment.

And also, Madam Speaker, from the point of view of the clause which focuses or attempt to provide employment or allow the young persons of Trinidad and Tobago to experience the world of work, I would want to hear from the Minister of Finance, because we have a responsibility—

Hon. Member: You will hear from him.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—we have a responsibility to look after the interest of all the

stakeholders, fine; to provide the incentives to the business community. But it is also the Government's responsibility to give that sense of comfort that in the prevailing circumstances and in the enabling environment which is being created, that a young person will feel he or she can take advantage of this, will want to become an apprentice, because Trinidad and Tobago has had a rich track record of an apprenticeship programme, and apprenticeship schools and so on, whether it was at Caroni (1975) Limited or at the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission and so on. It was destroyed, the legacy of the—

Hon. Member: Madam Speaker, 48(1)—

Madam Speaker: Well, part of what we sit down here to do is to suffer a bit, okay? So let us be tolerant, let us take the pressure. Member—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

5.50 p.m.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You see, Madam Speaker, they laugh and they scoff. They behave in the most arrogant and dismissive of manners when you are attempting to put a point across in the interest of the young people and protecting the young people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: They are calling upon the Government. The Government is calling upon young people to experience, come into the world of work, come into the work environment, and you are attempting to focus the Government, the Minister of Finance, and senior Cabinet Ministers, who are supposed to be looking out. They speak about their pride and their love for young people and so on, but when you are attempting to point them in a direction of protecting the rights of apprentices in the work environment, they scoff, they laugh and they dismiss it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, as I said, if—[*Inaudible*—hear me very well, I rule that that is in breach of Standing Order 48(1). I have asked you to go on to another point. Okay? And I think everybody in here, including your friends on the other side, are not “they”. They are hon. Members. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Well, Madam Speaker, the hon. Members, the hon. Members of the Government must certainly, in piloting legislation, must not only understand their role from the law books or the statute books of Trinidad and Tobago. When laws are made, we have a responsibility to make the people, who are to benefit from these laws, to protect them on the all fronts. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a little unfortunate that my hon. colleague from Couva South did not continue a little longer because Messi just scored a goal, so I would have been able to see all the penalty kicks, but Argentina is leading.

So, Madam Speaker, we have come to the end of this debate and some of the things that have been said by hon. Members opposite, in fact most, make absolutely no sense. So let me look at some of the things that were said. The Member for Mayaro wanted, for reasons unknown, to limit the apprenticeship allowance to only particular types of now employment. Now, why should one want to do that? The Member said the approach should be addressed to export earners. Why? Why would you want to do young people that? Why would you want to limit apprenticeship programmes to only companies that are involved in exports? It makes no sense. We are trying to give opportunities to everyone in

every industry. So that was a recommendation that made no sense.

With respect to clause 4 and the issue about approved small companies, all that is happening here is the extension of a measure that has been enforced since 2006. The question of exemptions for approved small companies has been in effect since January 01, 2006, and all we are doing here is that we are increasing the benefit. Whereas approved small companies previously would be exempted from corporation tax for five years, we are now making it six. How on earth could this be a problem for Members opposite, something that has been enforced for 16 years?

With respect to e-money issuers, I expected somebody to come over there and lobby for a particular e-money issuer or payment provider. It demonstrates to me that hon. Members opposite come into this Chamber with a prepared speech. They do not engage in the art of debate. They do not make counterpoints. They come with their written speech and they do not listen. I made the point, Madam Speaker, that we need competition in the area of electronic payments. We do not need monopolies. I really take objection to a hon. Member from the other side coming to lobby for a particular payment provider. We need competition, Madam Speaker.

With respect to the alleged time that this measure has taken to come here—and I am speaking about the pension arrangements, the minimum pension for members of the defence force and members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Consistent with the objections I made about relevance, hon. Members opposite—Madam Speaker, the Member for Naparima really is quite annoying.

Madam Speaker: [*Inaudible*]*—*something that you have participated in is going on without you. I think that is what has happened. All right? So let us all renew our composure and listen to the Minister of Finance in winding up.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, it cannot be right for Members to interrupt. So

let me move on.

The clauses that deal with the minimum pension for the police service and the defence force, Members opposite, hon. Members have no understanding of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. Members of the police service and the defence force do not fall under the civil service and therefore, could not be captured under the 2018 legislation which dealt with public officers in the civil service. They could not because they do not fall under that legislation. There are peculiar and special pieces of legislation that deal with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force.

In particular, if we have to make an adjustment to the pay and allowances for members of the defence force, the Minister of National Security has to publish regulations specific to members of the defence force. That is not required for the civil service. There is no requirement in law for special regulations to be made for members of the civil service with respect to their pay and so on, but that has to be done for the defence force. And therefore, when one is adjusting—and I would expect hon. Members opposite to know this because they have been in government before.

When one is adjusting the compensation package for members of the defence force it requires consultation and all arms of the force have to get involved, the coast guard, the army, the air wing and so on. There is a structure within the defence force for the adjustment of pay and allowances. And it is only in this year, 2022, that the defence force and the police service, after that special consultation, gave their consent to the minimum pension for police officers and members of the defence force, and I would expect Members opposite to know this. They should not need to be educated here today by me that there are special arrangements for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and for the Trinidad and

Tobago Defence Force. They should know that. Hon. Members should know that.

With respect to other points made, I want to clear up an issue. The hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—and let me just repeat what I just said before I get to the next point, Madam Speaker. Special consultation was required with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force in order to reach agreement on the introduction of a minimum pension, and that consent was only granted this year by those entities. That is what I am advised. So let me move on now.

The hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre made an allegation, which Members opposite like to make whenever they are challenged with the fact that the contract that the former government negotiated for the CGCL plant was flawed. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre accused the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries of getting—being responsible for the losses that NGC has suffered as a result of the CGCL plant. That is absolutely untrue. When we came into Government we met a gas price negotiated by the former government with the CGCL entity which resulted in the NGC having to sell gas to that plant—negotiated by the UNC—at a price lower than the NGC has to pay for gas. That is the result of the loss. A very badly negotiated contract, a very poor arrangement, where Greenfield sites were given priority for gas availability and the price negated by the UNC for the gas supply to that plant was lower than the cost of gas to NGC. And NGC has had to write-off over \$2 billion in losses because of that poor negotiation by the former administration. Those are the facts.

And let me also say, Madam Speaker, I heard a Member say that our Government has not dealt with the energy sector properly and as a result, there has been no investment in the energy sector as a result of legislative measures made by this administration with respect to petroleum taxes—one of the things we are

adjusting today—since we came to office. That is totally false. I asked the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to give me some figures, and between September 2015 and 2021, oil and gas companies have spent foreign investment \$76 billion in Trinidad and Tobago; \$76 billion, 7-6 billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: I am really tired of the fake news we get on the other side, Madam Speaker. And, you know, there are two schools of thought, Madam Speaker; two schools of thought. When they say the ridiculous things—sorry. When hon. Members opposite say the ridiculous things that they say, one school of thought is that they just do not know any better.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: And there is another school of thought, that they very well know that what they are saying is simply untrue, but they just say it to fool the public.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not sure which one it is, Madam Speaker, could be anyone. Could be anyone of them.

Now, let me go to the contributions of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. What did the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre have to say?—the hon. Member. The hon. Member said that there has been a large decrease in employment in the energy sector. We are dealing here with oil production; oil production, not employment in a sector such as employment in the refinery. That has nothing to do with oil production. But more importantly, Madam Speaker, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre complained that the arrangement in the Petroleum Taxes Act, which has been subsisting for over 50 year, 5-0 years, that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries must certify the requisite approvals for companies to benefit from the various tax regimes within the Petroleum Taxes Act is a humbug. Who else is

supposed to certify it, Madam Speaker? If not the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who will certify licences within the energy sector? Who?

You know, one of the problems with hon. Members opposite, they make these ridiculous statements that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries must not get involved in issuing or approving licences. Who else should approve it? If they could name an individual or an entity that will be superior to a Minister with portfolio, I would welcome the suggestion. But they do not make any suggestions. They just throw these things out.

The other point I have heard here and I think this falls into the realm of “don’t know” rather than deliberate mislead. The Member in Pointe-a-Pierre complained that production-sharing contracts are not covered by the legislative amendments we wish to make today. How could they be? There are two types of arrangements with oil and gas companies for the production of hydrocarbons and the revenue to be derived there from. One is an exploration and production licence which is subject to a regime of taxes, petroleum profit tax, supplementary petroleum tax, and so on. That is the E&P. And production sharing is an arrangement where the Government and the company share the profits after deduction of expenses. How on earth can you expect an amendment that adjusts taxes, relevant to exploration and production licences, to apply to a production sharing arrangement where what is being shared is the profits from the operation? And, as I said, it falls into the realm of “don’t know any better” because I cannot believe that somebody who is involved with the energy sector could wish to mislead people in that way.

Madam Speaker, there was also a complaint from the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre that he wanted to know, did we adjust the SPT regime to allow a waiver for Heritage Petroleum. Again, that falls into the realm of “don’t know any

better”. Because under the Income Tax Act, the President—and in the context of that word because there are no words following it, that President means the Cabinet. The Cabinet can waive any tax, income tax, corporation tax, value added tax, any tax, as long as the Cabinet/President is of the view that it is just and equitable to do so, and that provision in the Income Tax Act find its way into all of our revenue laws.

So if in the wisdom of the Cabinet to give Heritage Petroleum a waiver after Heritage Petroleum was able to refinance a loan, a bond of US \$850 million that became due just a couple years ago—that is over TT \$5 billion, Madam Speaker. Heritage Petroleum and the associated companies were able, without a government guarantee, to refinance a bond that became due in excess of TT \$5 billion, and one of the things that they asked us for was to give them a little breathing room and waive SPT, and it is one pocket to the other. Because if Heritage Petroleum pays SPT it comes into the Government’s pocket. And if they do not pay SPT because they are a wholly owned state enterprise, that savings could then be used for exploration, production and drilling, which is exactly what we agreed to do and we are entitled to do so under law. So again, that falls into “don’t know any better”.

So, Madam Speaker, I have heard nothing from hon. Members opposite that is of any substance as far as I am concerned. I cannot believe that someone will complain that increasing the time for tax exemption for a small company from five years to six years is a bad thing. I cannot believe that. I cannot believe that somebody would complain that introducing a tax allowance to encourage apprenticeship is a bad thing. I cannot believe that anybody would complain—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—that reducing taxes to motivate oil companies to produce oil and gas is a bad thing. But that is all I have heard today. And I cannot believe that

introducing a benefit of an interim pension for members of the police service and the defence force—because the hon. Member for Couva South, as I would have to say, inadvertently let it slip that it is the Commissioner of Police or the Chief of Defence, they are the ones that have to provide the pension and leave records to the Comptroller of Accounts in order for the pension to be paid, and therein lies the problem. It is not happening. So that the officials within the police service and within the defence force who have a legal responsibility to provide the information to the Comptroller of Accounts so that pensions could be paid to retired police officers and retired defence force officers, it is not happening. That is not a ministerial thing. The law states that it is the Commissioner of Police or the defence force that have to do the work. Not Ministers.

And because the people within the system are not providing the information for one reason or another; difficulties within the system, one reason or another, we decided, as legislatures, recognizing that the information is not coming out from the officials who are supposed to provide it, we decided to introduce the interim pension as a benefit for police officers and defence force officers, and that is bad.

So I have heard this entire debate from Members opposite, every benefit we are providing here is bad. Well, I wonder what is good. And with those few words, I beg to move, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*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 Chairman: Hon. Members, as the Minister of Finance has indicated there, he intended to move an amendment. I believe it should have been circulated.

Yes, Whip, you have got it? Okay. So can we take clauses 1 to 5 as a block?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, in discussions with my colleagues, we would also like to make a minor amendment to clause 4.

Madam Chairman: Has that been circulated?

Mr. Imbert: No, it has not been circulated. With your leave, it is just one word. I will state it.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we will do clauses 1 to 3. Then 4, 5, 6, 7.

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

Clause 4.

Question proposed: That clause 4 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. We have looked at clause 4 again and we think we want to increase the threshold for this allowance. So in the seventh line in 4(a), 10W(1), we want to change “five” to “twenty”. So it will be a maximum of 20 per cent of the total wages. We want to encourage companies to hire as many apprentices as possible. So we thought that by limiting it to 5 per cent of payroll, that might be sort of a restriction. So we want to increase “five” to “twenty”. That is the change.

Madam Chairman: Whip, agreed?

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So that the question is that clause 4 be amended as follows that in line 7 the word “five” now reads “twenty”?

Mr. Imbert: Replaced by “twenty”.

Madam Chairman: Replaced by “twenty”?

Mr. Imbert: Yes. Be deleted and replaced by “twenty”.

Madam Chairman: That the word “five” be deleted and be replaced by the word

“twenty”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6.

Question proposed: That clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

In the proposed new item 51(1), delete the full stop at the end of the sentence and insert the words “, as certified by the Minister with responsibility for energy”.

Mr. Imbert: I think it is self-explanatory, Madam Chairman.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to report that the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2022, was considered in the committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the committee’s report.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 126, I understand that there is an agreement by both sides to proceed with a notification

that only reached the House today for a nomination to act in the office of Commissioner of Police. Whip? In those circumstances, we shall now revert to Papers.

PAPER LAID

Notification of Her Excellency, the President, in respect of the nomination of Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher, for appointment to act in the Office of Commissioner of Police. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]

6.20 p.m.

**Nomination of Acting Commissioner of Police
(Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher)**

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move the following Motion:

Whereas section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (“the Constitution”) provides that the Police Service Commission shall have the power to appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police:

And whereas section 123(3) of the Constitution provides that the Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the office of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police:

And whereas section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives:

And whereas the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher, Assistant

Commissioner of Police, acting Deputy Commissioner of Police, as the person nominated to act in the office of Commissioner of Police in the absence of Mr. Mc Donald Jacob, Acting Commissioner of Police, who will be out of the country from 8th December, 2022 to 21st January, 2023:

And whereas the President has on the 9th day of December, 2022 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination:

And whereas it is expedient to approve the Notification:

Be it Resolved that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher to act in the office of Commissioner of Police be approved.

I beg to move.

Madam Speaker, Erla Christopher joined the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in 1982.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I am just looking for a ruling here. The hon. Member begged to move the Motion. He cannot debate now. He is supposed to debate before he begs to move.

Madam Speaker: Please, proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Erla Christopher, sorry, joined the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in 1982 as, of course, a Police Constable. Today, in 2022, she would have served for some 40 years. Madam Speaker, her first promotion came 11 years thereafter to the rank of Corporal, while she was attached to the Central Police Division.

Erla Christopher was made an Acting Sergeant in 1999 in the said Central Division and began a supervisory function at police station shift operations; duties including appraising and evaluating staff performance, providing guidance and facilitating appropriate staff training.

She was promoted to the rank of Sergeant in 1998, and then, of course, to the rank of Inspector, when she was then posted to the Human Resource Branch and managed special projects, including one for the computerization of personnel records of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and was part of the implementation team for the Public Service Human Resource Information System. At that point, Madam Speaker, the candidate, Erla Christopher, understandably, became aware of the needs and the welfare of officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

In 2006, she was made adjutant of the Special Reserve Police, broadening her experience and engagement from the regular TTPS to the Special Reserve Police Department, heading it as its adjutant. She was promoted to the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police in 2008, and then to Superintendent of Police in 2009, Senior Superintendent of Police in 2010.

Madam Speaker, she became an Assistant Commissioner of Police and was involved in the administration of the police service in or around 2012. In this regard, Madam Speaker, as Assistant Commissioner of Police, she was then assigned to the very significant and important Special Branch, a special unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, providing strategic leadership for intelligence management, directed to the collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence data and advised on national security issues.

She then went to the area south, back into the field of regular policing, providing management for the Central Southern and Southwestern Divisions, that cluster. She began to act as Deputy Commissioner of Police in 2016, and did so from August to October of 2016. Madam Speaker, she was involved, Erla Christopher was involved in community relations of the police service, providing strategic direction to the community policing secretariat and led the police public

engagement towards engendering public trust and confidence as a strategic initiative.

Emphasis was placed in that capacity on youth development, establishing a policy framework for the police youth clubs, directing community policing initiatives, and building networks with non-governmental institutions as key community stakeholders, and the very much needed acquisition of the experience where she developed sound conflict resolution techniques and gained a good appreciation of the issues affecting public trust and confidence in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, with initiatives at alleviating them.

In 2021, March of that year, she began acting as Deputy Commissioner of Police in Operations. In this regard, her responsibility was to assist the Commissioner of Police in strategic planning and directing the activities of the service, in the enforcement of laws and ordinances, crime prevention and the protection of life and property so as to promote and achieve high levels of safety and security to the nation. It involved planning and organizing and directing strategic operational and tactical planning activities in the then nine police geographic divisions and, of course, to foster corporative working relationships with all other arms of the Ministry of National Security including, of course, the Strategic Services Agency, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Prison Service, the Customs Division of the Ministry of Finance, the Immigration Division and, of course, all of them operating on an inter-agency platform in the National Operations Fusion Center.

Madam Speaker, Erla Harewood-Christopher was largely responsible for projects at professionalizing, and this is a very critical aspect of the experience that she has; professionalizing the police service and was responsible for training and development of officers to enhance their capacity and effectiveness. In this role,

she was also involved in providing strategic direction as a member of a border security coordinating team, border security issues being the highest priority for the Ministry of National Security and of obvious importance to all of Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, she harnessed a joint team to manage intelligence and surge and manage dynamic operations in the Southern and Southwestern Divisions. And I can bear testimony to some of her very outstanding work in this regard.

In the position of Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Erla Harewood-Christopher was responsible for the supervision of four Assistant Commissioners of Police, nine Senior Superintendents and 15 Superintendents who are responsible for the management of the police divisions.

Erla Christopher had tremendous regional and international exposure. For an example, in 2008 she participated in a Caribbean Regional Drug Law Enforcement Training Center Programme in Jamaica. Again, in 2008, attended the Jamaica Constabulary Staff College where she continued to hone leadership and management skills in the specialized business of policing.

In 2007, she participated in the National Policing Initiative Agency, hosted by the then Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago, that is to say SAUTT again, enhancing her leadership skill in the business of policing. She attended a number of meetings, I would just name a few and conferences: The Caribbean Chiefs of Police Meeting, one of them held in Colombia. She attended as well, a joint vision to counter transnational organized crime in El Salvador. Insofar as her professional experience is concerned, she has served as a Deputy Commissioner of Police in the administration of the police service for a considerably long time, and functioned as a member of the Executive Leadership Team of the police service, supporting the Commissioner of Police in charting the strategic direction for the police service.

Of course, she as well attended the International Visitors Leadership Programme in Washington and New York, back in 2017. And in 2016, participated in a training programme hosted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), in Virginia in the United States. Attended in 2015, the Administrative Staff College of India and, of course, attended in 2015, the Academy for the Defense Intelligence in Washington.

Madam Speaker, Erla Christopher has earned and is in possession of a Master's Degree in Strategic Leadership and Management, earned between 2019 and 2021 from the University of the West Indies—well she is a candidate in this programme. She holds a Master's Degree in Applied Criminology and Police Management from the University of Cambridge, a Bachelor of Science Degree in Public Sector Management from the University of the West Indies, an Associate Degree in Information Technology and a Certificate in Public Administration.

Madam Speaker, Erla Christopher, from all that I have just shared, some of her very long and impressive profile, Erla Christopher appears very, very well suited for the responsibility that is now being placed upon her to act as Commissioner of Police for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. In those circumstances, Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dinesh Rambally (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we have heard the impressive résumé of the proposed nominee on this occasion, from the Hon. Minister of National Security, Member for Laventille West. I may have missed it, Madam Speaker, but I am not sure that he recalls that

there was a debate in this Parliament in October, where this proposed nominee was actually debated. Be that as it may, Madam Speaker, I would get into some of the details. There is just a few matters of concern, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the order of—well this is the second Supplemental Order Paper. So we have the Order Paper, a Supplemental Order Paper referring to Introduction of Bills, and that was dealt with earlier, and now we have a Second Supplemental Order Paper. And I am referring to the Second Supplemental Order Paper, which now proposes the Motion for debate today. So, having received this, Madam Speaker, at about maybe 3.00 or 3.30, and I cast no blame on any entity or any individual. When I look at the Motion that is before the House, it refers to a name being submitted to the President. So the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Acting DCP, Deputy Commissioner of Police, as the person nominated to act in the office of Commissioner of Police, in the absence of Mr. McDonald Jacob, Acting Commissioner of Police. And this is what it reads in the Motion please, Madam Speaker:

“who will be out of the country from 8th December, 2022 to 21st January, 2023.”

So, what we have, Madam Speaker, is a situation whereby, last week Friday there was a debate concerning appointment of two persons to Acting DCP, and today we are looking at the appointment of Acting DCP to the Acting top CoP position, Acting Commissioner of Police. And this is what it says here, and this is the concern, Madam Speaker, that we are debating this today, the 9th of December, when we had a debate last week Friday in the House concerning appointments. There was no indication or reference to this particular movement within the police

service. And the problem is this, that we are debating today a Motion for acting appointments in the top CoP position in the police service, when the date of commencement of the acting top CoP going out of the country is yesterday. What does this mean? It means, Madam Speaker, that we are looking at a system whereby you have names being proposed by the Police Service Commission being remitted to the President's House, being remitted to the Parliament, and despite that process of all the players involved, that we are still here today to debate something, which has already taken effect yesterday. And what is the effect of that, Madam Speaker? We are dealing with—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: You know, if there is need to make an interruption, it is done in a particular way. Please, proceed, Member.

Mr. Dinesh Rambally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, I heard some comment whether I am a lawyer. This has nothing to do with whether I am a lawyer or not. This has to do with the fact that right now the people in this country, citizens, are looking for leadership in the police service.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally: And if we are talking about leadership in the police service and we have due respect for the officers in the police service, we must have known that the Acting top CoP, Commissioner Jacob, Mr. McDonald Jacob was going to be out of the country from 8th of December, 2022, which was yesterday. Why is it that we are debating that today?

So we are debating an event, which has already commenced. Know why? What is the importance of this, Madam Speaker? Because you have a situation where, when we look at the documents, which have been supplied, and so, we have a notification—first of all the Police Service Commission writing by way of letter

dated 8th December, 2022, to Her Excellency, Ms. Paula-Mae Weekes, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. So it is indicated on the 8th of December, by Police Service Commission that Mr. McDonald Jacob, Acting Commissioner of Police, who proceeded on vacation leave from 8th of December. It comes back to my point: Why is it that you are now hearing about this? And the notification thereafter comes on the 9th of December, today's date, and that notification is translated into this House.

As I said, Madam Speaker, these are concerns, and the concerns stem from the fact that here we are in the midst of, and I do not intend to get into a debate on crime, but it is a factual matter that we have to date recorded the highest number of murders in the country. I leave that there for now.

Madam Speaker, we need leadership in the police service and all of these matters—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally:—points to a bureaucracy. It points to a very cumbersome process. That terminology or language has been used before in this House in describing this said process. But what I want to say today, Madam Speaker, which may be a little bit different from what has been said in the past, concerning this process is that this is a slothful process, and it does not inspire confidence in the public. If anything—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). We are not here to debate the process. We are just here for the notice of the person.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, I would just give you some leeway to finish that point and move on.

Mr. D. Rambally: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, having just simply pointed the facts, which are before us on the documents, saying and

referring to this, using the instant facts which are before us today and that is in that context I am saying that what we are dealing with really is a slothful process which does not inspire confidence in the public. And that being said, if anything, what it does, it gives confidence to the criminal elements in Trinidad and Tobago that what we are dealing with—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, as I said I would give you some leeway. We are not going into crime. All right? So please, just finish your point and let us get on with it. Yes?

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very guided and grateful. It gives confidence in the criminal elements that what they are dealing with, when they are treating with law enforcement, is one that is very inefficient. That is the point, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally: Madam Speaker, I move along. Madam Speaker, when we had this particular nominee, it came up in October and I believe it was debated in the House, in the Lower House, on the 11th of October, 2022. And what was mentioned then was that you would have had—and to deal with any inefficiencies in the process—some changes being made by the Government.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Madam Speaker: Member, I would give you some leeway, please, proceed.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Member for San Fernando West, we are not here, Madam Speaker, to rubber stamp what is put forward here. The country deserves some debate on this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally: I know, Madam Speaker, and I say this in a lighter mood. I

know Members on the other side are happy just like myself. Argentina has won, they are going on. They have beat the Netherlands. I am happy about that. But we have to do the people's work now. Now, what we are dealing with, Madam Speaker, is I am saying on that occasion when we debated this said nominee, what was indicated in the debate, Madam Speaker, was that what we could see. And these are the words of the hon. Prime Minister on that occasion: "Plans by the Government being rolled out the very near future." Those are his words, that these appointments would be treated in an efficient manner, please. And here we are today, it seems as though it is déjà vu. We are seeing a repeat of what happened in October.

Madam Speaker, on that occasion, with respect to the nominee, Ms. Erla Christopher, we had gone through the qualifications on that occasion and as we have heard the hon. Minister of National Security say today. What I want to say, Madam Speaker, is the reason why I raise this, and I am not debating in crime simpliciter. I am not getting into that, but since that debate in October, with the appointment of this said proposed nominee, what was indicated to the country, through this House, was that we could see changes taking place, in terms of crime-fighting.

Madam Speaker: So, I gave you some leeway. And you yourself, hon. Member, keep punctuating everything that you have said that you are not going into crime. But in a way you are. And as you quite rightly recognize, this is not about crime. This is not about an anti-crime plan crime or crime-fighting policies, and so on. You yourself have admitted that. So, please, let us stay away from that and let us get on with the business before us.

Mr. D. Rambally: Yes please. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the point I want to make, as I move on, is that when we look at the Motion that is

before the House, I have indicated that it reads inter alia, that Mr. McDonald Jacob would be out of the country from 8th of December 2022 to 21st January, 2023. And it goes on:

“And whereas it is expedient to approve the notification...”

Madam Speaker, where it says “expedient”, it could only mean one thing. Whereas it is expedient, it means it is suitable at this point in time for achieving a particular outcome, given certain circumstances. That is what expedient means in this Motion. So, under this part of the Motion:

“whereas it is expedient to approve the notification...”

I am looking at it from the point of view, whether or not that is in fact being achieved, and is it being achieved when last we debated this nominee, that we were talking about the murder rate being 460 and today we are dealing with 560.

Madam Speaker: So you have gone back to the very thing that that saying—

Mr. D. Rambally: Yes please.

Madam Speaker:—we are not talking about crime. We are not talking about the murder rate here. Please be expedient if dealing with this Motion and the appointment of this person. Let us deal with that.

Mr. D. Rambally: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the simple point, dealing with this Motion, is that we are not necessarily satisfied that the means of achieving the particular outcome is what we have heard from the Minister of National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally: You see, Madam Speaker, debating this Motion cannot be done outside of what the reality is on the ground. The context is exactly what obtains in our society. So we too agree and we commend these qualifications of Ms. Erla Christopher. We have no dispute with that. So we commend her for all

of her training and all of the accolades. We too support Ms. Erla Christopher, in terms of this appointment. So we have no dispute with Ms. Christopher taking the particular position. But to debate in the absence of what is occurring with the citizenry, is really Madam Speaker, to—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b) and 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, I would rule on 48(1). In a way, you are trying to circumnavigate the very point, okay, getting back to what is on the ground. I have ruled on that twice when you tried to do it through expedient, okay, when you tried to do it initially. Please be guided accordingly. I am not going to stand on that again.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am guided. Madam Speaker, I would conclude with the simple premise that we on this side, we want to support all measures, which will assist in fighting crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Rambally: So today, we take the position, as we did on the last Friday, in relation to the appointment of two particular officers to the position of Acting DCP, that we support this appointment, this nominee being appointed to the Acting top CoP position.

Madam Speaker, the conclusion is that we cannot ignore the herd of elephants in the room as to what is taking place in terms of crime in our society. So, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b) and 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member, I take it that you have concluded.

Mr. D. Rambally: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Please.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Nomination of Acting Commissioner of Police
Mr. Rambally

2022.12.09

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I know we have several weeks. Maybe we are all in the season of Christmas and, therefore, we are merry. But Christmas also calls us to behave in a particular way of civility, respect. Okay? We are not at the football game here. We are not like some countries get on at football. Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I am on my legs. And Minister of Finance, just as you had asked for my protection twice during the proceedings when you were apparently being disturbed. Okay? I am saying it now, you had been part and parcel of all the disturbance today and your level of merriment is going to the extent that you are not even respecting when I stand. Okay? So now you appear contrite, let us get on with the business. Minister of National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

6.50 p.m.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Madam Speaker, I thank you. I listened very carefully to the remarks issued by the Member for Chaguanas West, and find nothing challenging or worthy of any further commentary from this side and, in those circumstances, with great emphasis, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher to act in the office of Commissioner of Police be approved.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much,

UNREVISED

Adjournment

2022.12.09

Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to next Wednesday, Wednesday the 14th of December at 1.30 p.m. It is the Government's intention at that time, to debate the Scrap Metal Bill, 2022 and take it through all stages, hopefully. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.52 p.m.