

SENATE*Tuesday, January 23, 2024*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Hassel Bacchus and Sen. Damian Lyder, both of whom are out of the country, and Sen. Anil Roberts who is ill.

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from Her Excellency the President Christine Carla Kangaloo, O.R.T.T.:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency CHRISTINE CARLA
KANGALOO, O.R.T.T., President of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/Christine Kangaloo

President.

TO: MR. NDALE YOUNG

WHEREAS Senator the Honourable Hassel Bacchus is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, acting in

UNREVISED

accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, do hereby appoint you, NDALE YOUNG to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from 23rd January, 2024 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator the Honourable Hassel Bacchus.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 22nd day of January, 2024."

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, O.R.T.T., President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/Christine Kangaloo

President.

TO: MR. TIM GOPEESINGH

WHEREAS Senator Damian Lyder is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, acting in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, do hereby appoint you, TIM GOPEESINGH to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from 23rd January, 2024 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Senator Damian Lyder.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 23rd day of January, 2024.”

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency CHRISTINE CARLA
KANGALOO, O.R.T.T., President of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/Christine Kangaloo

President.

TO: MR. COLIN NEIL GOSINE

WHEREAS Senator Anil Roberts is incapable of performing his duties as a
Senator by reason of illness:

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as
aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(b) and section
44(4)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, acting in
accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, do hereby appoint you,
COLIN NEIL GOSINE to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from
23rd January, 2024 and continuing during the illness of Senator Anil Roberts.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 23rd day of January, 2024.”

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AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Ndale Young took and subscribed the Affirmation of Allegiance as required by law.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senators Tim Gopeesingh and Colin Neil Gosine took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

TRIBUTES**(FORMER CHIEF SECRETARY HOCHOY CHARLES)**

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, former Senator and Chief Secretary, Mr. Hochoy Charles, passed away on Sunday, December 31, 2023. I now invite Senators to offer tributes. Sen. Hislop.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Laurence Hislop: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, there is no doubt in any citizen's mind, be it Tobagonian or Trinidadian, who Hochoy Charles was. He was a Tobagonian, first and foremost. The 116 square miles that is Tobago was so dear to his heart that he would fight anyone for it, even those who he considered political allies.

Mr. Charles held no punches and made his feelings known. A fierce proponent and defender of the Tobago House of Assembly and Tobago, Mr. Charles took on anyone who he felt diminished or downplayed the THA or Tobago. The "heavy roller", as he was fondly known, exuded an indomitable spirit when it came to his defence of Tobago and all that is Tobagonian.

He was appointed a Government Senator and Parliamentary Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister on December 06, 1988, during the Third Republican Parliament, as a Member of the National Alliance for Reconstruction, where he was part of the rebuilding of our national security architecture post the attempted

Tributes (Former Chief
Secretary Hochoy Charles)
Sen. Hislop (cont'd)

coup of 1990. Being Tobago's first Chief Secretary from 1996 to 2001, Mr. Charles had the unenviable task of the formation and the operationalizing of the Tobago House of Assembly, as we know it today. Mr. Charles championed the island's call for additional autonomy as only he knew how, with a vibrant vigour that was misunderstood by some, but at the heart of it all was his love and desire for Tobago.

Mr. Charles, though a political opponent, was well respected and gave political advice freely. He even stood with the People's National Movement if only to advance the cause of Tobago. And as he famously said to then Chief Secretary, Orville London, "We will fight together to achieve it"—that is the autonomy of Tobago—"and when we get it, we will fight each other to control it."

Mr. Charles was not only a politician but a long-standing businessman, a husband, a father and a man who loved the land. No matter your political persuasion, Mr. Hochoy Charles must be seen through all his years of public service to the people of his beloved island Tobago, and by extension, all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

From this very Senate Chamber to the Chambers of the Tobago House of Assembly, he loved Tobago more than he loved himself. And on the last day of 2023, we said farewell to a comrade, a fighter, a decisive and resolute Tobagonian. I stand today in this august Chamber, as he once did, a Tobagonian, to extend condolences to his immediate family and extended family, and his host of friends, including all of Tobago and Trinidad. May his memory live on in the legacy of his service to God and country. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. John.

Sen. Jearlean John: Thank you Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. John: I want join my Tobago brother Senator today because today we can join together in paying tribute to an honourable man, Mr. Hochoy Charles, whose passing left us all in a state of virtual shock, as perhaps it was never contemplated that the heavy roller of Tobago, someone so full of life, will one day leave us.

Mr. Hochoy Charles was a tremendous advocate for the rights of the people of Tobago and to self-determination. A fervent Tobago nationalist, Hochoy Charles made the fight for a meaningful self-government his life's work and will always be remembered as a consistent, firm and militant advocate for full and effective autonomy for the people of Tobago. A fierce community activist, Hochoy Charles emerged as Tobago's first Chief Secretary of the THA after the passage of the THA Act of 1996.

Mr. Charles fought tooth and nail for the establishment of the Dispute Resolution Commission to secure what he felt was right for the people of Tobago, through the Assembly, as part of his relentless struggle for self-government for Tobago. He could always be counted upon to give his advice freely, and information whenever requested, or even when you did not ask for it, on the Tobago autonomy issue. As a personal principle, he was selfless, fearless and always willing to assist everyone.

Hochoy Charles served as a Senator in the Third Republican Parliament and was a former Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security, making many valuable contributions again in this very House and in service to the people of this country.

A patriot of extraordinary magnitude, a giant of Tobago whose booming voice sometimes hid a very gentle heart, a man of substance. Tobago has lost a

Tributes (Former Chief
Secretary Hochoy Charles)
Sen. John (cont'd)

23.01.2024

favoured son, a profound thinker and a committed fighter for Tobago's rightful place in our twin-island State and even in the globe, because he saw Tobago as a global player. Today I say in tribute, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

May I take this opportunity to extend my sincere condolences to his bereaved family on his passing, and now that his work here is done, may he have eternal rest in God's loving arms. May his soul rest in eternal peace. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

1.45 p.m.

Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy: Thank you, Mr. President. I first want to take this opportunity to extend New Year greetings to all our Members of this august Chamber and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is my prayer that we will continue doing our part this year to advance the work of Trinidad and Tobago building a better nation.

I stand here honoured, not only to pay tribute to an esteemed visionary Mr. Hochoy Alexander Charles, affectionately known as "the heavy roller", but also to celebrate his life and contribution as a true patriotic powerhouse and a beacon of leadership and advocacy. The words "pioneer" and "political heavyweight" have been used to describe him in his illustrious career. As said before, he was appointed as a Government Senator and Parliamentary Secretary on December the 6th 1988 and served until 1991 during the Third Republican Parliament as a Member of the National Alliance for Reconstruction. He proposed numerous concrete ideas and played an important role in the political aspects of the NAR.

Tributes (Former Chief
Secretary Hochoy Charles)
Sen. Dr, Dillon-Remy (cont'd)

23.01.2024

He went on to serve as the Tobago House of Assembly Chief Secretary and Assemblyman for Moriah/ Parlatuvier from 1996 to the year 2001.

As the inaugural Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, he was largely regarded as one of the main architects of Act 40 of 1996, behind the scenes trying to make sure that we got a new Tobago House of Assembly Act. He played a fundamental role in elevating Tobago's governance by helping to operationalize that Act. He was set to have a thorough knowledge of governing the island and its relationship with the Central Government inside out. Years later, Mr. Charles was the political leader of a party called the Tobago Platform of Truth.

He has been dubbed as an ardent champion of the cause of Tobago. He left an indelible mark as he worked assiduously in promoting Tobago's autonomy, advocating for self-determination and the equality of status promised by the Parliament of 1977. He had a noted goal, to assist Trinidadians in understanding and appreciating the historical role and uniqueness of Tobago. His counterparts indicated that he loved Tobago more than himself and actually during his funeral, which I happened to attend, I heard his family said he even put them second to his duties as a politician in Tobago. He was described as a stalwart and the fighter for the self-government, a walking library, an eternal and ever vigilant fighter for the rights of Tobagonians.

Now, I just want to say that my experience of him was when I went back to Tobago to work as a public servant as Hospital Medical Director at the Scarborough Regional Hospital. He was the Chief Secretary at the time, and it was in fact as a result of his asking my sister, who was then on the board of the Tobago Regional Health Authority, if I did not want to come back to Tobago to work. But, I did go back to Tobago having tried before, and was unsuccessful. And I had the

UNREVISED

Tributes (Former Chief
Secretary Hochoy Charles)
Sen. Dr, Dillon-Remy (cont'd)

experience of working with somebody, even though he was not directly responsible for health, he was the one whom ensured that the Tobago Regional Health Authority got the funding that they needed to change what was going on within the sector, and lots of changes were needed at that time. So, I had the opportunity to work with him and together at that hospital was another person who was a former Independent Senator here, Dr. Victor Wheeler, who was again called back from where he was working at the time in the United Kingdom.

Now, Mr. Charles felt that he had a duty to the people of Tobago to staff the facilities of the hospital with the best qualified medical professionals from Tobago in order to provide the quality medical care. As everybody would remember, we had one hospital it was up the fort and it was very old. But he thought that he had to do something that was different in terms of getting people back. We also know that he went not just in terms of calling people back to Tobago, but he also instituted the programme where he sent people from Tobago to be trained as doctors, engineers, etcetera, to come back to Tobago.

He was indeed a Tobagonian at heart and I would just ask of us as parliamentarians and also, as people of Trinidad and Tobago to make sure that one of his great wish for the autonomy of Tobago is granted because we have an important role to play. So he has gone but he would not be forgotten. To his family who loved him, all condolences be extended to them and may his soul rest in peace. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I too would like to pay tribute to Mr. Hochoy Charles who was a Member of this hon. Senate during the Third Republican Parliament from 1988 to 1991. Not to make light of his senatorial appointment, he

Tributes (Former Chief
Secretary Hochoy Charles)
Mr. President (cont'd)

23.01.2024

was most recognized for his contribution to the political development of our sister isle of Tobago and it is in this capacity that I believe he would most like to be remembered.

Members, it was in the eulogizing of the late Mr. Charles, that he was described as carrying Tobago on his back and truly, a more fitting accolade could not be bestowed. It would therefore be remiss of me if I did not underscore some of his achievements.

Mr. Charles was Tobago's first Chief Secretary and from the very beginning, a passionate advocate for Tobago's autonomy. He was invested in the island's development, and had the unenviable task of putting into effect the voluminous provisions within the Tobago House of Assembly Act in 1996. However, his years engaging the application of the THA Act made him an expert and a walking encyclopedia of legislative knowledge on the said Act and the socioeconomic history and fabric of Tobago.

Hon. Senators, to further demonstrate Mr. Charles' patriotism in recent times, he set aside political differences to make a joint submission with his political counterparts. This submission was closely considered by the joint select committee on the Constitution Amendment Tobago Self-Government Bill, 2020, of which I was a Member in the creation of the Draft Constitution Amendment Tobago Self-Government Bill and the Tobago Island Administration Bill, both of which are still under consideration by the Parliament.

The mark that Hochoy Charles made on the Tobago's political landscape and by extension, our great nation of Trinidad and Tobago will forever be a part of his legacy and our history. Mr. Charles was indeed a larger than life personality, somewhat of a heavy roller as he was fondly called. He will also be remembered

Tributes (Former Chief
Secretary Hochoy Charles)
Mr. President (cont'd)

23.01.2024

as a kind, steadfast and fiercely spiritual man who put God and offering his time and service to others, above all else. I take this opportunity to express sincerest condolences to the Charles family, and pray the Almighty's peace and consolation to them during this time of mourning. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The Senate stood.

Mr. President: May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Senators, I hereby instruct the Clerk to convey our deep condolences and kind sentiments to the family of the late Mr. Hochoy Charles.

TRIBUTE

(Former Prime Minister Mr. Basdeo Panday)

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, former Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday, passed away on Monday, January 1st, 2024. I now invite Members to offer tributes. Dr. Browne.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, it is only fitting that we in this House would join together and pause today to pay tribute to a former parliamentarian, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Senator, Minister of External Affairs, and long standing Member for Couva North, the late Basdeo Panday. Many tributes have already been offered to this great leader and pioneer, including from his beloved daughter Mickela, from his brother Subash and from Her Excellency, herself. Many speakers in the Lower House have already given tribute to Mr. Panday on the record and other parliamentarians who will speak after me this afternoon. However, I wish to take a moment to share some reflections on

UNREVISED

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Mr. Panday on his attributes and what makes him so special and unique in the politics and the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

I remember the first time I met Mr. Panday in the halls of Parliament, as then a very young MP, I encountered a legend whose command and wit made a deep mark on everyone around him. He always commanded attention. He became a Senator in 1972, when some of us were not yet born. And when Mr. Panday became an elected Member of Parliament for the Couva North constituency in 1976, I doubt that he himself could have predicted that he would go on to become the longest serving MP in the history of that seat. It is quite possible that that record will never be broken. It is quite likely that that record will never be broken.

As a founding Member of the National Alliance for Reconstruction, in 1985, and the founder of the United National Congress in 1989, and as a highly influential trade union leader, rooted in the sugar belt of this country, Basdeo Panday was telling this nation all along that he was a force to be reckoned with. He was a man on a mission and he would forever change the course of Trinidad and Tobago's political history and landscape.

In 1995, as this country's first Prime Minister of East Indian descent and practitioner of the Hindu faith, Mr. Panday broke barriers and provided this nation of ours with a powerful reminder that with determination and the right attitude to education and development, a poor child of Trinidad and Tobago can aspire and rise to lead us all. His résumé, his life story and his accomplishments have already been itemized and printed in our newspapers and have been the subject of adoration and analysis. I will not attempt in this brief address to repeat what has been well chronicled and very recently chronicled.

2.00 p.m.

UNREVISED

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne (cont'd)

23.01.2024

What I can say is that there has always been a certain class and calibre to the man, that even his worst detractors would never ever deny. Even his worst detractors could never deny his class and calibre. Wit, intelligence and a vivid unforgettable communication style were his calling cards in every situation. He could be incisive without being insulting. He could be memorable without being loud. He could make a point without making an enemy. One of his favourite sayings was: “Politics is a civilized substitute for war.” And he never forgot to be civilized.

Basdeo Panday had the ability to fight you in the trenches without descending into the gutter. He had, of all the politicians I have ever met in my life, the keenest sense of occasion. He was an expert on time and place and had the unswerving ability to recognize the moment and seize the moment. He did so time and time again. Worst yet, if there was a microphone or a camera present, oh boy. So whether it was at a reunion, at his alma mater, Presentation College, San Fernando, or on his legs in a contribution in a debate in the Parliament, or on a platform with a red beret fighting for the party that he created, or on the stage at Brian Lara’s fete, Basdeo Panday would seize the moment and steal the show.

For me, one of Basdeo Panday’s defining attributes was the way in which he used his words. It was a gift. He had the uncanny ability to say quotable things, memorable things, iconic things, iconic statements, to create and use terms of phrases that will remain with us forever. Maybe this was enhanced by his background in theatre and film, and his degree in drama from the London School of Dramatic Art. But Basdeo Panday could tell you a simple “good morning” and you would feel to write it down and keep it with you forever. That is the man.

And in this beloved Parliament, when he was on his legs, he had the power to say, “Mr. Speaker,” and pause and look across the aisle with his wide smile, and

UNREVISED

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne (cont'd)

23.01.2024

I suspect the reporters would sit up and pay attention because you just knew that the next thing he would say would be headline-worthy and front-page worthy and memorable. He made it look easy, he made it look natural. Mr. President, these are not attributes that you can buy in a store or pretend to have. He had them. He never felt like a reluctant participant in the political process. He always seemed to enjoy his calling in life.

And the last defining characteristic of Basdeo Panday that I would wish to share in this tribute is his love for his family, his beloved and dedicated and devoted wife, Oma, who is now adjusting to a world in which her centre of gravity and north star has been removed. And what about his beloved daughters, Mickela, who is the most publicly accomplished of the siblings, and his other daughters, who are also amazing and highly accomplished professionals in his legacy?

2.05 p.m.

He would be so proud of Mickela's dignity and comportment through the funeral planning and throughout the rights and processes of saying goodbye. This nation is hard on its leaders. This nation is very hard on its leaders. We only soften our tone and express appreciation when they are no longer available for service; that has to change, Mr. President. I am grateful that the Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, assigned me to be part of the process through which the Panday family and Trinidad and Tobago were able to say goodbye to Basdeo Panday with reverence and due respect.

Right there in south Trinidad the nation witnessed and participated in a state funeral and a cremation with a difference; our first under Hindu rights. In that ceremony, Basdeo Panday was able to teach our society yet another important lesson, the beauty and nobility of the Hindu tradition and rights of saying goodbye

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne (cont'd)

23.01.2024

to a loved one—the beauty and nobility of the Hindu tradition and rights of saying goodbye to a loved one. The peace, the dignity, the comfort and the poignant richness of the Hindu tradition was elevated for our entire society to see.

The nation came together in death and I am certain that he would want us to stay together in life. That would be the best tribute to anyone, for anyone, who lived a life of service for Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. President, in so doing, we might in turn inspire the next generation of children, especially those of humble background, like Basdeo Panday, who might one day aspire and rise to build a better nation. Sincere condolences to his family who gifted him to us all. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, Basdeo Panday.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, today we celebrate the life of a giant of history who lived an ordinary life and provided extraordinary public service to the people of our beloved twin-island Republic. The late and great Basdeo Panday was not only the founding father of the United National Congress, but he was also a former lawyer, economist, trade unionist, Member of Parliament for Couva North, Senator, actor, and of course, Mr. President, a former distinguished and illustrious Prime Minister.

Basdeo Panday's life was firmly anchored on fundamental moral, and ethical principles and noble values that were both timeless and boundless. He was a man of truth, honesty, integrity, but like anyone else, he had his ups and downs. I remembered being at Rienzi Complex on that fateful evening when we had to take him to the Couva Police Station where he was arrested and charged on false charges; that is now history. I was also present at the Office of the Leader of the

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Opposition, at 11 Charles Street, when he was handcuffed by the police, again, on charges that he eventually was able—the court was able to throw out, Mr. President. I remember these things.

So, Mr. President, he served his country with distinction. Our fallen hero, our proverbial knight in shining armour was committed to national unity, social justice, equal opportunity, and social inclusion. He used his phenomenal acumen for doing good to improve the quality of life and standard of living of the working class, the marginalized and impoverished citizens of our country. The late and great Basdeo Panday was truly and genuinely committed to equality and unity as manifested in the following actions that he took, Mr. President.

He lifted the life ban on Kwame Ture, formerly Stokely Carmichael, which was imposed by the then Eric Williams' PNM regime. He granted a public holiday to the Shouter Baptists in 1996. He introduced the Orisa Marriage Act, making Orisa marriages legal for the first time. Mr. President, the late and great Basdeo Panday brought in the sunshine of transparency and lifted the dark and menacing cloak of secrecy and injustice through the Equal Opportunity Act, Freedom of Information Act, Integrity in Public Life Act, the Judicial Review Act, and the Constitution (Amdt.) Act, which introduced, under section 66 of our Constitution, the committee system that we currently enjoy.

As a Prime Minister, former; as a trade union leader, former; and a champion of the working class, Mr. President, he introduced the National Minimum Wage Act, the Maternity Protection Act for our women who were being dismissed by evil employers upon becoming pregnant, without pay. He introduced pension rights for all public officers with 10 years and/or more service. He increased old age pension from \$356 to \$620 on three consecutive occasions, '97,

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

'98 and '99. Mr. President, what is even more noteworthy, he only had a budget of \$12 billion.

Mr. President, Mr. Panday, the honourable, late and great, through the State, contributed through the Government the Bennett Farm, which is now known, Mr. President, if you have been to south, as Palmiste Park. That was the Bennett Farms. Mr. Basdeo Panday built three stadiums and renovated a fourth. Our fallen comrade granted lands to Pan Trinbago in Trincity, built scores of primary schools, secondary schools, and introduced the Dollar-for-Dollar system to help poor people to attain their educational ambitions. In so doing, Mr. President, it helped to set them on the road to economic and social self-sufficiency and meaningful economic independence.

Mr. President, the catalogue of achievements and accomplishments of this simple and honourable working-class fighter and warrior, a long—in fact, too long. Why to continue listing his achievements, it will take me weeks; I would not do that. Mr. President, I want to indicate that Mr. Panday will forever remain a legend, an icon, a titan, a master fighter and an unparalleled warrior in the hearts, minds and souls of our peoples, both at home and abroad. He has been called home by his maker for his eternal reward. Gone but will never be forgotten for his sterling and extraordinary contributions to the growth and development of our beloved twin island republic state.

Mr. President, I say to the hon. Basdeo Panday, wherever you are, sleep well. The great man Basdeo Panday was, as my colleague said earlier, Minister Browne, he exemplified class, humility and simplicity, whilst possessing great wisdom. Mr. President, Basdeo Panday now belongs to the ages, truly our own “millennium man”.

UNREVISED

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

2.20 p.m.

Again, as was said, he was a quintessential family man, Mr. President, sharp, razor sharp, witty. Mr. President, I cannot help but share with you all of it.

I remembered distinctly a gentleman in conversation with Mr. Panday, Mr. President, and he said, “Mr. Panday, you seem to be getting greyer, more grey, more grey. Is that a sign of ageing?” Mr. Panday immediately responded, he said, “Sir, you have it all wrong. What you describe as greying or getting older or getting more grey, in other countries, it is called—that greying that you are talking about is known as platinum gold in many other countries. So where you think is grey, no, it is not grey, platinum gold.”

Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to extend our deepest and sincerest condolences to the Pandays, to Oma in particular and his daughters—four daughters, and all of his relatives, friends and associates. May his great soul rest, wherever it is, in perpetual peace and rise in eternal glory. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Teemal.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Deeroop Teemal: Mr. President, we bid farewell to a distinguished statesman, the former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Basdeo Panday. A towering figure in the political landscape of our twin-island nation, Mr. Panday’s recent passing leaves behind an indelible mark on the history and development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Basdeo Panday, born on May 25, 1933, dedicated his life to public service and the betterment of his fellow citizens. His journey from a humble beginning,

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. Teemal (cont'd)

23.01.2024

rooted in poverty, to the highest office in the land, exemplified a life of resilience, determination and unwavering commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, rooted in a fighting spirit for what he believed.

His political career spans several decades, marked by numerous accomplishments and milestones and, of course, most notably, he served as Prime Minister from 1995 to 2001, becoming the first person of East Indian descent to hold this esteemed position in our country. His leadership during this period was characterized by a vision of inclusivity, economic development and social justice. He saw education as a means to escape poverty and his administration prioritized initiatives aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of their background or socio-economic status.

Basdeo Panday had his own unique style and personality, and we heard from the hon. Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs details of the unique and outstanding personality of the gentleman. We would remember his sharp tongue, witty remarks, keen sense of humour, and what was considered by some to be outrageous and controversial statements at times. But above all, he will be remembered for his unwavering commitment to fostering unity in a diverse and multicultural society. He consistently emphasized the importance of national unity. He recognized the richness of Trinidad and Tobago's cultural tapestry and believed that harnessing this diversity would propel the nation forward. It can be said that his vision of a united Trinidad and Tobago was not merely a political slogan but a heartfelt commitment to fostering a nation in which all citizens proudly could call themselves Trinbagonians.

From the heydays of the trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago, and the cut and thrust of local politics, Basdeo Panday transitioned to Prime

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. Teemal (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Ministership with an aplomb and statesmanship that surprised many. His magnanimity at times diffused critical political stand-offs that had the potential to disrupt national peace and harmony. He was a true patriot and this permeated his entire career in public service. His unwavering love for Trinidad and Tobago went beyond political boundaries, showcasing a deep-seated commitment to the well-being and prosperity of the nation and its people. His policies and initiatives were not just about governance, they were expressions of a profound belief in the potential of the country and its diverse population.

Basdeo Panday readily embraced cultural diversity and was prominently visible at all cultural events. He had a fondness for local Indian classical singing, or Taan singing, and it was only fitting on his death, in his memory, that a night of Taan singing was organized by his friends and followers in South Oropouche.

Basdeo Panday's impact on the trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago was profound as well as enduring. His involvement in trade unionism started in the 1960s and culminated in his role as the President General of the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union, where he became a prominent advocate and a fighter for workers' rights, collective bargaining and social justice. His service in the trade union movement laid the groundwork for his later political career and left an indelible mark on the relationship between labour and government in Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the most notable contributions of Basdeo Panday to the trade union movement was his role in the successful negotiations for improved wages and working conditions for sugar workers. His ability to engage in effective dialogue with employers and government officials showcased his skills as a negotiator and his dedication to addressing the concerns of the working class. Upon transitioning

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. Teemal (cont'd)

23.01.2024

to politics, Basdeo Panday continued to be a vocal advocate for workers' rights. As the leader of the United Labour Front and later, the United National Congress, he bore the concerns of the working class to the forefront of national discourse.

Upon assuming the role of Prime Minister in 1995, Basdeo Panday maintained his ties to the labour movement and incorporated labour leaders in his Government with the intention of implementing policies aimed at addressing the needs of workers, through the strengthening of labour laws. His transition from trade union leader and political figure to Prime Minister did not stop his commitment to addressing the concerns of the labour force and ensuring that their voices were heard in the corridors of power.

In the true spirit of enunciation outlined by Bhagwan Krishna in Bhagavad Gita, Basdeo Panday's post-retirement years were marked by his ability to let go. So even in his post-retirement years, there was a message for the nation. He remained a true adherent to the Hindu tradition and celebrated his 90th birthday with a grand satsang at the Divali Nagar site. Rather than clinging to the trappings of power, Basdeo Panday embraced a role as an elder statesman by a commitment to mentorship and civic engagement while still devoting time to his beloved family. He became a source of wisdom and guidance, offering his experiences and his knowledge freely to those who sought his counsel. He believed in happiness being the goal of life and lived his life in full embrace of this belief.

He often spoke of the fact that he had reached a point in his life in which he did not consider anyone as his enemy. He would often be seen at Ceremonial Openings of Parliament and other national functions, bringing his special charisma and interacting equally with everyone, irrespective of their status and political affiliations. His letting go should not be seen as a detachment from public life but

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Sen. Teemal (cont'd)

23.01.2024

a redefinition of his role in service of the nation. Basdeo Panday remained involved in community projects and philanthropic activities, channelling his energy into areas where his expertise would make an impact. His ability to successfully transition the relinquishing power and authority and continue a life of service and self-fulfilment showcases a commitment to a legacy that extended beyond political office.

As we mourn the loss of this eminent leader, let us also celebrate the life and accomplishments of Basdeo Panday. His legacy lives on in the hearts of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and his contributions would continue to shape the trajectory of this nation for generations to come.

On behalf of the Independent Senators, we hope that his family and loved ones find solace in the knowledge that his impact on our nation will not be easily measured and his memory will forever be etched in the annals of our history. May his soul find moksha or become self-realized. Om Sadgati.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I too would like to pay tribute to Mr. Basdeo Panday, a true statesman in every sense of the word. Mr. Panday commenced his illustrious parliamentary career in 1972, as an Opposition Senator, under the Democratic Labour Party in the Third Republican Parliament. Mr. Panday will be remembered as a political giant and a vanguard of democracy.

Affectionately referred to as the “Silver Fox” by the nation, he is also remembered for his charm, eloquence and charisma. Mr. Panday’s wit was sharp without a doubt. However, the man held such a firm command of the English language that he could turn a phrase to make one feel so uncomfortable and yet so

Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Mr. President (cont'd)

23.01.2024

comfortable at the same time, a skill that no other has been able to successfully replicate to this day.

Hon. Senators, Mr. Panday's contributions to the Parliament are numerous and I would like to take the time to recount some of them. Mr. Basdeo Panday's 38-year-long parliamentary career spanned multiple Republican Parliaments. He was the founder and pioneer of the United National Congress. He served as Opposition Leader and perhaps of greater significance was the service that he gave to Trinidad and Tobago as Prime Minister from 1995 to 2000. As a Member of Parliament, Mr. Panday represented both the constituencies of Couva North and Couva South. Within that time, Mr. Panday held ministerial portfolios such as the Minister of External Affairs, International Marketing and Tourism; the Minister of External Affairs and International Trade; and the Minister of National Security, a post which he held concurrently with that of Prime Minister.

The mark Mr. Panday left on this country is undeniably profound. Not only did he advocate for labour rights and the trade union movement but he passionately defended education and introduced a number of measures that sought to improve the delivery of education to our nation's youth. Two such initiatives that come to mind were the dollar-for-dollar programme and the securing of placements for each candidate of the Common Entrance Examination, now the Secondary Entrance Assessment. He will also be remembered for his progressive leadership in his establishing of the Spiritual Baptist public holiday in 1996, as well as the promotion of women to high offices in the political arena, among many other significant milestones and achievements.

2.35 p.m.

I said to his family, and I would like to now share with this august Chamber

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Tribute (Former Prime Minister
Mr. Panday)
Mr. President (cont'd)

23.01.2024

that there is no story of Trinidad and Tobago without the mention of stalwarts like Mr. Basdeo Panday. He stood as a lion among a generation of statesmen. I wish to take this opportunity to express my deepest admiration and respect for Mr. Panday's patriotism and achievements.

I would also like to yet again extend sincerest condolences to the Pandays during their time of bereavement. On behalf of myself, my family and all the Members of the Senate gathered here today, I pray that the Almighty continues to grant them strength and peace during this difficult time. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The Senate stood.

Mr. President: May his soul rest in peace.

Hon. Senators, I hereby instruct the Clerk to convey our deep condolences and kind sentiments to the family of the late former Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday.

CONDOLENCES

(MR. FAZAL KARIM)

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, former Senator and Minister and of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East, Mr. Fazal Karim passed away on Monday, January 22nd, 2024. I now invite Members to offer tributes. Mr. Vice-President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Muhummad Yunus Ibrahim: Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity in being able to say a few words on a true patriot and humble servant of Trinidad and Tobago, a Muslim brother of mine who I had the pleasure to work with on more than one occasion, and for this I say [*Arabic spoken*] and that

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simply means, “verily from Allah we belong and to Him is our eventual and final return”. God has taken what belongs to Him, but we must remember his memory and we must remember the legacy and the manner in which the fine gentleman did his work in the service to mankind in this great nation of ours.

Mr. President, when I think of Mr. Fazal Karim, I immediately recall his gentle nature. He was blessed with a countenance that was warm and welcoming and he was a man of great composure and resource. In my time as the Supermarket Association president and working with him in developing nation standards and national standards while he was the chair of the NTA, and further at that point in time there was a movement to create our national standards to the CSME standards, the poise in which Mr. Karim not only welcomed, worked, took every task to heart and what he delivered in subsequent meetings, his level of efficiency was almost second to none.

In fact, with my late colleague, Fazal, it was very difficult to distinguish between his being a gentle and a kind man or a gentleman. And I say gentleman in its truest sense because Fazal displayed a level of sensitivity, impeccable manners and most of all superior intelligence. If you think about it, Mr. President, he had the inherent qualities of a good leader, he was very clear in his purpose but he did not need to be seen or heard to achieve it or as we say, you do not need to toot your horn.

Fazal’s agility and poise and patience made him very approachable by those who he worked with and whom he worked for. This he extended to all during his tenure here at the Parliament where he served as a Member of Parliament in the Senate in the Tenth Session from 2010 to 2015 as a Senator, and the Minister of Tertiary Education, and in the Eleventh Parliament as an Opposition MP for Chaguanas East. He was affable and engaging with staff and always ready with a

smile and a warm greeting. He was a consummate gentleman with all Members no matter of the political divide. What amazed me the most is that he was always opened to the ideas and the concerns of others, and he usually moved the discussion forward no matter how difficult the stumbling block may have been just to achieve the best outcome for the nation and for all those concerned. This led him to contribute to many Bills, to very diverse Bills and Motions, pointedly anything related to education or the future of our youth.

You know, when a significant member of our society has passed you only realize how many lives they have served and touched in their passing. It just so happens that yesterday I was having a conversation with an individual who was from his village in Carapichaima, and in that interaction they had, Mr. Fazal Karim was a teacher and a community member, and because of a false accusation that the students went through because of a claim against their parent, those students were put out of a particular school. But his community and his fight for justice and equality, he ensured that he stayed day by day and visited the family and he did what he had to do long before becoming a Minister, long before this time. And he ensured that the students were reintegrated into that school and they had nothing against their record because he was a gentleman who believed in the fight for justice and for the fight for what was right. Education was one of his biggest passions in how he dealt with it and he did not want anyone to be devoid of having a proper education.

It is no wonder that Fazal Karim bettered the lives of people from so many walks of life in so many different arenas.

Today, I take the time to remember the man as he stood here, a true representative of the people, and I would like to extend sincerest of condolences to his family and those bereaved who he has left behind, for he has left an indelible

mark on the nation in the way he had served and an example of how to serve with great efficiency, poise and character. Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Gopeesingh.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh: Mr. President and parliamentary colleagues permit me first of all, it is a distinct honour and privilege for me personally to be present today in this august Chamber when honourable tributes have been paid to former Prime Minister Mr. Basdeo Panday, a political guru to hundreds, but I am to speak now about my friend and colleague for over 30 years.

So, Mr. President, and colleagues, it is with deep sadness that I rise to pay tribute to truly a remarkable educator and public servant Mr. Fazal Karim who sadly passed away yesterday after a battle with cancer for 10 years. During his religious ceremony this morning when many tributes were paid to this remarkable man, his wife Judy spoke about his fight for over 10 years with this battle and eventually succumbed.

Indeed Trinidad and Tobago has lost a model citizen as stated by Mr. Vice-President, Dr. Yunus Ibrahim, just a while ago. A model citizen who selflessly devoted his life in service to God and his people and his country. Fazal Karim was a long-standing member of the UNC as Sen. Mark and many others and sat in this esteemed Chamber from 2010 to 2015, when he served as Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training in the People's Partnership Government under the stewardship of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, but his political and public service career went back decades before.

Fazal Karim was born and bred in the sugar belt and attended political meetings of the late Democratic Labour Party founder, Dr. Rudranath Capildeo as

a young boy. In fact, his first job was a newspaper delivery boy for the *Torch* newspaper, which was the DLP's official newspaper in the '60s. He was always a brilliant student, attended Presentation College and, of course, UWI after which he became a secondary teacher.

His love for educating our nation's students and his core belief that education was our nation's ticket to success and progress would have inspired him to enter active politics in the 1990s to further this noble calling, and that is when I personally came into contact with Fazal Karim.

Fazal Karim had a particular love for engendering and developing the skills of our nation's students and youths, perhaps because while he was academically minded his parents were skills workers. His father, an electrician in the sugar industry and his mother, a needlework teacher. So he always focused on vocational and skills training becoming the CEO of YTEPP in 1997 to 1999, and CEO of the National Training Agency, 1999 to 2007. When he served as Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training he made it his mission to elevate the status and recognition for vocational and technical schools and skills and pioneered the Caribbean Vocational Qualification through CXC called the CVQ 1 and 2, and went on to pioneer that throughout the wider Caribbean in his role as Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, and that became a foundational stone for students who were not strongly academically minded, but went on to skills training and got the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications examination certificate.

He worked on bringing about workforce assessment centres where skilled personnel throughout the country were able to obtain certificates in their various skills, and he pioneered many other innovative initiatives to provide widespread access to vocational education and training. He is credited with having removed barriers to access for educational and career advancement, and making

opportunities for learning widely available through his expansion of the GATE programme. Of course, his stint in the UWI, UTT, COSTAATT, MIC, NESC and YTEPP.

2.50 p.m.

As an administrator, and an educator, and community activist, Fazal undoubtedly had a positive impact and influence on thousands of citizens and young ones across the decades, making him perennially popular and beloved among the ordinary people of the country, for he truly was the man who walked with kings but never lost the common touch.

He was also very devoted to his Muslim faith and his family. And today UWI had a number of tributes for members of his family at his funeral service this morning; tremendous tributes. The members of his family were ultimately the centre of his world, and he had a very expansive family.

Truly, the country has lost one of its most faithful, dedicated and inspiring patriots, and I consider it an immense privilege to have worked alongside and known this great man professionally and personally as a colleague and a dear friend for over three decades, as many of us on this side have been.

As I express my deepest condolences to his family—his wife, Judy, particularly—his family, his daughters, his son and loved ones, I urge all to remember that he lived a life of tremendous accomplishments, where his Muslim faith was his nourishment, his passion for the people was his shelter, and his wisdom and compassion were the lights that guided him in all did. His legacy will therefore endure for generations.

May his family and loved ones find comfort in this time of grief, which we all share, and may his soul rest in eternal peace.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Condolences (Mr. F. Karim)
Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Richards.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Paul Richards: Thank you, Mr. President. It is my honour and privilege to bring greetings and condolences to the family of the late Minister, Fazal Karim, on behalf of the Members of the Independent bench. I thank his daughter, Ria Karim, providing some of the information that I will be using.

The name “Fazal Karim” is synonymous with integrity, good character, honesty, purpose, intellect. He was a man of service and a man of faith. While he has left this earthly realm just yesterday, his good name remains. He was a good man, he was a good person. Fazal was the epitome of the servant of the people, dedicating his entire life to empowering citizens of all ages through education and skills training.

He believed in education, he believed in skills training. He was especially passionate about elevating the status and recognition of vocational skills and worked tirelessly towards the parity of esteem of that sector. He believed in the power of tech/voc in helping the nation to move forward, envisioning and pioneering the Caribbean Vocational Qualification, or CVQ, through CXC, the Workforce Assessment Centres, and many other innovative initiatives to provide widespread access to vocational educational training. He believed that tech/voc and vocational qualifications and training could stand side by side with traditional academics and provide the nexus for the country to move forward in very many different sectors.

As an administrator, an educator, a community activist, he positively impacted the lives of tens of thousands, and even more of people across the country and the region, by bringing together and standardizing CVQ qualifications, constantly creating new programmes and projects to help people find pathways to

employment, advancement, independence and self-sustainability, even while serving as an MP in the Opposition.

Fazal Karim has left an indelible mark of the lives, hearts and souls of our nation's children, and young people, and young adults, having removed many different barriers to access to education and career advancement, and making opportunities for learning widely available through the expansion of GATE. He also associated with UWI, St Augustine campus, and across the region; the University of Trinidad and Tobago; COSTAATT; MIC; NESC; and YTEPP, where he served as CEO for a period of time.

He served as Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training from May 2010 to September 2015; a Member of Parliament for the constituency of Chaguanas East from September 2015 to August 2020; CEO of the National Training Agency, 1999 to 2007; CEO of YTEPP from 1997 to 1999; a director and board member of several state agencies; coordinator of UWI's School of Continuing Studies; a lecturer; an educator and teacher for many years.

As you see, it is a common thread through all his career advancement. It was education that he thought was extremely important in everyone's life and he sought to democratize the access to education to the entire country and, in fact, beyond through the Caribbean because he worked with several other Caribbean islands in that stead.

2.55 p.m.

He served as the right hand of former Prime Minister, the late Basdeo Panday, and the General Secretary of the United National Congress from 2000 to 2010, as well as a Senator and Minister in the Cabinet of Prime Minister, the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC. He was truly a man of the people remembered fondly by so many who would see him in the market as an ordinary citizen, while a Member of

the Opposition, buying produce on weekends, shopping in grocery stores, hardwares, and visiting and participating in community events on a regular basis, and cultural event. He embraced people of all religions, all ethnicities, all economic levels, and remained humble, accessible and a kind man despite his position or place at any stage in his life. As far as Fazal Karim was concerned, his greatest love and accomplishment was his family. He was an adoring and dedicated husband, father, father-in-law and grandfather, and for him, no task was too great for his beloved family who loved him endlessly and stayed by his side until the very end.

He was born on the 8th of October, 1953, and left this realm yesterday, the 22nd of January, 2024. There is an old saying, the only thing you leave behind when you leave this earth is your name, so make sure you do all you can to preserve your good name, and Fazal Karim accomplished that in every word and deed. On behalf of Members of the Independent Bench I would like to send our deepest condolences to his wife of 47 years, Apostle Dr. Judy Karim, his children, Rhonda, Ria and Rhion; his son-in-law Dr. Colin Samuel; his daughter-in-law Zita Karim; and his grandchildren, Jordan, Christen, Christopher-Reign, Victoria and Ethan-John.

I will end like I started, Fazal Karim despite his many accomplishments, if you knew him at all, would like to just be remembered as a family man, a man of faith, a good man, and a good person. May I soul rest in eternal peace.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I too would like to pay tribute to Mr. Fazal Karim who served as a Member of the Senate in the Tenth Republican Parliament. Mr. Karim was a fierce advocate for education and a latent potential of skill enhancement. It is no coincidence, therefore, that he held the portfolio of Minister

of Tertiary Education throughout his appointment as a Senator from May 2010 to June 2015.

Mr. Karim was vested in promoting knowledge as a means of advancement and developing the education sector, and showed his interest via his contributions to the Motion on the GATE programme, and as a Member of the Special Select Committees on the University of the Southern Caribbean Incorporation Bill, 2012, as well as the Beauty Services of Trinidad and Tobago Incorporation Bill, 2014. Hon. Members, former Sen. Karim was focused on adding value to those areas in which he wish to leave an impression, and it is unsurprising that education is the common thread uniting them. It is reflected in his professional achievements, such as his role in securing World Bank Project Financing for the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, and in the various portfolios he has held in major educational institutions such as the University of the West Indies, and in the consultancy projects he undertook thereafter. Alongside the service and orientation towards community life Mr. Fazal Karim's accomplishments as an educator and learning advocate has become a cornerstone of his legacy for which he will always be remembered.

I take this opportunity to express my sincerest condolences to the Karim family and pray that the Almighty's peace and consolation be with them during this period of mourning. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The Senate stood.

Mr. President: May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Senators, I hereby instruct the Clerk to convey our deep condolences and our kind sentiments to the family of the late Mr. Fazal Karim.

PAPERS LAID

1. Criminal Procedure Rules, 2023. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC)*]
2. Annual Report of the Anti-Terrorism Unit, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs for the period 2022 to 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC*]
3. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs to the Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs on a follow-up inquiry into the accessibility and quality of legal representation provided by the State with specific focus on the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority and the Public Defenders' Office. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Non-Receipt of Financial Statements of the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2012. [*The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne)*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Non-Receipt of Financial Statements of the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Non-Receipt of Financial Statements of the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2014. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

- for the financial year ended September 30, 2019. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
7. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2010 to September 2011. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
 8. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2011 to September 2012. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
 9. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for period October 2012 to September 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
 10. Annual Report on the Exercise of Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2013 to September 2014. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
 11. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2014 to September 2015. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
 12. Minimum Wages (Amendment) Order, 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
 13. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour to the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of the state of technical or vocational programmes and their contribution to achieving the development goals of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]

14. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Land Settlement Agency for the financial year ended September 30, 2012. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
15. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Land Settlement Agency for the financial year ended September 30, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
16. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
17. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2014. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
18. Report on the Operations of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago and the Audited Financial Statements for the year ended June 30, 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

National Security

Criminal Justice System in Trinidad and Tobago

Sen. Dr. Paul Richards: Mr. President. I have the honour to present the following report:

First Report of the Joint Select Committee on National Security, Fourth Session (2023/2024) of the Twelfth Parliament on an inquiry into the Criminal Justice System in Trinidad and Tobago to determine strategies to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. President, I am pleased to indicate that the Government is prepared to respond to questions on the Order Paper. Question No. 11, question No. 13—to which the Ministry of Education is very graciously present—question No. 14, question No. 15. And for written response, all the questions with the exception of question No. 54 for written response, to which we seek a two-week deferral. Thank you.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, the deferral sought by the Leader of Government Business is so granted. Sen. Mark.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**Rental/Lease of Buildings and Office Spaces by the State****(Details of)**

52. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Public Administration:

With respect to the buildings and office spaces rented/leased by the State as at September 30, 2023, can the Minister provide the following:

- (i) the addresses and locations of the buildings and office spaces that were/are being rented/leased;
- (ii) the names and addresses of the owners of the buildings or office spaces;
- (iii) the purpose for which the buildings or office spaces were/are being rented;
- (iv) the cost per month to rent/lease each building or office space;
- (v) the date on which each rental/lease agreement was entered into;
- (vi) the period of each rental/lease agreement;

- (vii) whether said properties are vacant, fully-occupied, partially-occupied or unoccupied; and
- (viii) what are Government's plans to reduce its property rental costs in the immediate future?

TT \$17B in Additional Energy Revenue Stemming from Negotiations

(Can the Minister provide the information)

- 56. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: With reference to the \$TT 17B in additional energy revenue stemming from negotiations referenced by the Minister at a sitting of the Senate on November 24th 2023, can the Minister provide the following information:
- (i) when was this \$TT 17B received and under which head is this information listed in the Estimates of Revenue;
 - (ii) what Companies paid this \$TT 17B;
 - (iii) what contracts were re-negotiated by the Government to effect this additional income;
 - (iv) with reference to (c) when were these contracts renegotiated and what companies were involved in these negotiations; and
 - (v) the names of persons who represented the Government of Trinidad and Tobago or its agencies in these negotiations?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL QUESTIONS TO ANSWERS

Automated Immigration Kiosks - Piarco International Airport

(Details of)

- 11. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

As regard the status of the automated immigration kiosks that were installed at the Piarco International Airport, can the Minister advice as to the following:

- (i) which Government agency is responsible for the operation and maintenance of said kiosks;
- (ii) what is the quantum of money spent on the kiosks as at August 31, 2023;
- (iii) what are the reason(s) for the failure to operationalize the kiosks;
- (iv) what is the timeline for the operationalization of the kiosks; and
- (v) whether the Government intends to increase the number of kiosks in the short-term.

Mr. President: The Minister of Works and Transport.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Mr. President, the Senate should be aware that the automated Immigration kiosks at the Piarco International Airport are the subject of active litigation between the equipment provider and the Airport Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. This matter is therefore, sub judice and cannot be commented on in this forum. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, I would like your ruling on this matter. A matter that is before a judge as opposed to a jury cannot be used to deny the public transparency and accountability. If this matter was before a judge and jury I could understand the point that the Minister is making. But it is rather loose for anyone to come here and simply invoke a Standing Order and say it is sub judice. It is upon you, it rests upon you as our Presiding Officer, to so examine that particular

matter, to determine whether the comity between the Judiciary and our Legislature is going to be infringed or violated, if the answers to these questions are given to this honourable Senate. So I call on you, Sir, to rule on this matter and to guide us, because this thing is becoming a bit regular now with the Government.

Mr. President: Okay. So, Sen. Mark the procedure as we have it, that we have followed on several occasions, the question is on the Order Paper, it has been asked, and the Minister answered the question as he saw fit to do so. If you have any supplementals, I invite you to ask them now.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the Minister whether he can provide this Senate with any appreciation of the length of time this matter will be before the courts? First of all, is there a time frame that he can provide to this Senate as to when this matter would be concluded so that we can get answers from him?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. President, I think it is public knowledge that the Ministry of Works and Transport has no control over the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago and as such we cannot determine the time that a case will take to be adjudicated on.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Can the Minister indicate whether this matter involving Novo Technology and the Airports Authority involving some \$300million in a contract that they have voided, they have voided eh, not avoided, made almost in effect—

Mr. President: A question.

Sen. Mark: Yes, I am asking a question.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark just—

Sen. Mark: I am asking a question, Sir. Mr. President, I am asking a question. Can the Minister indicate to this Parliament whether this matter has been the subject of an investigation by the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago as

well—

Mr. President: Sen. Mark that question does not arise. Next question on your supplemental.

3.10 p.m.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, can the Minister indicate what were some of the factors that led the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to refer this matter to the judiciary? Can the Minister advise?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. President, I think Sen. Mark is really looking for a question. My original answer stands, this matter is sub judice—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—and I am not in a position to answer it in this forum. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, final supplemental.

Sen. Mark: I have one more?

Mr. President: You are asking for a supplemental or are you moving on to the next question?

Sen. Mark: No, I am asking a supplemental. I want to ask the hon. Minister, whether he can share with this honourable Senate whether the Government has decided to take this matter to the court owing to the fact that the company that they had favoured to get this particular contract obviously was not successful.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, that is sounding very much like a statement. Do you have a question, an actual question?

Sen. Mark: Yeah. I am asking the hon. Minister, can he explain to this Parliament the basis for the Government's action as it relates to this decision taken by it? What is the basis for it?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. President, for the third time I would repeat this matter is sub judice and this is not the forum for me to be commenting on it. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, next question on the Order Paper.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: We will take it on the platform when you call your snap election.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: “Eh? Ent you all have a—”

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, Sen. Mark, have a seat, have a seat. So that question is done. You have asked your supplemental we move on to the next question on the Order Paper. Please do so.

Sen. Mark: I am just saying, Mr. President, I know you would not be taking part in the snap election, okay.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, may I address you? Would you allow me?

Mr. President: Yeah, yeah.

Sen. Mark: Thank you.

UWI Open Campus Financial Difficulties

(Details of)

13. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Given the financial difficulties facing the UWI Open Campus, can the Minister advise as to the following:

- (i) what are the reason(s) for the financial challenges being faced;
- and

- (ii) what steps, if any, are being taken to assist the UWI Open Campus?

Mr. President: Minister of Education.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the Open Campus has advised the Ministry of Education that the main reason for the financial challenges currently being experienced lies in the funding model with which the campus was established.

The Open Campus was formally launched in July 2008, with a funding model that assumed 35 per cent financial contributions from the 17 contributing governments of the University of the West Indies and 65 per cent generated from student tuition fees and entrepreneurial activities. No dedicated seed funding was allocated by the UWI or the contributing governments for the newly established Campus. Instead the assets and liabilities of the entities that were amalgamated to form the Open Campus were transferred to this new Campus. Without the seed funding, the cost of operating the Campus exceeded total revenues earned by it year over year, hence the unpaid obligations kept climbing as the years progressed.

The Open Campus further advised that over the years there have been deficits in both anticipated revenue streams. The Open Campus has stated that it simply does not generate sufficient revenue from tuition fees and this matter has been signposted as a major contributor to the continuing cash flow concern. The campus management has stated that the Open Campus was established to be a self-financing enterprise but the fees were never set at a level that took this into consideration. The campus survives simply by means of loan assistance from other campuses, loans from financial institutions or by limited grant funding coupled with its revenue generating programmes and projects.

Mr. President, it should be noted that the Open Campus in recognizing its financial situation has conceptualized and started to implement several measures to improve the financial sustainability of the Campus. One: revenue generation. The UWI plans to transition the Open Campus to the Global Campus, and it has started, to leverage the UWI's reputation in the global market to align all the key elements of the UWI to create a powerful single phase for the UWI in its global engagement and its purpose is to put the UWI's intellectual property online and available to global audiences thus creating an increased revenue stream for the Campus. This includes online courses, global research partnerships and internationalized curriculum.

As a campus within the UWI system the Global Campus will assist the University in generating revenues from the global market by using the University's enhanced global reputation for academic excellence. The intention is to expand the Open Campus' reach from a regional online education enterprise to a global online educational player in the higher education market place. The Global Campus will have two major divisions, the current Open Campus which will house university grants, committee-funded programmes and activities, and the global online division which will house self-financing activities with an emphasis on the global market.

It is important to note that the executive management team of the University is not proposing the creation of a new campus. Instead, it is the proposing the re-branding, re-engineering and commercializing of the Open Campus. The University intends to utilize its existing resources for this exercise and governments would not be asked to contribute additional funds but instead maintain their commitments to the UWI.

Cost containment. The cost of operations has been significantly reduced

over the last two years and further reduction is being explored. The Campus has successfully reduced its operating cost through cost containment measures. And finally, the Open Campus has estimated that based on the developmental plans of the Global Campus it is anticipated that within three to five years it will become profitable and thereafter continue on a sustainable path. Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Yeah, can I ask the hon. Minister, during that period of three to five years or whilst it is seeking to become viable from a sustainability point of view, can you share with us given your interaction with the University, Open Campus, what are the interim measures you intend to pursue to avoid a repetition of this crisis that plagued them a short while ago?

Mr. President: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the interim measures are the ones that have been expressed. The revenue generation plans, the cost containment plans which are continuing, and so those two are supposed to, with the best intentions, generate more revenue and reduce their expenditure and that is what they are banking on to sustain their operations.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, supplemental.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, can I ask the hon. Minister whether she can share with us some of the measures that have been taken by this Open Campus body to reduce operating expenses? Can you share with us? Do you have any idea?

Mr. President: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I do not have those specific details now before me and certainly if the Member is interested he can ask another question and those can be provided in detail.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark, next question on the Order Paper.

Persto Praesto Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre

(Discontinuation of the Breeding Unit)

14. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Youth Development and National Service:

Can the Minister advise whether Government has taken a decision to discontinue the operations of the Breeding Unit of the Persto Praesto Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre?

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Thank you, Mr. President. No such decision has been taken. To the contrary, the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service is currently in the process of revitalizing the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres, formerly referred to as youth camps, through the refurbishment and expansion of the current suite of Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres.

In April 2022 the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service started refurbishment and construction work at the Persto Praesto Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre in Freeport of which the Breeding Unit is an extension. The refurbished Persto Praesto Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre will provide a residential development programme for 250 young persons which would incorporate technical/vocational skills, as well as a comprehensive approach to the personal development and empowerment of our nation's youth. The livestock from both the Chatham and Persto Praesto Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres inclusive of the Breeding Unit is currently being utilized in the animal husbandry component of both the fulltime

and part time Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service in which there are 400 young persons enrolled at the ECIAF Campus, UTT, where they are being trained to become 21st Century agri-business entrepreneurs.

So, Mr. President, contrary to the premise and phrasing of the question, this Government does not reduce youth programming, and the youth development sector is expanding and progressing in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Next question.

Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP)

(Provision of Resources)

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

Can the Attorney General indicate when will talks resume and conclude with the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) on issues surrounding the provision of resources to the Office of the DPP?

Mr. President: Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the use of the word “resume” in this question operates on a false premise, in that it presumes a cessation of talks which misrepresents the ongoing reality. The Director of Public Prosecutions and I continue to engage with each other on important matters including the provision of resources to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. In fact, this engagement must necessarily continue rather than conclude, another word used in the question given the nature of our constitutional offices and the relationship which must necessarily exist between those two

offices. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Attorney General what is the status of his exercise in terms of the provision of resources to the DPP, whether it is human, financial, technical, and more importantly, the allocation of accommodation for the DPP?

Mr. President: Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: The status, Mr. President, of ongoing relations between the Office of the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions with respect to allocation of human resources, technical resources and physical location premises is ongoing. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister indicate, given the absolute need for critical, physical accommodation for the Office of the DPP in order to execute its mandate in accordance with the Constitution, can you give this honourable Senate any idea as to when proper accommodation would be provided for the DPP and its staff?

Mr. President: Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Again the false premise of “proper accommodation”. The premises currently occupied by the Director of Public Prosecutions are proper accommodation. But there are ongoing considerations and discussions with respect to the provision of additional accommodation. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Any idea, Mr. President, through you rather, can the hon. Minister indicate, the Attorney General that is, any time frame Attorney General as to when the additional physical accommodation for the Office of the DPP and its staff will be accomplished and/or achieved?

Mr. President: Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. President. I am an optimist. I hope in the near future but it would be presumptuous of me to give a time frame. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, the Attorney General would agree with me that scores of critical human resources, and I am dealing with, for instance, counsel at the level of the DPP's Office cannot be employed. So I am asking the hon. Attorney General, in light of this deficiency or shortfall in the staff complement as agreed upon by the Cabinet because there is an absence of physical accommodation, can the Attorney General indicate to this honourable Senate, is there a timeline or time frame to establish physical accommodation to bring all these additional resources into one common location so that the speeding up of the administration of justice can occur? I am trying to get clarification from—

Mr. President: So that question has been asked and answered, Sen. Mark. That was the fourth supplemental.

3.25 p.m.

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE

(APPOINTMENT OF)

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. President, having regard to the decision of the Senate on June 27, 2023, made pursuant to Standing Order 77(3), I beg to move the following:

Be it resolved that a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Jury Act, Chap. 6:53 and the Criminal Procedure Act, Chap. 12:02 and for related matters be referred to a Special Select Committee of the Senate hereby established to

Special Select Committee
(Appointment of)
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne (cont'd)

23.01.2024

consider and report; and

Be it further resolved that this committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Special Select Committee appointed in the Third Session 2022/2023, and that the following seven members be appointed to serve:

1. Mr. Reginald Armour SC - Chairman
2. Mr. Randall Mitchell - Member
3. Ms. Allyson West - Member
4. Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal - Member
5. Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial - Member—

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business, sorry. You would notice in your procedural that it calls for a date to report by. So I will ask that unless you have another date in mind, use March 31, 2024. So you would have to start over again just to ensure it is correct and that the procedure is properly done. I invite you to start.

Sen. The Hon. A. Browne: Thank you for filling in that blank, Mr. President. So can I go from “Be it further resolved”? Would that work or should I restart the formulation?

Mr. President: Start from “Mr. President”, please.

Sen. The Hon. A. Browne: Mr. President, having regard to the decision of the Senate on June 27, 2023, made pursuant to Standing Order 77(3), I beg to move the following:

Be it resolved that a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Jury Act, Chap. 6:53 and the Criminal Procedure Act, Chap. 12:02 and for related matters be referred to a Special Select Committee of the Senate hereby established to consider and report; and

Special Select Committee
 (Appointment of)
 Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Be it further resolved that this committee be mandated to adopt the work of the Special Select Committee appointed in the Third Session 2022/2023 and report by March 31, 2024, and that the following seven members be appointed to serve:

1. Mr. Reginald Armour SC - Chairman
2. Mr. Randall Mitchell - Member
3. Ms. Allyson West - Member
4. Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal - Member
5. Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial - Member
6. Mr. Anthony Vieira SC - Member
7. Prof. Gerard Hutchinson - Member

Question put and agreed to.

ST. DOMINIC'S CHILDREN'S HOME (INC'N) BILL

Question put and agreed to: That a Bill for the incorporation of the St. Dominic's Children's Home and other incidental matters, be now read a second time.

Bill accordingly read a second time

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE

(APPOINTMENT OF)

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 73(7), I beg to move that the private Bill for the incorporation of the St. Dominic's Children's Home and other incidental matters be referred to a Special Select Committee of the Senate for consideration and report, and that the following five members be

appointed to serve:

1. Mr. Anthony Vieira SC - Chairman
2. Ms. Donna Cox - Member
3. Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal - Member
4. Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing - Member
5. Mr. David Nakhid - Member

Question put and agreed to.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela

(Development of)

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [November 28, 2023]:

Be it resolved that the Senate call on the Government to provide a detailed account of its approach to this project involving entities such as Shell, the National Gas Company, Venezuela and the US Government;

And be it further resolved that the Government provide this Senate with quarterly reports on this critically significant project. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question again proposed.

Mr. President: The list of those who spoke on the last occasion is as follows: Sen. Wade Mark, mover of the Motion; hon. Stuart Young MP, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; Sen. Sunity Maharaj; Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh; Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy; Sen. Anthony Vieira SC; Sen. Anil Roberts; Sen. Francis Lewis; and Sen. Damian Lyder

Hon. Senators, on the last occasion, that being Tuesday, November 28, 2023, there were nine speakers on this Motion. As such, I now invite the next

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Lutchmedial (cont'd)

23.01.2024

speaker. Sen. Lutchmedial.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for permitting me to enter the debate on this Motion brought by Sen. Wade Mark. Mr. President, this Motion, I want to make it clear, is not brought to diminish the importance of the Dragon gas deal. It is not brought to criticize the progress that has been reported to the nation, in terms of securing what is, and what I think we can all agree, important to the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

In fact, it is because of the importance of this deal and how important it is to the lives and livelihoods of every citizen of this country is the reason why the Motion is brought. Because as citizens, and as a responsible Opposition, it is part of our duty to bring forth concerns and to try to obtain information where there may be a lack of clarity.

Now, the debate began on the 28th of November, and several key areas were raised by all Members who spoke on both the Opposition and Independent Bench, and the value of this Motion is evident because—I was not here on that day. I was out and Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh sat in my place on that particular day, and I looked at the debate and I noticed that he gave way to the Minister to answer questions, to clarify certain issues and that is, in essence, what we are here to do, to seek clarification—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial:—and it is very—I think it is quite telling and it validates the importance of this Motion in this Senate, the fact that we were able to get some of that information. But as the information comes forth and as new developments take place, again, I think it is only fair to expect a responsible Opposition to raise

issues and to highlight certain things that are developing. Because, you see, this Dragon gas deal is not two people sitting in a room negotiating a simple contract. There are many, many, many factors at play. And particularly with this deal, there are many variables that can affect this deal that are simply outside of the control of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and by extension, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So when you talk about a deal that requires \$100 million investment in a pipeline, something that you are reading in different local and international journals, and newspapers, and reputable news sources about first gas being realized in two years' time, but at the same time you are hearing that the supplemental—I do not know if that is the correct word, but the supplemental licence that allows us to make cash payments will expire in October 2025, one of the important clarifications sought by Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, obtained through the debate on this Motion, it is only reasonable that we continue to explore all of the variables and seek from the Government—as something which I do not believe to be unreasonable—but seek, not only the clarification at this point in time but seek periodic updates, and that is what the Motion is essentially about.

As I sat here today and we spend some time paying tributes to those who I would say paved the way for us to be here today, I remember and I always say that I think freedom of information was one of the most spectacular accomplishments of the Basdeo Panday administration.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Freedom of information—and I heard my senior one time in court, because we do a lot matters involving freedom of information challenging the reluctance of state agencies to give information, and I remember he described it

as a piece of legislation that opened up the filing cabinets within every nook and cranny of every government Ministry and gave citizens access to information. And access to information, and the importance of access to information by everybody, from the doubles vendor to the energy executives who are all down at the energy conference there at the Waterfront today, is important, and we must never diminish the importance of access to information by citizens who can make informed decisions. Because the decisions taken by a government who are the trustees of our resources on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we must have information in order to judge those decisions.

I liked literature when I was in school and one of the things that my literature teachers always told me is that you must paint the scene, set the scene when you are answering a question or when you have to describe something. And if we look at the scene that is playing out around us, both historically as well as what is happening now and what we may anticipate and we what we see developing in the very near future, it is very important to this debate and it is important for us to evaluate and to make judgments about the Dragon gas deal.

So let us set scene. We have had quite a rapid decline in gas production in this country.

3.40 p.m.

We have had a number of plants sitting idle in Point Lisas. It has caused immense hardship and it has caused, I would say, the decimation of a whole portion of our society.

Again, we pay tribute today to Mr. Fazal Karim, former Minister, and one of the things that pushed the development of central Trinidad and the move away—and I heard one of the Member opposite recalling the talk about “from cutting cane

to flying plane”. And it was part of the vision of moving the children who would have been brought up in agriculture and so on to learn skills, and to learn technical/vocational skills so that they can work in the energy sector, so that they can work in Point Lisas. And that provided—it created a whole lift for a generation of children in this country and so many of them have lost their jobs. When Sen. Mark piloted this Motion, he gave all of the statistics about how many people were once employed in our energy sector, in our petrochemical sector and those numbers have simply plummeted.

So that is part of the context and it sets the context of why this deal may be important because if we do not revitalize our energy sector, we will simply have plants laying idle. We all know what happened with Atlantic. It cost NGC—an investment so risky—I think it was some 280 million or something like that, an investment so risky that it had their board of directors seeking to indemnify themselves just to keep Train 1 alive. Why? Because of a gas shortage. Trains 2, 3 and 4, I do not know where they are now. I think they are still just going along, limping somewhere. They are just there. So, that is the scene in which we are operating.

The need for us to monetize this deal, and to get gas here and to produce for our petrochemical sector to be revived and so on, cannot be underestimated. We have to recognize that we have a lot riding on this deal and its viability. So that in the absence of us being able to point to any other significant industry in Trinidad and Tobago emerging as becoming a leader, much of our prosperity as a nation depends on oil and gas. And so, our ability to develop our human capital, our ability to deal with the most pressing issue which is crime, our ability to maintain the social safety net, whatever it is, we have to revive our energy sector.

And when the announcement was made on—subsequent to this Motion, an announcement was made around the 21st or 22nd December that the deal had finally been signed off. And all of the rhetoric and the little catchy phrases “the dragon could dance” and all of that and it is great and everything is happening, we still have questions coming out of how this deal would be done. And the reason again I say that freedom of information and whether you get it through the court, whether you get it through legislation, whether you get it through this Parliament is important, is because of how important the deal is. And we cannot depend on non-disclosure agreements to not give information to allow people to make informed decisions, because it is not just about an election and what citizens think and so on but it is about investors. We want to attract investment into Trinidad and Tobago so people who are evaluating our performance as an economy, people who are going to be evaluating how—what they can see in terms of the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago, would want more details about this particular deal.

And I mentioned earlier that there are in fact a lot of variables that would truly, to some extent, be outside of our control that could affect the viability of this deal. And I know others would have mentioned it but the fact is this, if we have a two-year supplemental licence to be able to allow us to make cash payments. You will recall that January last year when we got permission from the United States to be able to have our—to engage in this deal with Venezuela and to avoid what we call secondary sanctions, no cash payments were allowed.

3.45 p.m.

And so without those cash payments being allowed, we had no particular clear path forward to actually be able to engage in this deal with Venezuela to buy the gas

coming out of the Dragon Gas Field, getting it to Shell's platform, I think it is called Hibiscus, and how were we going to do it. We have the technical knowhow here, we have companies. They say Shell and NGC are going to be the major players in this. We still do not have the details as to specifically what role each company will play. NGC again is not a private company, it is a state-owned enterprise owned by the people of Trinidad and Tobago, its decisions, its investment, its management and so on. You know, it has to be that people have clarification as to the role that NGC will play in this deal.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

When the deal was announced and finally concluded or as being concluded in December, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries alluded to the fact that PDVSA would now play less of a role and that NGC would be more fully involved in the value chain, and I remember hearing that and thinking to myself well, what does that mean? Now, I am not a person who has ever worked or has any experience in the oil and gas sector but there are thousands, hundreds of thousands of people just like me, who do not know what that means. Maybe there is some energy executive as I say, down the road there, who might understand and who might have the details.

But why not clearly set out for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as I said, from the "doubles man" to the energy executive, set out what is the role of a state-owned, owned by me, you and everybody in this room and outside there, of a state-owned enterprise in this deal what is the risk; what is the financial exposure of NGC versus, for example, a private company, Shell. So let us find a way whilst protecting whatever may be protected by an NDA and for whatever reason. I have found the reasons being put forward for why it is more information cannot be

given, to be quite wishy-washy and really not holding much water. Because I read somewhere where the Minister talked about, you know, there are many players in Venezuela seeking to negotiate deals and so on, and so if Venezuela is negotiating with us, they would not want the details of our agreement to be made public because they have other negotiations.

Is that really justification for depriving the people of Trinidad and Tobago about details of a deal this big that could affect our entire future? Is that really justification for not telling us how a state-owned enterprise will be spending the money that they hold as trustees on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? And that to me warrants—so the Government must find a way, they must find a way to be able to be accountable. Be accountable.

Accountability and transparency must never be feared and there is too much fear of accountability and transparency with this Government. There is too much fear of giving citizens information, and I do not know if it is because they feel that citizens having information would put them out of a job but I find that time and time again, not just when it comes to the energy sector, not just when it comes to anything in particular but in general, there is a lot of secrecy around the way that this Government undertakes projects and undertakes its work on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that to me is unacceptable.

Because we have this two-year window, and that is the other thing, we have a two-year window but we cannot expect first gas, according to some reports, from this project for two years and we only have a two-year window to actually make cash payments. What happens when it expires and we have to try to seek to renew it? There are many things that can happen between now and then that can affect the United States giving us further permission to make cash payments. There are

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Lutchmedial (cont'd)

23.01.2024

many things that can affect the United States giving us permission to be able to continue with this deal, you know, altogether.

And I am hearing a little thing, “before it gets off the ground, we are asking questions”, well, that is what you do. That is what you do to avoid another WGTL scandal.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Set the stage and the context. The context is your Government has made very poor decisions on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago particularly when it comes to the energy sector.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: So asking questions before something gets off the ground is a good idea, not a bad idea, it is a good thing. Before “yuh pump \$100 million into building ah pipeline” to find out in two years before you even get the gas, if you will be able to continue with the deal.

The United States has an election this year, in November of this year. The former administration of the United States, their parting shot when they were demitting office was to impose a host of sanctions on Venezuela. That was the parting shot of President Trump to grant a sort of—you know, allow Venezuelan persons in exile to remain and to hit them with every financial sanction that they could have found. So if the United States has a change of administration by November of this year?

Mr. Vice-President, you cannot divorce yourself, you cannot sit in this Parliament and say “we have an NDA”, and “we know wah we doing”, and “why are you all crying down this thing before it even gets off the ground”, and so on, and divorce yourself from the reality of what is happening outside of Trinidad and

Tobago. This Government can be so narrow-minded and they cannot expect—and I do not know why it is that they seem to be happy if people take a narrow-minded approach to evaluating projects like this. But what we need is to make the information and draw the information to the attention of the public so that people are aware of all of the factors that are taking place outside of this room, outside of the Cabinet, outside of Trinidad and Tobago that could affect this particular deal and that could have severe ramifications for the lives and livelihoods of Trinidadians and Tobagonians. So we have that issue.

The other thing is that when the United States decided to actually grant and ease the sanctions on Venezuela and permit them to engage in this contract with us, it was because of what the—the US backed what they call the Unitary Platform in Venezuela. They had some discussions and they sat down and they came up with some sort of an accord. I think they met in Barbados actually. And again, the details of that agreement are very relevant to us because if that agreement does not come through and if the current Government in Venezuela, the ruling party does not actually hold up their end of the bargain, then what happens to our Dragon Gas deal?

So for the benefit of members of the public, because I am sure the Government knows, even though they do not want to talk about it. For the benefit of the members of the public, I will tell you some of the terms, I think it was a 12-point plan that the Unitary Platform, the Opposition in Venezuela, reached with the Maduro Government, brokered, I think, by some European mediators. And some of those things include not just that they would have free and fair elections in the latter half of 2024 but that they would allow international observers, that they would engage in the updating of their electoral lists to ensure that you had free and

fair elections and that persons were registered and there was no tampering and so on. That you will have balanced media coverage because the actual free and fair media is not something that is—people do not accept that the media in Venezuela are free and fair. So all these variables are things that are agreed to and it is on the basis of that agreement that the United States has decided to give a partial relaxing of the sanctions.

Are we as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to peg all our hopes on a deal that can fall through if you do not have balanced media coverage of elections and so on in Venezuela? Are we to peg all our hopes on the fact that Biden is going to win the next election and that it would not have a change of administration and that a new US President is not going to come and say, “eh-eh” and put in a whole host of sanctions again? Are we to simply accept that we now have this licence in our hand for two years to allow us to make the cash payments and to exploit this deal and Shell and NGC are on board but we are not actually considering all of the other developments taking place in Venezuela that can then jeopardize this relaxing of sanctions against them and open us up to secondary sanctions if we continue to do business with them?

Never forget that this Government when there were serious sanctions and the borders were closed and there were serious sanctions against PDVSA and government officials, they allowed a plane to land here full of PDVSA officials exposing us to secondary sanctions. Irresponsible decisions. Irresponsible decisions, and what we do not want is another set of irresponsible investment decisions being made like WGTL which would cause losses to the people of Trinidad and Tobago because of factors either within or beyond our control. And my contribution today, I am focusing primarily on significant things which are

outside of our control.

So again, opening the eyes of citizens as to what is taking place will help them to evaluate the viability of this deal and we ought not to deprive citizens of that opportunity. Mere days, well, in the months leading up to the finalizing of this deal and the granting of the licence and the lifting of the sanctions in October and so on to allow the cash payments, what else has been happening in Venezuela? The Opposition party had a primary. They had their primary to determine who will be the Opposition candidate in these elections which this deal is pegged on, this election happening this year. The Government of Venezuela refuses—they said that that was an invalid election. They do not recognize the Opposition's primary election. They have imposed a ban on the person who emerged with a landslide victory in that particular election.

So we are saying that we have a relief from sanctions for the Government of Venezuela on the basis that they will have free and fair elections but they refuse to recognize and they have instituted a ban against the person who has actually emerged as the winner of the primaries in Venezuela who is the person likely to contest the election. Are we hopeful that there are going to be free and fair elections in Venezuela in the context of that information?

Because if María Machado continues to be unrecognized as a candidate and banned from contesting this election that is supposed to happen in the latter half of 2024, what are the implications for our Dragon Gas deal and the relief from sanctions that allows us to engage in this deal with Venezuela? What will be the position of the United States? Has the Government explored all of those possibilities? What assurance can the Government give to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the developments in Venezuela and how things are progressing?

Since the conclusion of that agreement that resulted in the relief from sanctions, there have been several things that took place in Venezuela.

Sometime in early December, days before the big announcement that the Dragon Gas deal had been concluded, 14 members of the Opposition in Venezuela had arrest warrants issued for them, three of them being key members of the team that supports María Machado. So what does that say about the free and fair elections? How does it really—and again, we are setting the scene of what is playing off in Venezuela and we have to as—it is a simple risk management exercise because there is a lot of risk and there is a lot of damage that could be done if this deal for free and fair elections in Venezuela falls through.

I came across, when I was reading the *Hansard*, I think Sen. Gopeesingh made reference to the exact same article that I found, one from *Bloomberg* that says the United States is prepared to back out and to re-impose all of those sanctions if it is that the Maduro regime does not stick to their end of the deal as it comes to this plan moving forward for elections.

4.00 p.m.

And if it is—and I think mention has been made already, and I heard in the last debate Members opposite objecting to raising the issues with Guyana. Now, at that point in time, we were awaiting a decision on the dispute that had been referred to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, involving Guyana and our CARICOM counterpart, our CARICOM brothers and sisters in Guyana. Again, from the date of that debate, we have been focusing on the great things that have been happening: Dragon gas deal signed off, cash payments and all of that. But are we really considering the implications of what is happening with Guyana and Venezuela? What is going to—Venezuela initially had said they do not even

recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. And subsequent to the delivery of that decision, they are simply not accepting it. And while talks may be happening and CARICOM has attempted to intervene, and so on, and so forth, Mr. Vice-President, we cannot ignore that this is another factor and another variable that could have serious consequences on this deal for Trinidad and Tobago if it is that one of our CARICOM neighbours ends up in conflict with Venezuela. What are—

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order, please. Standing order 53(1)(b), this, the relevance of Guyana in this matter has been raised by multiple speakers on the last Private Members' Day. I am not sure if the Member is going to go ad nauseam through that again.

Mr. Vice-President: Thank you, Senator. I am upholding 53(1)(b), especially in the context that a lot of progress has happened since. You might be going backwards in your deliberation. Can you proceed with your contribution, please?

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Yes. But, Mr. Vice-President, whilst there might have been progress in certain areas, there are also new issues arising.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: There are also new issues arising. So, on the last date, and I listened and I read very carefully the *Hansard*, we did not yet have that decision. We were awaiting the decision. So the decision having been handed down and the particular stance taken—the particular stance adopted and taken by Venezuela subsequent to our last debate and what has transpired since then is particularly relevant. And I raise it because this is not an issue that has gone away. So as much as the Government feels that they have made significant progress from November to now in securing this deal, and they are all patting each other on the

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Lutchmedial (cont'd)

23.01.2024

back and cheering each other on, and they are happy, I am simply highlighting the fact that many of the issues, the variables, the things beyond even their control, and certainly beyond the control of the people of Trinidad and Tobago are still lingering.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: It can still endanger this particular deal.

And I say all of this to say that giving the population more information, which is what this Motion calls for, and asking for periodic reports to this Senate as the vehicle through which you keep a population informed—I do not know why this Government is so committed to keeping people in the dark. I think that that makes them feel powerful and it uplifts them in some way, but they resent accountability and they resent the opportunity to even come—that is what a Parliament is for, it is to account to the people. And I do not know why they are so resentful of the opportunities given to them to do so, and they ought not to be. And nobody, no right-thinking Member of this Senate should be opposed to periodic updates and information given on this deal, in light of everything.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: As I said, I set the scene. I set the scene of everything that is happening, everything that has happened locally. This is something that we have been talking about since 2016. The Government themselves and no less a person than the Prime Minister described this deal as pushing a boulder up the hill. That is what he said?—pushing a boulder up a hill. Mr. Vice-President, we do not want to see that boulder rolling down and crushing the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Lutchmedial (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: And do you know what is the thing about pushing a boulder up the hill? It is not just the person that is pushing, but it is also all of the external forces can push the boulder down and crush you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: It can crush you. So it is not just about you and what you are doing to push the boulder. Because when the boulder comes rolling down, it is not you alone will be crushed, it is all of us. It is all of us. And that is why this Motion is so important. And that is why the call for updates and for further information and for the Government to set out in specific detail the role to be played by our state-owned enterprises, and so on, is so important.

It was a whistleblower who went to Guardian Media and had to inform the population about this risky investment that NGC was making to keep Train 1 alive and about the indemnity being sought. That is how the population gets information about NGC and their expenditure. That is how it was done. And they seem to like that. They do not want to come to the Parliament and account for how state enterprises spend their money. They want a whistleblower to give it to the *Guardian*. So if that is the preference, well, I do not know what to say if that is the state of affairs.

We still, I believe, are a democracy. And in a democracy, you use your Parliament, you use your parliamentary time and you use all of the opportunities, whether it is through questions, Motions, whatever debate it is, you use that time to give an account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is all we are here to ask for today. Because, like I said, all of the other forces operating on the boulder could still bring it down the hill. You are not at the top just yet. You are not safe. Because there are too many things outside of the control of this Government and

the people of Trinidad and Tobago that can affect that this particular deal. And I have made mention of a few of them.

Mr. Vice-President, in all that has already been said, I would say the questions being put to the Government are very sensible, they are very timely, they are very reasonable and most importantly, they are in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in order for them to make informed decisions and to evaluate this particular deal, and that is what we need. We do not need to hide in corners and whisper and wait until things do not go according to plan, to then come out and say, “Well, okay, we would have to restructure, we would have to do this, we have to do that.” Keep people informed.

The other thing I just want to mention in passing as well is that, I mean, I think we have all grown up hearing the talk about you do not put all your eggs in one basket. And it is not specifically called for in this Motion, but I want to mention it, that the Government should also utilize its parliamentary speaking time and report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to give us updates on what else we are doing to bring more gas back to our plants in Trinidad and Tobago. What are we doing? Are we just going to say, “Well, the dragon dancing,” and that is it? Because again, given the context of that deal, it cannot be that our hopes and dreams have to be pegged to this one particular deal.

Where are we going? What are we doing to ensure—I read that there was—the Prime Minister sat down at the opening of the energy conference yesterday and said, “Look, we are going to be exporting gas in 2050.” Really? “Wey we finding it”? What is going on with the exploration? What is happening with exploration? We talk about the fact that we have mature fields and all of that. Well, what is happening with the exploration of new fields? Have licences been granted? How

many—you know, up to yesterday, people are lamenting about the slow pace of decisions, and so on, that affect the energy industry. The Prime Minister said, “Well, we are lackadaisical. It is a cultural problem we have.” Is that good enough, or can the Government not sit down and give more facts and plans and set out its policy for developing and/or redeveloping, re-energizing this very particular part of our economy?

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have just under five minutes remaining here.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Sure. I am winding up. And that is all I really wanted to say about that aspect of it. It is not part of this Motion, but I would encourage the Government to not simply use its time outside the Parliament to pat itself on the back about concluding this deal, when everything to the casual observer and even some very informed observers seem to be far from concluded when it comes to this deal.

Do we have contingency measures in place, in the event that all of those variables that I set out, all of those things that could happen? What are the contingency plans? What are the measures? How are we trying to mitigate against all of the risks that can be posed to this deal from all of the external factors and external forces? That is a simple question. And I do not expect them to have all the answers, because it is a developing situation. Things are changing all the time. But all we want, and what the people of this country deserve is an update. It is an acknowledgment that things can happen and that we are addressing our minds to it. Because sometimes I feel that things that are patently obvious that could happen, it is like it escapes this Government and then they are all, you know, running around trying to fix something that we could have foreseen. We can foresee a lot of the problems.

Because in this entire debate, you are hearing everybody setting them out. And so, how are you going to mitigate against those risks? What are your contingency plans? How are you going to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago in this particular deal? And that is what we, again I say, as a responsible Opposition, we have brought a sensible, timely and reasonable Motion seeking answers, seeking information. And in the spirit of freedom of information and to honour those who have done so much to provide clarity, to provide information, to open the filing cabinets of every government institution and allow people access to information to make informed decisions, I call upon the Members of this Senate to support this Motion. I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Teemal.

Sen. Deeroop Teemal: Mr. Vice-President, I do thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Private Motion before us and also to welcome the opportunity for this august Chamber to debate this particular Motion, for I think it is Motions like these, outside of legislative agenda, that afford us the opportunity to tune issues that impact on the lives of the citizens of the Trinidad and Tobago.

There is no doubt, I think, in the mind of any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, the importance of a Dragon gas contract to the country. And I prefer to use Dragon gas contract, rather than Dragon gas deal because as a country, we are not dealing, we are contracting. And dealing—in our local culture, particularly how we perceive things, dealing would carry with it certain connotations, and the fact that those connotations could give the wrong impression of the genuine intentions that are behind this particular contract.

Mr. Vice-President, this country is no stranger to complex and difficult

contracts, and negotiations that are necessary to cement those contracts. In the 1980s, we had a plethora of government-to-government contracts. We would recall the Mount Hope medical complex, where arrangements were with the French Government; the German Government for the secondary roads project. And I think we did engage in that period, during the '80s, in a lot of government-to-government contracts, as they were termed at that time. And as a country, as a nation, I believe that we have learnt our lessons, because it was new territory for us and we were on a learning curve as a nation. Genuine intentions, yes, but we were on a learning curve, and we need to be careful. We need to be diligent, that the lessons that came out of those government-to-government contracts of the '80s, we do not forget them or we do not bypass them, but we take those into account as we move forward.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, this contract can best be termed, from the information that has come to us, as a government-to-government contract, which would fall outside of the purview of the procurement Act, because in the amendments to the procurement Act, certain exceptions were made, and one of them included government-to-government arrangements. But I would like to start off by questioning whether this is really a government-to-government contract because the reason why I ask that is because we keep hearing about the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Venezuela. But I am not sure, or I may have missed it during the course of this debate, whether the contracting parties are the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Venezuela, or whether the contract is between contracting parties who are agents or agencies of the respective states. For example, in our case in Trinidad and Tobago, what is the

role of the National Gas Company in all of this? Is the National Gas Company a party to the contract? And in the case of Venezuela, would PDVSA be, you know, the agency of the Venezuelan Government, according to the contract arrangement we are getting in?

I am not trying to split hairs here but I think there has to be clarity, because if there is not clarity on who are the contracting parties regarding the Dragon gas contract, then it influences, you know, a lot of things about the contract, including the avenue for recourse should there be default by either of the contracting parties. What are the conditions for termination and under what conditions can termination be effective, whether there are conditions for non-performance, and whether those conditions for non-performance would influence how a contract is brought to an end.

So, the actual contracting parties, I think I would like to probably get a lot more clarity on it because it is an extremely complex industry, exceedingly complex negotiations that are taking place and, you know, we need to be always very careful about the contracts we get into. So, is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago a facilitator under this arrangement in which the entire contract—they are facilitating the set-up of the contract, or is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago going to be a party to the contract? I think we need some clarity on it.

The other thing is, the question based on comments coming forward in the particular debate, Mr. Vice-President, I would just lump it under risk analysis. We have heard about certain geopolitical factors that could possibly impact the outcome of this contract and, you know, the United States was mentioned a lot. At times, it was made to mention Guyana as well, but definitely there are geopolitical factors that could impact negatively on this particular contract. So, I would have

liked to hear from the Government, in particular, what sort of risk analysis was done for this particular project.

4.20 p.m.

And why? Because I think assurance would come to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago from the fact that look, although the project is complex, although the project is absolutely necessary for our economic future, and although the project involves negotiations of a high standard, these are the risks that we have considered. And the risks that have been considered would include geopolitical factors. So all of the risks associated with a contract of this nature, we can say, “Well, yes, it is A, B, C, D, E”—or more, and this is what we have identified, and these are the measures that we have taken into account, and these are the mitigation measures that as a Government we intend to put into place to mitigate against the risks that have been identified.

Risk analysis and risk management are key factors of any major undertaking, and particularly for a project of this nature. And yes, I am of the view, I share the view that information on the analysis needs to be shared to assure the public that the factors have been considered, and we are moving forward on a solid basis. For although the project hinges heavily, it would have a lot to do with the economic future of the country. If it does go wrong, the effects could be disastrous as well, and how do we mitigate against it? I think I would have liked to hear that in addition to what we are doing, pursuing the Dragon Gas contract, this is what we are doing to mitigate—we would not be able to fully mitigate any negative risks, but this is what we can do to reduce the impact of any negative aspects of this contract.

For instance, running parallel and concurrent with what we are doing regarding this project, we are going to step up our exploration programme. We are going to accelerate outside of the Dragon Gas contract our exploration for natural gas. We are going to increase our deep-sea exploration efforts. We are going to try to attract more investors into the deep-sea exploration for natural gas as a parallel to the Dragon Gas contract, in order to mitigate any negative aspects coming out of this particular contract. That is what I would have liked to hear, and to hear further about other risks identified and how we can address them with sound, well-thought-out mitigation measures.

Mr. Vice-President, what we have seen in this country, in my opinion, is a growing tendency for—I wonder if I am fair in saying this, but I will still say it—a growing tendency for the more complex projects to be surrounded by an expanding arena of confidentiality. And a lot of these projects are surrounded with or permeated with a lot of confidentiality clauses.

Now, I am not saying that we cannot or we should not have confidentiality clauses because confidentiality clauses serve particular purposes. And in the response we got from the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, did point out that a fair amount of information regarding, you know, certain conditions of the contract, particularly with reference to pricing, were confidential under what was being sorted out. Understandable, but at the same time—yeah also, I appreciate the need for confidentiality because sometimes you are dealing with patented technology, you are dealing with certain technology that has been developed by certain parties, and you do not want that technology or that information to be divulged to the public because it is patented and it is copyrighted. That is understandable. But at the same time, I am concerned about a lot of times when

questions are asked, the confidentiality clause argument comes forward. And more often than not it is on the key aspects or what the public considers to be key aspects that these confidentiality clauses are enforced.

So in such an arrangement that we are entering to, there cannot be any information being provided with regard to pricing, and in a way I encourage the Government. In addition to quoting confidentiality clauses, and in addition to referring to them, I think the Government should be encouraged to find some means to respond to public concern by providing as much information as possible rather than a blanket statement that that is covered under confidentiality. I think it would go a long way in winning the support of the public for projects that are undertaken. Particularly projects like these that are huge, complex, and important for the country.

So I will return to the whole question of risk analysis and the need to inform the population of what has been done, what are the consequence if things do not happen, and what are the mitigating measures that the Government has available or has identified in order to not fully offset, but at least offset to some extent, you know, the negative effects of any risks that come into fruition? And with those few words, Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Neil Gosine.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Colin Neil Gosine: Mr. Vice-President, I am honoured to contribute this evening in this esteemed House. Happy New Year to all of you. Firstly, let me thank the Leader of the Opposition, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for the opportunity to be part of the Opposition Bench today as we continue to stand up for the critical

views of our nation.

Mr. Vice-President, this evening I join this debate with experience in our energy sector, having served as the Chairman of the National Petroleum Marketing Company of Trinidad and Tobago from 2010 to 2015. Therefore, I thoroughly understand the importance of our energy sector to our nation's socioeconomic stability, growth, and sustainability. As a matter of the fact, I wish to congratulate and commend our Senate Bench leader, Sen. Wade Mark, for his patriotic act in bringing this Motion, because this Motion reflects the fact that the Opposition understands and values the importance of our energy to our nation's socioeconomic stability. This can be fully seen in our Motion where it says:

“And whereas there are many other issues that remain outstanding in order to bring...”

—this gas from the gas field to this country and our shores.

In essence, the Opposition is not against the Dragon Gas; we are against the cloaked secrecy and the vaulted accountability from the Government on the Dragon Gas deal. This debate began on the 28th of November last year, and all our Opposition Senators brought forward important urgent questions. I would like to bring some of the critical issues to this esteemed House.

The signing of the exploration and production licence is the information that signaled the Dragon Gas is coming to Trinidad and Tobago. The Governments of Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela have signed off on the licence to get natural gas from the Dragon Gas Field in the Venezuelan waters. This was agreed to after almost a year of negotiations between the two countries following a licence being granted by the Office of the Foreign Asset Control, OFAC, on January the 24th, 2023.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

What we know is that one of the conditions of the licence that is currently valid was for supplying gas to the Caribbean countries including Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. PDVSA, Petróleos de Venezuela also known as that, discovered the Dragon Gas Field over a decade ago and built some infrastructure before US sanctions and before Venezuela energy halted that development. Though no US entities are involved in this project, companies and governments request a green light from Washington to avoid being slapped with secondary sanctions.

In January 2023, after Trinidad's persistent efforts, the Government announced a two-year licence from the US Treasury Department to negotiate natural gas initiatives with Caracas. However, Washington prohibited any cash payments to Venezuela, which President Maduro denounced as a form of colonialism leading to a standstill in the negotiations between Caracas and Port of Spain. This was eventually extended again. What we know is Shell will hold a 70 per cent stake in the joint venture and Trinidad's National Gas Company, NGC, the remaining 30. Venezuela would collect royalties and taxes, possibly via natural gas supplies. The Government, however, needs to give a definite estimation for first gas to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

4.35 p.m.

Sen. C. Gosine: The information in the public domain is scarce to say the least and we look forward to a full account of what will be the real value that will come to Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: "Dey doh know".

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Sen. C. Gosine: Exactly. “What exactly will Venezuela make and what will Trinidad and Tobago make” is a good question, Mr. Vice-President. The importation of natural gas will mean taxes and royalties will have to be paid to Venezuela. What exactly are these taxes and royalties? The benefit to us most likely will be that LNG trains and the industrial plants operating here will finally get a boost in natural gas.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: But when?

Sen. C. Gosine: That is exactly it. But when will they get this boost? At a time where we really need this natural gas and where some of these plants have closed up shop because of no supply, we need to understand the role of the National Gas Company in this whole scenario, and to what the National Gas Company’s board and the Government has bound Trinidad and Tobago to.

There is a lot to understand. What is the role and—what is Shell’s and the NGC’s exactly role, and what do they have to do? What was put in the public domain is that a natural gas project can materialize in the Venezuelan waters by Shell and Trinidad and Tobago’s state firm, the National Gas Company, NGC, and can achieve its first output in the next two years. But that next two years, we are not sure how long—it is just a figure in our atmosphere, next two years. We are hearing next two years.

Although information is scarce, as I stated before, the Venezuelan licence granted provides an initial output of 185 million cubic feet per day of gas to be sent to Trinidad for producing liquefied natural gas, LNG and petrochemicals. Shell will operate the Dragon project and an 18-kilometre pipeline that will link Dragon to its Hibiscus production platform in Trinidad. It must be noted that it has taken years to convince the Venezuelan Government to allow Trinidad and Tobago to

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

develop the field that is under the authority of the Venezuelan state oil company, PDVSA.

One will note that there is a 335,000 barrel per day refinery located 140 kilometers off Venezuela's north coast and has been leased out by PDVSA since 1985, until RDK—and RDK is a Curaçao state holding company—abruptly ended the cooperation in 2019, under pressure from US sanctions and citing low production levels. In 2020, RDK sued PDVSA for US \$51 million for alleged missing service payments between February 2018 and December 2019. The refinery has remained idle since terminating business with PDVSA.

RDK sold remaining crude stocks and tried to collect the rest by joining a group of creditors, seeking to collect unpaid debts from a US court ordered shared auction of Venezuelan US-based oil subsidiary, CITGO, but the manoeuvre failed. We are hoping that we do not have to face the same type of situation that RDK is facing in this situation.

We also know dealing with PDVSA is not easy. Although the current debt amount was not disclosed, the Curaçao Prime Minister said that the Maduro administration agreed to settle a \$450 million amount in 10 years for the debt payment, including \$21 million in labour liabilities and bilateral projects.

There is another issue: the controversial topic of the territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana, which has been spoken about by my colleagues. Recently, this has eased up as initially it took a bleak turn with Venezuela taking a bold stand to claim back lands from the Essequibo region in Guyana. We all have questions, like whether the company, PDVSA, installed some infrastructure, but we are not sure what exactly this consists of.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Concerning Shell, what production tests have begun on building a gas line to its Hibiscus production platform in Trinidad's shores? We know that the north coast marine area includes two offshore facilities, the Hibiscus platform and the Poinsettia platform. We want to know, what is the status of the wells that were drilled in the Dragon field in the past? Will there be a need for a new drilling system? If that is the case, where will it take place from?—as we have no information from this previously—we do not have any information in the public and this is what we trying to get out of the information. We are trying to get the information from the Government. What new infrastructure has been installed to ensure that this project comes online? That includes, what is the distance of the pipeline to be installed to the Shell Hibiscus platform? We did hear 18 kilometres. When will the bathymetric surveys begin?

Sen. Mitchell: What survey?

Sen. C. Gosine: Bathymetric.

Sen. Mitchell: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. C. Gosine: You could Google it. That is the correct pronunciation. What about the environmental clearances? Some potential concerns related to the Dragon gas field could include environmental impact and extraction activities, potential risks to the local ecosystems, and community concerns regarding the social and economic effects of the gas extraction.

Additionally, issues for stringent safety measures may also be considered in light of the Piarco—sorry, the Paria fiasco. These things normally take years to get done. Who are the actors in this almost Shakespearean deal? We, as the public, only have a small amount of information revealed to us over the last three years.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Small, minimal.

Sen. C. Gosine: Very minimal information. Are these persons understanding that the multigenerational contract on both parts require not only a keen international skill set, but when one party in the past has come to the table without clean hands, it can lead, understandably, to distrust?

History cannot be erased but it can be observed to ensure we learn from our own mistakes. For example, under the part of the Venezuelan regime, there was a mass reappropriation of US assets in the Lake Maracaibo region with several US and international players. Tidewater international had their assets acquired by the Venezuelan state in 2010, in the case, *Tidewater Investment SRL and Tidewater Caribe CA v The Bolivian Republic of Venezuela*, where claims arose out of the Government's enactment of a law reclaiming to the State the assets and services related to the primary activities of hydrocarbons, and the seizure of the claimant's marine support services operations and assets in Lake Maracaibo and the Gulf of Paria, including 15 vessels.

So when we look at that, we are hoping that our Government has dotted all their "i's" and crossed all their "t's" in any arrangements with the Venezuelan Government. We do not want the same thing to happen, where they come and say now, "There is a different arrangement." When we see things like this, where they could just go in and take the assets of another company—

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Seize them.

Sen. C. Gosine:—seize them, it is a worrying thing to this side, and it is a worrying thing to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Sen. C. Gosine: Are these the persons that are having closed-door meetings with our Government? Are these the players that we and our children are bound to? Are these the persons we expect to uphold the agreement for decades to come? If so, will we get the capital infrastructure of a project of this size? How many years will it take to recover the cost and show a profit? Bottom line, we are being asked to underwrite a multibillion-dollar investment, stretching generations, with no transparency as to the terms or conditions. Where is the Government with negotiations with Shell to move this project to the final investment stage? There are so many questions, Mr. Vice-President. What is the price that Shell and NGC will pay Venezuela for the gas? The question on everyone's mind and surely my mind is that, what will be the price of the gas when it has landed in Trinidad and Tobago?

Again, remember the border dispute? There was an issue between Venezuela claiming the land in the Essequibo region of Guyana. I know that they spoke a lot about this issue. The issue is still there though. The issue is still there. There was an agreement by Guyana and Venezuela not to use force over the border dispute. But if this erupts again between Venezuela and Guyana, and it flares back up again, what do we do? Does this deal prevent us from supporting Guyana in the future?

4.50 p.m.

Mr. Vice President I am just asking the pertinent questions, but I think we need an answer. We are hopeful, but most likely the political landscape in Venezuela and the United States could change in 2024. Since, both countries have general elections, and are scheduled in 2024. Time waits for no man; we want to know the date when the Dragon gas will be launched. It has had several

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Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

signings—remember Guyana found oil and gas in 2015, where:

“The Liza discovery was announced in May of 2015. Liza-1 well was the first significant oil find offshore...of...Guyana. It encountered more than 295 feet...of high quality oil-bearing sandstone reservoirs. It was safely drilled to 17,825 feet...in 5,719 feet...of water”.

And since then they have advanced.

Currently, Guyana's crude oil production is an average of 400,000 barrels of oil per day. The volume is even more impressive when you put it in the perspective with national demographics. We are on the decline; they are on the incline.

Sen. T. Gopeesingh: We are at 55,000 barrels per year

Sen. C. Gosine: With us with 55,000 barrels per day. They at 400,000 barrels per day. Trinidad had over 120 years in oil production and this is where we are now.

Sen. T. Gopeesingh: Declining for the last 50 years

Sen. C. Gosine: Declining for the last 50 years. We should just shake our heads.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. C. Gosine: While we are stagnant and we are waiting on this deal, and then the construction of the infrastructure, and as we know how efficient the EMA and the public authorities operate, and in their own timeline we can anticipate to see this project completed. Can we anticipate to see this project completed in time before our competitors reach its next stage of growth, which is gas? Making us once again play catch up, with decades of old infrastructure feeding aged plants. There are many questions and many things related to this Dragon field to resolve, before we even get gas from the Dragon well.

We want more answers, because the Dragon gas deal still seems shaky to

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

me. Two months ago, the Government boasted to the population about their lobbyists securing exemptions for us to assess the Dragon gas. Let me read a Bloomberg headline for you:

“US says All Venezuelan Sanctions Are on the Table If Maduro Reneges”.

Bloomberg November 16, 2023, two months ago. I want the country to hear this damning part, the foreign report tells us.

“The Biden administration is prepared to revoke all licenses recently awarded to Venezuela if Nicolás Maduro doesn't present a path toward fairer elections by the end of November.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols...”—has confirmed if you do not fulfill the agreed upon steps, we will revoke the licence issued.

4.55 p.m.

This is very worrying. What does this mean for Trinidad and Tobago? It means, no matter what agreement or lobbyists this Government has, in the blink of an eye, the Dragon deal is off yet again. What is different with the Dragon gas agreement? With this country facing a gas shortage and no tangible signs of new gas, the Government has come to pin all our hopes and dreams again on this Dragon gas, and we just want to make sure, because we are not opposed to this Dragon gas. We want it to happen, but we want the information. We want to know what we are getting into, what our children are bound to for the next 50 years.

The Minister of Finance has told us in the budget:

“As is public knowledge, our diplomatic initiatives with the United States and Venezuela have been very successful, clearing the way for the

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

September 20, 2023, signing of an agreement with Venezuela to develop the Dragon Gas Field. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries deserves special commendation for this remarkable achievement.”

Page 51 of the budget presentation. This is not the first time, as we have said, that the Dragon deal has been signed. In 2018, the Prime Minister sat in the very presidential palace and signed the terms of the development of this same deal with President Maduro, which is five years ago.

According to the Prime Minister’s official website, dated August 25, 2018, it states:

“Prime Minister Dr the Honourable Keith Rowley and President of Venezuela, His Excellency Nicholas Maduro today (Saturday 25 August 2018) signed the terms for the development of cross-border gas from the Venezuelan Dragon Gas Field.”

We are five years down the line since that and we are still trying to figure out what is going on with this deal.

This is not the first budget where the Minister of Finance has come to Parliament to pin the hopes of our nation on the Dragon. In the 2019 budget, he said the exact same thing. We really hope the Dragon will dance. In his 2019 budget, he listed as the number one in his six game changers:

“strengthening our gas-based economy: on August 18th, 2018, the Prime Minister, Dr the Honourable Keith Rowley, executed a Terms of Agreement with the Government of Venezuela to secure a competitively priced steady supply of natural gas from the Dragon Field in Venezuela. The project will commence with 150.0 million standard cubic feet per day with the possibility of that level rising to 300 million standard cubic feet per day.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Importantly, this supply of gas will return our petrochemical centre to full production and in the process make the sector a much more attractive source of investment;”

Now, he is saying this in 2018, which is five years ago. This is page 8 of the 2019 Budget Statement. How is this going—it is five years down the line, where are we? We are down to 55,000 barrels? We are down to 55,000 barrels. We really need this gas.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*—barrels of oil. We are down to 2.7 billion.

Sen. C. N. Gosine: Down to 2.—So what is the difference between this deal and the deal that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Minister Young, signed? What are the contents of this deal which is being portrayed to have resolved the grave issues that led our Prime Minister to state recently, back in July last year, “Negotiations had reached a stalemate”, or more recently, “It is a huge diplomatic boulder we have been pushing uphill”—and just like Senator—my colleague said, that boulder could come and crush us.

Is it that the Government has solved the greatest hurdle of having Venezuela agree to accept non-cash payments or has the Government received clearance from the US authorities to make cash payments? We are still not sure how we are going to compensate Venezuela on this deal. We do not know. Taxes, royalties, we do not know—cash. We do not know if it is onions and potatoes, or even toilet paper. We do not know. That is the reality. If this hurdle has not been cleared, then not only are we back to square one, but this signing was nothing but public relations, an act, theatrics.

If this is a workable, effective, tangible deal by the Government and not a political tool for the budget, they must tell the population what is the timeline for

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

first gas, which we have been asking. When will operations begin on this field, Mr. Vice-President? How much gas will we receive in Trinidad and Tobago and how much will the taxpayers pay for this development? The Government must state explicitly what the role of Shell is and tell us the terms that we have been bound to. What is even more damning is that back in February 2020, when the Dragon gas was delayed, the former Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Franklin Khan, said the Dragon gas would not affect the supply of our gas at all:

“‘With regards to the gas forecast I am pleased to announce that based on the outlook for gas production in the short to medium term the delay in the status of Dragon will have no adverse impact on the availability of gas supply.’

He explained that Dragon gas was not factored into the ministry’s forecast. He reported that gas production is expected to increase to four bcf (billion cubic feet) per day in the year 2024...”

—which we are, Mr. Vice-President, we are in 2024:

“...and at 2025 the Manatee project will come on stream and that is scheduled to bring in 270-400 million cubic feet per day.”

Trinidad *Newsday*, the 5th of February, 2020; that is four years ago and we have not seen that materialized at all.

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: 2.7 billion.

Sen. C. N. Gosine: 2.7 billion, we have not seen it materialized.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: “It gone down from 4 billion.”

Sen. C. N. Gosine: From 4 billion, we have gone down to 2.7. So as a gas economy, we have gone from a—

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Mr. President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. C. N. Gosine: So as a gas economy, we have gone from a position where the Dragon gas would not affect our gas supply to one where we are now thoroughly dependent on the gas, on the Dragon gas, a reflection of how our gas sector has collapsed.

In the energy conference—I heard the hon. Prime Minister at the energy conference yesterday say that the Dragon gas will bring more investments to T&T; I would say, a safe and crime-free country will bring investments to T&T.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. C. N. Gosine: We need a safe and crime-free country, Mr. President. BP, the country's largest extractor of natural gas, refused to let its premises be used for Carnival because of crime. How can the leader of the Government stand up and say that the Dragon gas will bring investments when close to 600 people are murdered every year in Trinidad and Tobago? Again, so as a gas economy, we have gone from a position where the Dragon gas will not affect our gas supply to one where we now thoroughly depend on the gas. I want to see this Dragon dance. I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, permit me at this time to congratulate Sen. Gosine on his maiden contribution in this Chamber.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to join your good self, Mr. President, in thanking Sen. Neil Gosine for his very in-depth and very profound contribution today.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Neil Gosine (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Sen. Dr. Browne: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wade Mark: I would like to thank him. Mr. President, I would like to thank everyone who has spoken on this Motion that we have been discussing and deliberating on since last November. We have had, from my record, roughly about 11 speakers, inclusive of the mover of the Motion, and I really want to sincerely thank all of them. I was a bit disappointed, however, not to hear some more governmental intervention apart from the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who spoke and gave us a historical evolution of the energy sector. We did not get much details on this very important matter.

As I said, Mr. President, this Motion was brought for the Government to provide the people of this country, through this Senate, with more details, with more information, with more transparency and accountability as it relates to this Dragon project, but we have been disappointed. The Government has not provided us with the kind of information that we would have expected during the Minister's contribution in November of 2023.

5.10 p.m.

Now we know, Mr. President, from the resolution, the entities that are involved in this project. We know the National Gas Company is involved, Shell. We know that the Venezuelans are involved, through the Minister of Oil in Venezuela. What surprised us, however, was when the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries made the announcement on that fateful day when he was boasting, Mr. President, that they have gotten—Trinidad and Tobago had just received the licence to transport gas from the Dragon field to Point Fortin. Of course, there are disruptions along the way, bridges that have to be constructed, pipelines that have to be laid in order for the gas to leave the Dragon field to get to

Point Fortin's LNG plant and later, Mr. President, to Point Lisas Industrial Estate.

But you know what surprised me, Mr. President, and I think would have surprised Trinidad and Tobago? It was when the Minister said that PDVSA is no longer involved in this project. The main players, according to the Minister, Shell, the National Gas Company, and the Minister of Oil of Venezuela—the Minister of Oil will now represent the interest of Venezuela, no longer PDVSA. So, Mr. President, the question that arises is, who is going to invest US \$1 billion in this project? Is it NGC? Is it Shell, or is it a combination of Shell and NGC? We do not know.

Mr. President, there are so many uncertainties surrounding this project, that when colleagues on this side and others said, unless we get some definite information to guide us on this matter, we have to express deep reservations about this entire project. One would have thought by now, Mr. President, that the main player, Shell, would have taken a critical financial investment decision and announce it to the world.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: We would have thought that since this thing was announced before Christmas, that Shell is going to be part of this, Shell is going to be part of the Loran–Manatee project and the Dragon, and there is a competition between the workers who are going to be employed on the Dragon project, led by Shell, and the workers, Mr. President, who will would be involved in the Loran-Manatee field. That is what the Minister told us, there is a competition to see who will finish first.

Well, Mr. President, we have to ask the Government what has happened with that decision, that financial investment decision that Shell was supposed to take and announce as it relates to the Dragon gas project as well as the

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Loran-Manatee project. Has Shell gone to sleep on this project? Has the British Government and the American Government influenced Shell in some way or the other not to get involved in this project? I am not too sure. I am not too sure, Mr. President. What we do know is that this Dragon project is up in the air.

Mr. President, may I advise you that we have three elections that are carded for '24?—three: one in United States, and from all indications, it appears to me, Mr. President—I may be wrong—we might have a new President in the United States after November. It appears to me. So if there is going to be a new President in the United States, what will happen to the Dragon deal? I do not know. These are very serious issues. Mr. President, there is another election carded in Caracas, which the Americans have said they are monitoring very carefully and closely. And if they do not reach up to the standards that have been agreed upon by the parties under the heading called “Electoral Roadmap”, then all hell will break loose. So that is the second election that is supposed to take place in 2024.

And, Mr. President, it appears that given that state of play in Trinidad and Tobago with gas production going down, we understand, Mr. President, as we speak, gas has gone from 2.6 to 2.5. And the rate that it is going, unless we find new gas, by the year 2027, we will be down to 2 billion standard cubic feet of gas. That is a disaster for Trinidad and Tobago unless we get the gas out of Venezuela. You could imagine Trinidad and Tobago, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar and under Patrick Manning, they produced 4.2billioncubic feet of gas? When we left office, we were 3.8 billion cubic feet of gas; 3.8. This Government has brought our gas production from 3.8 billion standard cubic feet a day to 2.5 standard cubic feet of gas per day. And from all indications, Mr. President, if we do not find gas, we will be down to 2 billion standard cubic feet by 2026/2027. Where are we? That is

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

why we have a third election in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: You are having a snap election—you want to have a snap election in 2024 because your situation is dire. And I want to tell you, call the elections in 2024 and we will get rid of you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: Call it. We are ready for you all. I hear they have a trip for my partner, Works and Transport. “He going China”.

Sen. Lutchmedial: Again?

Sen. Sinanan: [*Inaudible*]—internal.

Sen. John: “He going for T-shirts”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Sen. W. Mark: “Doh worry with no internal. Doh worry with no internal”. Yes, Mr. President, “ah” focusing [*Laughter*] No, that is part of the banter. It is part of the banter [*Laughter*] So, Mr. President—

Sen. John: “He going for T-shirt awa”?

Sen. W. Mark:—this is a very serious matter that we are dealing with here. Let us not use or take this thing in a very flippant and jovial manner. The lifeblood of Trinidad and Tobago is natural gas. Without natural gas, we cannot get the foreign exchange that is required for us to import food, medicine and anything that we consume in Trinidad and Tobago. So natural gas is the lifeblood of our country, and our country, Mr. President, was at its height when we were 4.2 billion. Now we are at 2.5, then we are going to 2billion. What is going to happen to our country?

So the Government, Mr. President, has to see this Motion in the context of

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

an effort by the United National Congress to get the Government to work with, not only us but with the Independent Bench, so that we, as citizens of the Republic of T&T, can pull our heads together and get the best outcome for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: Right? So we are calling for transparency. We are calling for accountability. We want to know what is going on. Mr. President, what is wrong with that?

Mr. President, the Dragon gas field has wells, but you have to connect those wells to the Hibiscus platform. The Hibiscus platform is owned by Shell. To put down the infrastructure from the Dragon gas field to Hibiscus will cost us US \$1 billion. Who is going to invest US \$1 billion when you know the President of Venezuela will not hold free and fair elections in 2024? You know that. Nobody “eh” want—he is not going to give up power, let us face it. He is not going to give up power. So what it will mean—you think Shell “dotish”? You think Shell is stupid? You think Shell is going to invest US \$1 billion to connect the Dragon field to the Hibiscus platform, and the United States has a President called Trump coming in '24 and the sanction is reposed? Mr. President, we have to be serious. And the question that has to be asked is this, the role of the National Gas Company, Mr. President—because they are part of this project. I have been advised that the National Gas Company is deficient, is unable, is incapable, does not have the wherewithal to engage in that kind of project. That is a pipe-laying company. “Dem doh” know about—you see Petrotrin that you closed down? Man, you will rue the day that you closed down Petrotrin.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President, you need certain professionals. You talk to any professional who understands energy and they will tell you, you need certain professionals to deal with that project called the “Dragon gas project”. You need professionals. If you are going to invest \$1 billion and you do not have the professionals to do that job, Mr. President, then we are going to be taken for a ride by Shell if they invest. I would like to ask the Government, could you tell Trinidad and Tobago what is the capacity of NGC? Do they have the professionals? Do they have an exploration and production department, as Heritage does, in order to look after the national interest? And the answer is no.

5.25 p.m.

So you are putting are NGC to be in a project that they do not have the capability, they do not have the competency and they do not have the professionals.

Hon. Senator: Where is the money?

Sen. W. Mark: So all they are doing is giving out the money, our money. That is what they are going to do, Mr. President.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. W. Mark: No. You do not know anything about that boy. I think you are going to the man name in fact, eh Yeah. You are getting ready for that. Yeah. So, Mr. President, the question here is this. The question here is this: How are we going to safeguard the interest of the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago? The Venezuelan Government has said in this deal that you want to get natural gas flowing from Dragon. Maduro, the President, he wants US \$65 million as a signature bonus. Who is going to pay that? You think Shell is going pay Maduro US \$65 million? So is it going to be the National Gas Company? And

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

where are they going to get the money from to pay \$65 million as a signature bonus? That is before you could even put down a structure in Venezuela. Maduro says US \$65 million.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: NGC might want to pay.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. W. Mark: So the reason why the Government is silent and they have put on no further speakers on this important matter that will determine the life and death and future of our country is because the Government is aware that this project is dead.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Mark: “De” project is dead, that is why the Government is silent.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: And Manatee is one that is going to save them.

Sen. W. Mark: But, Mr. President, I would have thought that the Government would have contributed by fielding another speaker to tell us, listen, Dragon might be problematic, we are not too sure, but you see Manatee on our side of the border, 10 trillion cubic feet of natural gas is buried there in the waters. I thought the Government would have gotten up here and say, “Listen, we are going to put a lot of energy into the Manatee field because you know why?” It belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and not Venezuela. The Dragon gas belongs to the Venezuelan population, and my colleague Sen. Neil Gosine made the point that the people who are going to get all the royalties, all the taxes, everything from this thing is Maduro. And you know who is going to get the set, Mr. President? Shell.

Hon. Senator: “What we get?”

Sen. W. Mark: So what are we going to get, Mr. President? So you know, in any serious civilized society that has natural resources whether it is mineral, oil or gas,

you know, Mr. President, there is a rule it is in the Petroleum Act, no oil is to be exported from Trinidad and Tobago to any country unless domestic demand is satisfied. That is a standard rule. We do not have it for natural gas. So you know what it means? We are going to Venezuela, we are getting 350 million standard cubic feet of gas from the Dragon field. The Dragon field is capable of producing 500 million standard cubic feet of gas per day, but Shell Hibiscus platform has to be restructured if you are going with it as is, Mr. President, all it can transport is 350 million standard cubic feet of gas per day. And you know what is more alarming? Shell is a big shareholder in Atlantic LNG with BPTT. You know who the gas is going to—300 million out of the 350 going to where? Atlantic LNG and only 50 million going to Point Lisas, and Point Lisas is the heartbeat of Trinidad and Tobago because we get taxes from the petrochemical sector.

Mr. President, do you know that this same Atlantic NLG robbed the country of almost about US \$20 billion between 2011 and 2015 through transfer pricing? They tell us, they paid one price, then they take our natural gas, liquefied, Mr. President, then they go on the ocean, then they transship it to another barge and they sell it for 1,000 times more than they pay, so we end up getting “lick up”.

Hon. Senator: “And where Ramnarine is?”

Sen. W. Mark: Forget Ramnarine—it is Trinidad and Tobago, you were there, you had four years when you came in, you knew what went on, but you know what you did? You gave Shell and BP a “bligh”.

Hon. Senator: A “bligh”.

Sen. W. Mark: That is what you did. So, Mr. President, this Motion is very serious. It is a very serious matter and the Government must come clean with the people of Trinidad and Tobago on this matter, and we are calling on the

Government, Mr. President, to agree. What is wrong with the Government, Mr. President, agreeing to provide us with information that, you know, information, it has been said is the oxygen of any democracy, eh. That is the oxygen of a democracy, but the PNM produces carbon dioxide. They want to kill people. No. Well, I will not say “kill”. I withdraw that. They want to suffocate people I should say.

So, Mr. President, we have brought this Motion because we understand what is going on. We understand the geopolitics. We understand the risks associated with this project and my colleague again raised a very important point. Even if Maduro takes God out of his mind and he seeks to invade Guyana with this deal, with the Dragon deal would Trinidad and Tobago side with Venezuela at the expense of Guyana? That is the question. That is the question that we are faced with, and I “doh” think the man in Venezuela is a stupid fella. He knows what he did. He tied them up like crabs in a barrel and say, “allyuh cyar move”, and he bawling if you move left, “ah cut allyuh off”. So that is why they cannot talk, they cannot criticize “de” man. We could criticize Maduro any day. We are no friends of Maduro. We are friends of the people of Venezuela. So, Mr. President, when it comes to the national interest in our country we have no friends. We have no friends. If we believe that this deal is not going to assist the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we are not going to take part.

Mr. President, may I ask through you to the Government, is the Government considering making sure that once that project is successful, the Dragon gas project and Point Lisas needs to 200 million standard cubic feet of gas per day to operate and we are getting the 350 million out of the Dragon field, will this Government be prepared to pump 200 million standard cubic feet of gas to the Point Lisas project

and only 150 to the Atlantic LNG? Would they do that? I am saying, Mr. President, they must do it, because it is in the interest of the people to pump gas at Point Lisas—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark:—because Point Lisas belongs to us. You know how much—“hear nah”, Mr. President, the Government is boasting after 30 years, BP made all their profits, they got all their returns, Shell made all their profits, they got all their returns. Thirty years later you know what this Government did? They renewed the licence for another 30 years and an extension of 50 years and they are boasting to Trinidad and Tobago, we now have 10 per cent of Atlantic LNG.

So, Mr. President, 350 million cubic feet, they are getting 300, who is getting the bulk of that? It is BPTT and Shell. We only have 10 per cent, but at Point Lisas we get corporation tax, we get royalties, Mr. President. So the question that we have to ask, Mr. President, is this Government operating and doing business in the interest of the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago or is the Government an agent of Shell and BPTT? That is the question we have to ask here, because how can a government in 2024 agree to have 350 million standard cubic feet of gas come out of the Dragon field, but 90 per cent going to Atlantic LNG and 10 per cent going to Point Lisas? That “doh” make sense. Atlantic LNG is not owned by us, but the Point Lisas Industrial Estate is owned by us. So we must support the plants that are at Point Lisas and, Mr. President, may I remind you, the Minister of Finance indicated sometime last year that when the invasion of Ukraine by Russia took place, the price of methanol went up fivefold. And you know what he told the whole country? We got almost \$1 billion in revenues from the Point Lisas Industrial Estate because of the price going up so high.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Hon. Senator: “He boast.”

Sen. W. Mark: How much we got from Atlantic NLG? How much? Yeah. So, Mr. President, as I said, our Motion is straightforward, direct. They “aint” bound to support it because they are on their way out. They do not have to support it. They have served their term.

Sen. Nakhid: Time to go.

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah. They have served their time.

Sen. Nakhid: Time to go.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: It is time for us to see the back of these devils.

Hon. Senator: Oh gosh.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, what we are asking for is simple. We “doh” expect the PNM to support us. People who sell out the national interest and sell out our national patrimony, you expect them to support us? So what we are asking, Mr. President, is simple. We would like the Government, Mr. President, to provide to this Senate, a detailed account of its approach to the project involving the entities such as Shell, the National Gas Company, Venezuela and the US Government. What is wrong with that, Mr. President? We are asking them to give us a detailed account. Even, I think, it was Sen. Sunity Maharaj, I think she was making the point. Okay. You may not be able to give us a detailed account, Mr. President, but can you not give us an account that would be minus, Mr. President, sensitive commercial details that can compromise your interest? Do we as a nation not deserve to be told what investment we are engaging in and how much we are getting in terms of returns on those investments on behalf of the population?

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Government secrecy.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

Sen. W. Mark: This is a kleptocratic Government. It is a kleptocratic—you know what is kleptocratic? Okay. “Doh let me tell yuh what a kleptocrat is.”

Hon. Senators: *[Interruption]*

Sen. W. Mark: Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. “Doh” let me tell you what is a kleptocrat, you know, Mitchell.

Sen. Mitchell: “Tell meh. Tell meh. Tell meh”.

Sen. W. Mark: Because “ah know, ah know”—I will leave that one.

Mr. President: Sen. Wade Mark. Sen. Mark.

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah. Yeah. Sorry, Sir. Sorry, Sir. I know he is an honest fella.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, you are still—

Sen. W. Mark: Yes.

Mr. President: Members. All right, Sen. Mark, so you have made statements. Sen. Mitchell has thrown his banter. You all have responded. Let us continue

5.40 p.m.

Sen. W. Mark: No, I was just telling you, Mr. President, that he is an honest man. So, “dais all” I was about to tell “yuh”. And that is a compliment, eh. I will meet you on the hills, eh, up the road.

Hon. Senators: *[Laughter]*

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, we are simply asking the Government to give an account of what is taking place. So, like for example, Mr. President, in closing, how much money would Trinidad and Tobago through the National Gas Company, be investing in the Dragon project? We do not know.

The Government must come and tell Trinidad and Tobago how much money NGC will be investing. NGC belongs to you and me, and every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago. So once they are investing, Mr. President, they ought to be

accountable, and they must come and tell us how much.

Mr. President, the Government must come clean and tell us what is the real relationship between Shell and the Government. Shell is in Dragon, “Oh, God”, you put them in Loran–Manatee too? What is going on? Why is Shell all over the place? They are down in Invaders Yard, in fact, the Prime Minister was boasting he got land from Shell.

Hon Senator: What?

Sen. W. Mark: The Prime Minister said he got land for a band called Invaders, from Shell. He is on public record as saying that.

Sen. Gopeesingh: On Tragarete Road.

Sen. W. Mark: On Tragarete Road. So, I do not know if there is a link between land in Invaders Pan Yard, and Shell at Loran–Manatee. I do not know. The people will probably want to ask that. So, Mr. President, the next thing we are asking for, through you, is this. The Government should provide this honourable Senate with quarterly reports on this critically significant project, review this project as critically significant and important for the future well-being and sustainability of our economy. We recognize that, and that is why we are working and we would like to work with the Government to ensure that we are on the same road. When the hon. late Patrick Manning was alive, and I want to hope that wherever he his, his soul rests in peace. But when he was alive, one of the things he was pushing, Mr. President, is for the Opposition and the Government to work jointly on energy matters because energy is the life blood of our country. And you do not want the PNM to be in power, we in Opposition, and they have one policy and when we get into power we change the policy. It is confusion.

So, Mr. Manning was saying let us get together, Mr. President, and come up with one policy for the country that the Government and the Opposition can agree upon. So, when one leaves office and the next one takes over, there will be continuity, there will be certainty, and therefore all the investors in our country would have a sense of, you know, comfort that the United National Congress will not revisit contracts, because we were part and parcel of the exercise.

But Mr. Manning is now dead and therefore that idea died with him, because the bunch that he brought into being, they are just like him, same attitude. I think, I do not know, Mr. Manning called them “wajang”.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Manning called a fella “wajang”, you know. Yeah.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, just watch your language.

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah, yeah, sorry.

Hon Senator: You have nothing to say, you know.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, we will not stand idly by and allow the national patrimony of Trinidad and Tobago to be sold off by this Government to multinational corporations and foreigners. We will not permit that, and that is the only reason why these investors might be a bit worried. We are looking after the national interest, not our own interest. The national interest is first.

So, Mr. President, I would like on behalf of the Opposition—how much time do I have again? Five minutes?

Mr. President: You finish at 5.51.

Sen. Wade Mark: Oh, I only have six minutes again. Yeah.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. President, I would like to suggest that the Government take this matter

seriously and try to work with the Opposition so that we can arrive at some consensus. It would be very difficult for persons to, who are interested in our country's future, if the PNM use their majority here today to vote against this Motion. There is nothing harmful or negative in this Motion to harm the PNM or the Government. This—the measures, the resolutions that are here, Mr. President, is calling for accountability and calling for transparency, probity and openness.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: And the PNM is on record, Mr. President, as saying that they are committed to these values and these concepts. So if they are committed to those values and concepts, Mr. President, how can they find muster to say they are voting against this Motion? This is a very simple Motion. So, Mr. President, I am very happy to have brought this Motion on behalf of the people of the Republic of T&T, on behalf of the Opposition of T&T, and I dare say on behalf of the incoming administration—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark:—the incoming administration of the United National Congress. Come what may, the PNM is a dead party now in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President, I think right now the PNM is sleepwalking or moonwalking. What do you call it?

Sen. John: Dead man walking.

Sen. W. Mark: So we are hoping, Mr. President, that this Motion will find support, would gain support from the Opposition and we would be able, as a Senate, to leave here this evening confident that the Government is interested in these principles or values, as I call them, as it relates to what I have just outlined.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

23.01.2024

And, Mr. President, I think I have said enough on this matter. I have a lot more to say but I am waiting on them. I am waiting on the PNM to declare the election date. The Prime Minister has indicated to people, he is going to Washington at the end of this month and when he comes back screening is starting, so we know you all are on an election footing and we are ready for you. We are like the dragon. This time, we will eat you raw.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, I want to close by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this matter on behalf of the Opposition UNC and the people of T&T. I look forward to my colleagues, even though they are going out, but you could go out with some glory by voting for this Motion, and we look forward to their support in this Motion at the end of the day. And, Mr. President, with those few words, I beg to move. Thank you very much.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put.

Sen. Mark: A Division, division, division, for the people. Let it go to the people. [*Inaudible*]*—the people.*

Mr. President: All right. Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Sorry, sorry, sorry.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Oh gosh, have some behaviour.

The Senate divided: Ayes 15 Noes 15

NOES

Browne, Hon. Dr. A.

Armour SC, Hon. R.

Gopee-Scoon, Hon. P.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

Hosein, Hon. K.

West, Hon. A.

Mitchell, Hon. R.

Cox, Hon. D.

Singh, Hon. A.

Ibrahim, Dr. M. Y.

Sagramsingh-Sooklal, Hon. R.

Sookhai, Hon. R.

Lezama-Lee Sing, Mrs. L.

Hislop, L.

Young, N.

Sinanan, Hon. R.

Mr. Imbert: I “cyah” vote in here.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Division continued.

AYES

Mark, W.

John, Ms. J.

Lutchmedial, Ms. J.

Nakhid, D.

Gopeesingh, Dr. T.

Gosine, C.

Richards, Dr. P.

Vieira SC, A.

Teemal, D.

Dragon Gas Field in Venezuela
(Development of)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

Thompson-Ahye, Mrs. H.

Dillon-Remy, Dr. M.

Hutchinson, Prof. G.

Patasar, Dr. S.

Maharaj, S.

Francis, H.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, the results of the Division are as follows: 15 Senators voted for and 15 voted against. As such, it falls upon me to have the casting vote in this situation. As I have indicted on other occasions before, when I am called upon to give a casting vote, precedence does dictate that the status quo must remain. In this particular situation, the Motion calls for something to occur, which has been read out before. And as such, given the fact that it is an even vote and I must maintain the status quo, I must, in this occasion, vote “no” in order to maintain the status quo. As such, the Motion is not carried.

Motion negatived.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Well done. Well done.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave as been granted for two matters to be raised on the Motion on the Adjournment of the Senate. Sen. Mark.

**CLICO's Shareholding in MHIL
(Government's Decision to Sell)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the first matter is the need for the Government to explain the decision to sell CLICO's shareholding in Methanol Holdings International Limited, contrary to statements made in the Senate on April 25, 2023.

Mr. President, let me inform you, it was on April 25, 2023, that we were informed by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance that Proman, having refused the offer because they wanted to renegotiate prices, they, CLICO that is, decided to turn to the Government, 36 per cent that they had to sell. The total shareholding CLICO has in Methanol Holdings International Limited, which I will refer to as MHIL, was 56.53 per cent; 36 per cent was for sale and 20 per cent—19.99 per cent was held by CLICO in accordance with the Insurance Act.

The question here, Mr. President, is this. We were told by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance that corporation sole was approached by CLICO to buy the 36 per cent of MHIL shares because the Proman group refused or did not take up the offer. So corporation sole took up 19 per cent, and NIF, the National Investment Fund, took up 17 per cent. So 19 plus 17 is 36 per cent. They signed the purchase and sale agreement. They signed the shareholders agreement. They signed the valuation agreement. Everything was signed.

Mr. President, I was shocked. On Christmas, when everybody was having a good time, Proman and the Government met in secret with CLICO, the headline in the *Trinidad Guardian* on Wednesday, December the 27th was "Govt to sell MHIL shares to Proman". So when I read this thing carefully, I said, is it real? But how come the Minister in the Ministry of Finance came here and told us those shares were purchased by corporation sole, were purchased by NIF? And the only thing

Clico's Shareholding in MHIL
(Government's Decision to Sell)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

that was outstanding was updating the share register. So how come on Christmas Day, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sold, not 36 per cent, Mr. President, but 56.53 per cent?

Now, this is a company that is extremely rich. They operate out of Oman. They have a 30-year contract for natural gas supply. Every tonne of methanol that is produced, the Oman Government takes it, so it is a rich enterprise. Why would a government want to dispose of 56.53 per cent shares of CLICO? And remember, Government owns 49 per cent of CLICO. But Government went ahead, Mr. President, and they did that. The question here is this, there is a valuation problem. When this thing was valued in 2020, the 56.53 per cent shares was valued at \$2.6 billion.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: US or TT?

Sen. W. Mark: TT. Mr. President, and this was—anyway, I will talk about that before I conclude—at \$2.6 billion. They never conducted a proper valuation under Claire Gomez-Millar. Since that woman came on the compound in 2018, a qualified opinion from KPMG, '18, '19, '20, '21, '22, before that, Mr. President, “everything hunky-dory”. But once this Executive Chairman came on the scene, everything was qualified.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. President, you know what they did? They hired their friend—“oh”, I should not say their friend, they hired somebody called Charles River Associates. I went into the CLICO report that came to this Parliament for the last quarter of last year, no mention of Charles River Associates. Who did the valuation for this company to be sold? Who did CLICO hire, Mr. President? We do not know, we have not seen the report. So, you know what happened, they conducted an

in-house valuation and you know what happened, because nowhere in that report is Charles River mentioned. They mentioned it only in this Parliament when the Minister addressed us. That is the only time we hear about Charles River Associates. You go to the notes Charles Rivers is not there, you go to the Auditor General, the Auditor's statement, his name—you go to the report, not there. So where is Charles River Associates?

Mr. President, hear what is the rub. You know what “dem fellas” valued the assets in 2022 at, Mr. President?—2.2. So in 2019, it was 2.6; in 2020, it was 2.6; in 2021, it was 2.6, but come 2022, the value of CLICO shares went down from 2.6 to 2.2, a difference of \$323 million. Where that money gone? Who take that money? We want answers, Mr. President. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has to account for this discrepancy.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: The Prime Minister has to account, the Minister of Finance has to account, because I want to tell you something about this Minister of Finance, eh. This Minister of Finance, Mr. President, I have to give him credit for one thing, he stuck to his guns. He wanted a NIF 2. He is on public record as saying that Methanol Holdings International Limited will form the basis of his NIF 2, but there was something going on that he had no control over. And the next thing you know, Mr. President, Switzerland “come” to Port of Spain at the Diplomatic Centre, Switzerland, and then Trinidad and Tobago went to Switzerland and the next thing we know, Mr. President, is that our asset that is worth \$2.6 billion is sold for \$2.2 billion, a difference of \$323 million, and you are telling me I have to pay property tax and you cannot account for \$323 million.

Mr. President, what is even more hurtful, this is an unconfirmed report

which I cannot show you. Up to now as we speak CLICO, silent; the Prime Minister, silent; the Minister of Finance silent; the Governor of the Central Bank is silent. So Trinidad and Tobago, the people of this country do not know what is going on so I have to bring on behalf of the people and the party this matter so that we can get clarification from the Minister. There could be a possible, plausible reason why the Government chose to sell the entire 56.53 per cent shares of Clico in MHIL to the Proman Group, but the Government has a lot of questions to answer, Mr. President.

When the Minister came here and addressed us, Mr. President, in April, did the Minister deliberately and calculatedly mislead us? Because he is on record as saying that this thing has been agreed to. They have purchased the corporation sole. So how corporation sole could purchase in April of 2023, and on Christmas day, Proman “geh” all, all, all. How could that be possible, Mr. President?

Mr. President, I am doing my research and I am coming up with some damning evidence. I am giving the Government an opportunity today to clear the air before we take this thing further. But, Mr. President, all is not well, all is not well. The Prime Minister has to answer, the Minister of Finance has to answer, the Central Bank Governor has to answer and this woman—let me not say “this woman”, let me withdraw that, the former Executive Chairman has to answer, Claire Gomez-Miller.

Mr. President, let me tell you something, eh, in closing. You know when you look at the 2019 report there was, they slipped into the report, the auditor is asking for the techniques used to determine the valuation. And you know what they are told by the Executive Chairman and CLICO management, a contempt of court order is in effect and it cannot show the techniques to the auditors. Mr.

President, I went through the books of CLICO for the court Order, the number of the court Order, Mr. President, I cannot get it, I cannot see it and then the Minister comes here, in the Ministry of Finance and say it is under appeal by the Court of Appeal. "Ah looked for it, Mr. President, ah cyah find it". So where is this court Order, where is this Court of Appeal that this thing is under?

Mr. President, this is round one and we are asking for clarification. The Minister is in the best position to clarify the issues for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I might have got it all wrong and I am seeking clarification. I am making no accusations at this time. I am making no accusations at this time.

Mr. President: Senator you have two more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: I am making no accusations. All I am asking is for the Minister to explain the following: What happened to Corporation Sole, 19 per cent? What happened to NIF 17 per cent shares? How come it flipped? How come Proman come and buy all on Christmas Eve? Who conducted the valuation of those shares? Which company did it? In the past, Mr. President, it was Phelps, something and Phelps, I forget the name of the company that the Central Bank hired. But, Mr. President, when this valuation was conducted CLICO was under the supervision of the Governor of Central Bank. And under 44D (f) of the Central Bank Act you cannot dispose of any asset belonging to CLICO without having an independent valuation conducted, and that must be a public document that you and I could see and have access to or at least they will report to us. We have not seen anything.

So, all I am asking the hon. Minister to do for us today is to clear the air, let us know what has happened, just like how Lisa Agard come and say, she was not responsible, let the Minister come and say, I was not responsible and that happened

Clico's Shareholding in MHIL
(Government's Decision to Sell)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

behind my back.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: So let us get this thing clear because, Mr. President, I am telling you this is the smoke, fire coming. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. President, I never heard a more convoluted, incoherent, rambling, work of fiction as I just heard. There is no part of the contribution of the hon. Senator that is accurate or relevant, so let me deal with the facts now. I “cyah” respond to what he said because nothing he said was truthful or accurate. The fact of the matter is that CLICO, Colonial Life Insurance Company, is owned 49 per cent by the Government, 51 per cent by the liquidator of CL Financial. Therefore, the Government is not the majority shareholder of CLICO. Therefore, the shares in question do not belong to the Government. The decision to dispose of the shares was a decision of the shareholders. The liquidator could have sold them without the Government's consent. But there is a relationship of respect between the liquidator and the Government with respect to important decisions. It is the business of the liquidator to try and recover the \$30 billion, 3-0 and counting, that the Government has put in to the CLICO bailout, as it is commonly called, which also included the bailout of many CLF subsidiaries, because CLICO is simply one of the CL Financial subsidiaries that were bailed out by the Government. Other subsidiaries, for example, are British American Insurance where the Government put \$1.6 billion into that company to bail it out, among many others.

It is the job of the liquidator to liquidate the assets of CL Financial, which include the 51 per cent of Colonial Life, to repay that \$30 billion that the Government is owed. CLICO on its own within that \$30 billion owed the Government \$18 billion. CLICO up to December had paid the Government \$17 billion. It was just about \$1.1 billion was left to be paid. CLICO had been trying for probably, 15 years, about 10 years, to dispose of the MHIL shares as part of its obligation to repay the Government the money injected into CLICO bailout. This is something that has been going on a long time. It predated the administration, it predated the 2015 administration and in fact, it began under the 2010 to 2015 administration, an attempt to sell the shares in MHIL in order to pay back the Government the billions of dollars of taxpayers money injected into the CLICO bailout.

The problem has always been, there is a clause in the shareholders agreement between Colonial Life and a company called Consolidated Energy, CEL. Typical clause, typical commercial clause, where if the shares are to be sold they have to be first offered to the other shareholder and if that shareholder refuses then the shares can be sold at the upward market. That is standard corporate governance, not just in Trinidad and Tobago but around the world. Usually in companies there is this type of shareholders agreement.

On all previous occasions Colonial Life offered the shares to Consolidated Energy at an independent valuations price, because there are many different, there have been several independent valuations done over the years, including the most recent one. And on every occasion that Colonial Life offered the shares to the other shareholder, in accordance with the shareholders agreement, Consolidated Energy declined to pay the price.

So whether it is US 300million or US \$350 million which are the numbers that have been in the system for the last 12 years I would say, Consolidated Energy said, no, we cannot pay the price. The next step after that occurs because CLICO offers the shares to Consolidated Energy which is the other shareholder in the company in MHIL and a month has to elapsed and then Consolidated Energy would say, yes, we are buying the shares at the valuation price, no, we are not. So on every occasion they said, no, we are not paying that price for these shares.

The next element in the shareholders agreement kicked in, a very unique shareholders agreement composed by the former owners of CL Financial. I do not need to call their names, everybody knows who they are, a very unique clause that you can sell them on the open market but you cannot sell them to a competitor. Now, who else would want to buy shares in a methanol company than somebody involved in the business of methanol?

6.15 p.m.

So it was very clever of the former owners of CL Financial to put that in. So that when CEL said, look, we do not want them, it was impossible to sell them. So this just went on for years, and years, and years. There were in fact three attempts. On the last occasion after multiple legal opinions from senior counsel and so on, an opinion was rendered that, look, you could try to sell them to the Government and to NIF. As soon as that was done the lawyers for Consolidated Energy immediately sent pre-action protocol and said, "If you try to complete that transaction we will go to court and we will ask for injunctive relief".

The last transaction was never completed. There was no consideration paid, there was no payment made. It was in abeyance. Sometime around September, October, November, CEL came forward and said, all right, now we are ready to

buy the shares at the valuation price, which is what they had refused to do for 12 years. As a result, the shareholders agreement kicked in and they have paid \$2.4 billion for the shares. That is it.

**NIB Directorship on Board of Massy Holdings Limited
(Government's Explanation)**

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the second matter I have on—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Why are they—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. W. Mark: I understand. Tim, Tim, Tim, leave that. Mr. President, the second matter I have here dealing with the need for the Government to explain why the National Insurance Board does not hold a directorship on the Board of Massy Holdings Limited despite being the largest single shareholder in the company's current structure.

Mr. President, I brought this because some interesting—I read some matters that generated my interest in the last two to three years and I thought it fitting to ask the hon. Minister of Finance, who is responsible for NIB, to clarify and explain to this House and to the people why NIB which is losing moneys according to a statement issued by the Minister and read to the House sometime—I believe it would have been, Mr. President, on the 13th of December, 2023. The Minister of Finance provided the Parliament with a chronicle of events surrounding this very important institution called the NIB.

One of the things that the Minister said is that the beneficiaries and whatever benefits they get currently outstrip, Mr. President, expenditure. In other words, the income that NIB is getting versus the expenditure that they have to pay out like benefits, there is a deficit and they have to go into their investment portfolio in

order to fund excessive expenditure to pay beneficiaries. We are also seeing in the Minister's statement where NIB invests close to about \$28 billion, and their equity portfolio is very lucrative. Now, they are also involved in things like mutual funds, but their equity portfolio is also in trouble. They are realizing losses to the tunes of—to the tune, rather, of hundreds of millions of dollars, and I say this to bring it into perspective.

The NIB is the largest single shareholder. Twenty per cent from the last report I have, that they have in that Massy Holdings Company Limited. But I am seeing all kinds of people on the Board of Directors of Massy, but when I look for NIB I am not seeing any NIB Directors. So I am asking the hon. Minister to explain to Trinidad and Tobago why it is NIB, after all these years of investing in this company called Massy, has no directorship, no oversight role, no supervisory role in this operation. And why have I raised this?

Mr. President, it was in April of 2021 Massy sold PRESTCON, one of its companies, to the Warner Group of Companies. You know for how much, Mr. President? Seventeen point seven million dollars. We did a conservative estimate of the value of the assets of PRESTCON. PRESTCON is located on Tumpuna Road—factory, equipment, crane, land—and, Mr. President, they are down at Sanctuary Drive, Sea Lots—10 acres of land, harbour front, and they sold that company for \$17.7 million. It is estimated that company could have been worth between \$100 million and \$150 million. That is what we have been advised. So that is what caught my attention, and that is why I realized NIB is in trouble.

And then recently, Mr. President, July of 2022, I saw a company call Endeavour Holdings. George Aboud and whoever, the Rahaels, they bought the whole of Edward Street. From who? Massy Holdings. Mr. President, when last

you travelled Edward Street? Everything on your right, everything on your left Massy owns. You know how much he sold it for, Mr. President? Forty million dollars—\$40 million. You know what Aboud said in their last report? They said by buying these two prime properties on Edward Street the value of their assets has gone up by \$90 million. So in no time, one year, they have moved from \$40 million to \$90 million.

So the question that is being asked, Mr. President, we need to query Massy. We need a forensic investigation into Massy because Massy is a public company. They are listed on the public exchange, the stock exchange, and the question that has to be asked: How come Massy sold Massy Communications to TSTT for \$250 million—

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark, number one, Massy is a public company as you just indicated.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes.

Mr. President: What brought this question on here is you are talking about NIB leading to have a directorship on Massy for certain reasons. That is why the Minister of Finance is here because he is dealing with NIB which falls under the Ministry of Finance. You are talking about Massy. You need to talk about NIB and what is before us.

Sen. W. Mark: Okay. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, all I am doing is just connecting the dots. I am saying that when you look at the portfolio of the NIB you realize that they have a large equity portfolio and they are the largest single shareholder in Massy. So they are losing money. And I am saying, Mr. President, if they are losing money we have to look at one of those companies where they have a large investment, and I am seeing properties owned by that

company being sold and being undervalued and under-priced. And I am asking the question whether that is accountable for what the experiences have been for NIB. That is all I am asking. There appears to be a link. I may be wrong. The Minister could clear the air on that.

So all I am asking the hon. Minister to tell this Parliament what accounts for the fact that after so many years of being the largest single shareholders—

Mr. President: Senator, you have one more minute.

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah—in the National Insurance Board, could the Minister explain to us—maybe I need—I am seeking clarification, Mr. President. Could the Minister who is a corporate man—because I know he has property somewhere on New Street. He is a well-off man so he could tell us about things. So what I would like the Minister to tell us, as a businessman himself, what explains this Why, for instance, Mr. President, you have this situation occurring? Maybe there is a proper and plausible answer. All I am saying is the time has come for the Government to consider having directors from NIB on the Board of Massy Holdings Limited, and I am asking the Minister to clarify for us and to give the population some comfort that that could be done. That is all I am asking, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. President. By way of an analogy I could have answered the last Motion by simply saying—last matter—that in accordance with the shareholders agreement the shares were sold at the valuation price to the other shareholder for the valuation price. I could have said that, but I think that would have been disrespectful to the Senate. This one is worse, and in trying to figure out how to answer this one I had to do some research. I went and checked literature to check a book called *The Book of Husbandry*

published in 1523. It is one of the classics of English agriculture. And apart from giving a lot of shrewd observation and wisdom on agriculture, it also delved into other matters. And in *The Book of Husbandry* there is a saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks".

Now, that expression was made popular by an English playwright called John Heywood in 1546, and the old English wording of that is, "The dog must learn when he is a whelp or else it will not be. For it is hard to make an old dog to stoop". "Stoop" is the old English word. Translating to modern English is, "A dog must learn when he is a new puppy or else it would hard for him to comply". And similarly not ascribing any references to the hon. Senator, he must learn, but it appears he is too old to learn because this is an advertisement published by the National Insurance Board proudly proclaiming the appointment of somebody called Nigel Edwards to the Board of Massy Holdings on the 8th of December 2022, over one year ago. This notice was actually published in the local media on the 11th of May, 2023, and Mr. Edwards was reappointed as a nominee of the National Insurance Board to the Board of Massy Holdings at its most recent AGM and is being re-elected for three years.

So NIB has had a representative on the Board of Massy Holdings for 14 months.

Sen Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: But I have to come into this Senate and answer this matter which the Member did not deal with at all. He carried on at a rate about a publicly listed company which the Government has no shares in and demanded that the Government deal with a public company that they do not have any shares in, and this is the matter I came to answer, the need for the Government to explain why the

National Insurance Board does not hold a directorship on the Board of Massy Holdings. This is ridiculous. They have had a Director on that Board for over a year.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Something is wrong with Sen Mark. Something is wrong and I refer to that treatise by John Heywood. You just cannot teach an old dog new tricks because this has to be some attempt at a trick. Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: I think he is referring to himself. He is talking about himself.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, I am on my legs.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark!

Hon. Senator: No, no, no, withdraw that.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.30 p.m.