SENATE

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. PRESIDENT in the Chair]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial-Ramdial, who is ill.

SENATOR’S 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. COLIN NEIL GOSINE

WHEREAS Senator Jayanti Lutchmedial-Ramdial is incapable of performing her 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

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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 11th June, 2024 and continuing during the absence of the Senator the Honourable Jayanti Lutchmedial-Ramdial by reason of illness.

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 11th day of June, 2024.”

**OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Senator Dr. Colin Neil Gosine took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION)**

**(FINANCIAL YEAR 2024) BILL, 2024**

A Bill to amend the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2024) Bill, 2024, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**PAPERS LAID**


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3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the financial year ended September 30, 2012. [The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne)]

4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the financial year ended September 30, 2013. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the San Fernando City Corporation for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

6. Administrative Report of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2021/2022. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

7. Annual Administrative Report of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2019/2020. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]


10. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security to the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on a follow-up inquiry into the implementation of the recommendations of the 18th Report, 11th Parliament, on an inquiry into the treatment of migrants with specific focus on the rights to education,
employment and protection from sexual exploitation. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

11. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs to the Eleventh Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT) for the financial years 2014-2018. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

12. Response by the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs pursuant to Standing Order 41 of the Senate on the Review of the Commissions of Enquiry Act. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

13. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Education to the Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of the state of the regulation and administration of public and private early childhood institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

14. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on National Security on an inquiry into the safety, security and protection of citizens with specific reference to the factors that contribute to the prevalence of illegal firearms and gun violence in Trinidad and Tobago. [Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne]

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2023

(Presentation)

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you, Mr. President. I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Order Paper in my name:

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Examination into the Provision of Flood Relief Grants by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
(Presentation)

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell): Mr. President, I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Order Paper in my name:


JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS
(Presentation)

Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye: Mr. President, I have the honour to present the following reports as listed on the Order Paper in my name:

Inquiry into the State’s strategy with specific focus on the Electronic Transaction Act, Chapter 22:05.

Eighth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament, on an inquiry into the State’s strategy for implementing un-proclaimed legislation passed by Parliament during the last 20 years (Part II) with specific focus on the Electronic Transactions Act, Chapter 22:05.
Inquiry into the State’s strategy with specific focus on the Dog Control Act, Chapter 67:56.

Ninth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament, on an inquiry into the State’s strategy for implementing un-proclaimed legislation passed by Parliament during the last 20 years (Part II) with specific focus on the Dog Control Act, Chapter 67:56.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

1.40 p.m.

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President with respect to questions for oral answer, the Government is prepared to answer question number 105, question number 107, question number 108, question number 110, question number 111, question number 117, question number 123, question number 127, question number 128 and question number 129. With respect to question number 124, we seek leave for two weeks to defer that particular response.

With respect to questions for written responses the Government is prepared to answer and we will circulate 100 per cent of the responses to the questions for written answers. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, the leave that the Member seeks is so granted. Sen. Mark.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Authorized Blood Collection Centres/Institutions - 2018-2023

(Provision of List)

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112. **Sen. Deoroop Teemal** asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With regard to the authorised blood collection centres/institutions in Trinidad and Tobago during the period 2018–2023, can the Minister provide a list containing the following:

(i) the names of each centre/institution;

(ii) whether each centre/institution is stationary or mobile; and

(iii) whether each centre/institution is public or privately-owned?

**Authorized Blood Centres/Institutions - 2018-2023**

(Details of Blood Collection)

113. **Sen. Deoroop Teemal** asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With regard to blood collected at centres/institutions authorised to do so in Trinidad and Tobago, can the Minister provide the following for the period 2018-2023:

i. the units of blood collected annually by each of the authorized blood collection centres/institutions;

ii. the total units of blood which were rejected annually after testing;

iii. the total units of blood and blood products which expired annually;

iv. the total units of blood and blood products annually discarded after dispatch from the Blood Bank and/or returned to the National Blood Transfusion Services from all institutions; and

v. the number of Volunteer Non-Remunerated Blood Donations collected monthly?

**Authorized Blood Centres/Institutions - 2018-2023**

(Statistics on the Operations/Administration)
114. **Sen. Deoroop Teemal** asked the Minister of Health:

With regard to statistics on the operations and administration of centres/institutions authorized to collect blood in Trinidad and Tobago, can the Minister provide the following for the period 2018-2023:

i. the average cost of collection per unit of blood borne;

ii. the annual operating costs for each of the authorized blood collection centres/institutions; and

iii. the annual labour costs for each of the authorized blood collection centres/institutions.

**Authorized Blood Centres/Institutions-2018-2023**

*(Removal and Replacement of Chit System)*

115. **Sen. Deoroop Teemal** asked the Minister of Health:

Can the Minister advise whether the Government intends to remove and replace the ‘chit system’ utilised at authorised blood collection centres/institutions in Trinidad and Tobago and provide the following:

i. the strategic action plan, including timelines for the removal and replacement of the chit system at said institutions; and

ii. what steps, if any, have been completed towards this objective?

**Trinidad and Tobago Society for Haematology and Blood Transfusion**

*(Findings and Recommendations from National Symposium)*

116. **Sen. Deoroop Teemal** asked the Minister of Health:

Can the Minister provide the findings and recommendations of the study which stated that the estimated national requirement for blood stands at 40,000 units per year, as reported in Trinidad and Tobago Society for Haematology and Blood Transfusion National Symposium on October 30, 2022?

*Vide end of sitting for written answers.*
ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Port of Port of Spain Surveillance/Scanning

(Details of)

124. Sen. Dr. Paul Richards asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

With regard to surveillance and scanning operations at the Port of Port of Spain, can the Minister advise as to the following:

(i) whether the scanners at the Container Examination Station (CES) are operational

(ii) whether the CCTV cameras at the CES are operational; and

what are the significant challenges in relation to the equipment used for the surveillance and scanning of containers and goods imported into this country?

Question, by leave, deferred.

Average Net Back Price of Natural Gas - 2022/2023

(Details of)

105. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Can the Minister provide the average net back price of natural gas realized for fiscal 2022/2023, as it relates to Government revenue from the energy sector?

Mr. President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much. Mr. President, 466.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.
Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister, if he can answer, how did this impact on his revenue numbers having regard to the fact that the Government had in fact predicated its budget on a price of US$6 MMBtu, can I ask that question, Mr. President?

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, you gave a lot more information than the question has, that is one. Two, I am sure the Minister of Finance did not get the question inside there. Just make it more succinctly, please?

Sen. Mark: Okay, I am just asking through you, Mr. President, to the hon. Minister, whether he can share with this honourable House, how did this price that he has just provided to us impact on the revenue base of the country?

Mr. President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President, I am aware of something called anticipation, where one anticipates a debate in the future. I was not aware of the flipside of that, which is to go back in time. We have had a full budget debate in this House on the fiscal 2020 through—[Interruption] We have had a full budget debate in this House on the estimates for fiscal 2023 and also a full account in the closing of the accounts. All of the data was provided there. So I suggest to Sen. Mark, go and take a good look at the Hansard. I will provide him with the dates if he needs that level of assistance.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Okay, I will go to the next question.

Retrenched WASA Managers’ Executive Packages

(Details of)

107. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Can the Minister indicate when will the executive packages of the approximately two hundred (200) retrenched WASA Managers take effect,

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Oral Answers to Questions (cont’d)  

Mr. President: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, this question is based on a false premise from the start since no decision has been taken to form a new water management company in Trinidad and Tobago. With respect to the proposed restructuring of the Water and Sewerage Authority, several reports, including the 2020 Report of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on WASA, which was tabled in Parliament, have indicated that WASA’s top management is grossly overstaffed and needs to be significantly reduced, a position which I concur.

In this regard, Mr. President, the organization’s redesign process has been guided by the development of a transformation plan. The top management structure for the 34 top leadership positions has been approved and the human resource subcommittee of Cabinet is still determining the compensation packages for these positions. Persons have been identified for the filling of the following nine leadership positions: Chief Executive Officer, Director of Corporate Finance, Director of People Transformation and Central Services; Director-Technology Future Systems and Sustainability; Director-Water Management Tobago; Director, Water Management-Northwest, Northeast, South and Central.

Once the top leadership has been contractually engaged, the next levels of management will be restructured guided by the transformation plan and the top leadership will participate in the decision in relation to the next level of management. For these positions, which fall within the bargaining units, there will be consultation with the recognized majority union. Until that consultation takes
Oral Answers to Questions (cont’d)

place, there will be no final decision with respect to the precise size of the management team and the various options for separation, which will be agreed upon between the authority and the representative union

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can the Minister confirm or deny whether at this time any decision has been taken in the restructuring and transformation plan for WASA to earmark close to 200 managers for separation packages, Mr. President?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. M. Gonzales: The answer to that question, Mr. President is no.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask through you, Mr. President, to the hon. Minister, whether in the transformation of WASA, a new entity by the name of the water management company, will replace WASA as we know it?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Mr. President, I did answer that in my response but let me again, reiterate to the national community that this whole idea of a new water management company is UNC’s foolishness—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—disguised to mislead the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: I do not know why he is getting antsy. Mr. President, can I ask you—

Sen. Lyder: The suit must be tight.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask you, Mr. President, whether the Minister can confirm or deny that in the restructuring and transformation of WASA, some 3,000 workers are expected to be either separated or retrenched in the restructuring and
Oral Answers to Questions (cont’d)  

transformation plan of WASA? Can you provide any clarification to this honourable Senate, Mr. President?

**Mr. President:**  Minister.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:**  Thank you very much, Mr. President. I am happy to respond to the hon. Senator, because it is in a 2013 document submitted to the IDB by the then UNC Government that 2,500 workers were earmarked to be dismissed from the Water and Sewage Authority. It was on that document signed by one CEO Ganga Singh—

**Mr. Young:** He was the CEO?

**Hon. M. Gonzales:**—who approached the IDB for a loan of $1.5 billion and indicated to the IDB that he was going to restructure the Water and Sewage Authority, and on that basis, 2,500 workers will be dismissed from the authority. It got even worse, Mr. President. They got $500 million to engage in a VSEP package to separate these WASA workers. One thousand of these workers participated in that VSEP package and as they exited the Authority, they entered via another door costing the people of Trinidad and Tobago over $500 million. So I want to refer Sen. Mark to that document—

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:**—signed and delivered by the IDB and account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for that scandalous waste of taxpayers’ money and their scandalous behaviour in the water sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. President:**  Sen. Mark, final supplemental.

**Sen. Mark:** I have one more supplemental? I just want to ask the Minister, probably like the Prime Minister—

**Mr. President:** I cannot hear you.
Sen. Mark: Oh, sorry, sorry, sorry Mr. President. Just in case you are opening your fridge—

Sen. Lyder: Fridge door.

Sen. Mark: —you did not hear me. So let me repeat for the hon. Ministers. I would like through you, Mr. President, to ask the hon. Minister whether he can confirm or deny that it is the intention of this evil PNM regime, right—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, again, no, no, no, no, have a seat, just temper.

Sen. Mark: Okay.

Hon. Senator: Beleaguered.

Sen. Mark: Yeah. Mr. President, can I ask the Minister to confirm or deny whether it is the intention of this beleaguered PNM administration to retrench through separation packages between 2,000 to 3,000 workers upon the transformation and restructuring plan—

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Sen. Dr. Browne: Point of order.

Sen. Mark: That is what I am saying.

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, there is a point of order.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne: Mr. President, Standing Order 28(1)(f). I heard lots of hypotheticals in—

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. President: Allow the Standing Order to be raised. Okay, so in this particular instance, yes, Sen. Mark, 28(1)(f) does apply. I have already asked you to temper, the question has been asked. Unfortunately, the Minister has answered that
question already so I will not allow that question to go through. Next question on the Order Paper.

**Sen. Mark:** Time alone will tell.

**Hon. Senator:** Yes.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, let me continue.

**Unhealthy Air Quality Across Trinidad and Tobago**

(Measures Implemented)

108. **Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Health:

In light of the unhealthy air quality levels being recorded across Trinidad and Tobago, can the Minister advise what heightened measures, if any, will be implemented at the regional healthcare facilities to ensure vulnerable groups can easily access urgent care?

**Mr. President:** Minister of Health.

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

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. All public health facilities utilize the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale system called CTAS. In triaging patients accessing emergency health care services, the CTAS system assigns a level of acuity for patients based on their presenting complaint and type and severity of symptoms using the following levels:

“Level—Immediate: life threatening

Level 2—Emergency: could become life threatening

Level 3—Urgent: non-life threatening

Level 4—Semi-urgent: not life threatening

Level 5—Non-urgent: needs treatment when time permits.”
The Ministry of Health continues to communicate with the public and especially with vulnerable groups through press releases public service announcements by the RHAs, radio interviews and via the Ministry of Health’s website on the precautionary measures for those suffering from respiratory illnesses arising from the ongoing poor air quality due to the presence of Sahara dust in the atmosphere. As previously indicated, high levels of Sahara dust may exacerbate illness in persons with higher risk of respiratory complications including, persons with pre-existing lung conditions such as asthma, persons with pre-existing heart disease, the elderly and children.

**1.55 p.m.**

Our public health facilities are equipped with the necessary staffing and medical devices, inclusive of nebulizers, ventilators and pulse oximeters, and continue to utilize the CTAS system for prioritization and treatment of all patients experiencing respiratory illness, namely asthma, allergies, respiratory infections and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases. Within the public health sector, there are 1,217 nebulizer stations, of which 1,008 are in the hospitals, 70 are in the district health facilities and 139 are in health centres, which include outreach and enhance centres.

It is highly recommended that those persons with pre-existing conditions take the necessary precautionary measures, such as stay indoors where appropriate to minimize the effects; partake in less strenuous outdoor activities, example, walking instead of running; ensure that their rescue inhaler is with them at all times; and wear a mask, where appropriate, to protect yourself from dust particles.

Affected persons experiencing severe shortness of breath, persistent fever or severe worsening of pre-existing conditions can seek immediate medical attention at all public health facilities. Thank you very much.
Oral Answers to Questions (cont’d)

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Can I ask, through you, to the hon. Minister, given the unhealthy air quality level, as you have defined in terms of the various levels, can you share with this honourable House or Senate the number of citizens who may have had to seek attention at the various centres that have the apparatus that you outlined earlier for support given the unhealthy air quality over the last few weeks in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: That data is not with me, but if the question is posed, we can certainly try to answer it.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether such data is, in fact, gathered by your Ministry and is, in fact, available upon questions being put to you for data on that particular matter?

Mr. President: He just indicated that if you ask the question, the data will be provided. Next question—next supplemental, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Yes. Well, Mr. President, I will pause at this time.

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Paul Richards.

Tobago Oil Spill
(Update on Vessel)

110. Sen. Dr. Paul Richards asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

With regard to the vessel that ran aground off the coast of Tobago in February 2024, causing significant environmental damage, can the Minister provide the following:

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Oral Answers to Questions (cont’d) 2024.06.11

(i) a comprehensive update on the search for the owner(s) of the vessel; and
(ii) the owner(s) and origin of the vessel that was reported to be towing the barge?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. President. The oil spill’s impact on the Atlantic shoreline of Tobago and on the marine environment was caused by a non-propelled tank barge, strongly suspected to be Gulfstream. The barge, Gulfstream, was classed with the American Bureau of Shipping until the 31st of December, 2018, but after that date, no further registration details were available. It was also noted that it appeared that the vessel had not been reclassed or registered for a number of years. The tug involved in the incident has been identified as the Solo Creed.

The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard has been working in close collaboration with the Guyana Coast Guard, the Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, CARICOM IMPACS, to assist in identifying the owner of the Solo Creed.

Additionally, the Director of Maritime Services Division has been using that Division’s resources and relationships, including but not limited to reaching out to various similar divisions in CARICOM, Panama and Africa, as well as the I.R. Consilium to identify the vessels, and the owners of any vessels involved in and responsible for the oil spill. In this regard, official correspondence was dispatched to Panama and Tanzania seeking any relevant information regarding the two vessels. The Maritime Services Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport was also contacted by a Nigerian lawyer representing the purported owner of the tug and barge. The Maritime Services Division is currently scrutinizing the

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validity of the claims, having initiated enquiries to the Nigerian Government. However, at this time, there is reasonable suspicion related to this particular claim and correspondence.

Despite great efforts to date, all of these searches have failed to locate the tug, *Solo Creed*, which has not reactivated its automatic identification system since the date of the incident, seemingly having fled the scene, nor led to the discovery of any definitive information regarding the ownership of the barge, *Gulfstream*, at this time.

Recently, however, there were reports of the *Solo Creed* being arrested in Angola. Immediately, the Government dispatched official correspondence to the Government of Angola to obtain information to confirm whether the tug/vessel has, in fact, been detained. This line of enquiry is being pursued. At a recent meeting of the International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds in London, when Trinidad and Tobago made submissions to this body and its members, it became apparent that unfortunately, there is a global network of rogue vessels attempting to operate under the law and international obligations, similar to how the *Solo Creed* and *Gulfstream* and its owners operated, where it is very difficult to ascertain those legally responsible for the vessels.

Once ownership is established, this Government will take legal action against the purported owners of the barge, *Gulfstream*, and/or the owner of tug, *Solo Creed*. We will continue to use all of our relationships and resources, including an independent satellite provider to attempt to ascertain the owner or owners of the vessels.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Dr. Richards.
Sen. Dr. Richards: Minister, can you share with the Senate if there are any applicable laws that can minimize any such reoccurrence and protect, not only Trinidad and Tobago, but other CARICOM counterparts from a reoccurrence of this or any other type of environmental potential threat?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. The answer is yes. In the international maritime industry and also, in domestic ports, there are obligations. Unfortunately, this would not have helped us here in Trinidad in preventing the vessel from entering the way it did. However, we have raised those questions, for example, at the IOPC meeting a few weeks ago and there is an obligation, for example, on Panama, which was the port that we know it last left, to have proper records, including confirmation of insurance, confirmation of ownership, et cetera.

So how the international community should be dealing with it is each domestic port must do its best to ensure that proper records are being kept of every vessel entering and leaving its waters. So, in particular, when a vessel leaves its waters, if there is an unfortunate incident, before reaching to another port safely, one can go back to the last port and obtain the information. Unfortunately, in this particular incident, it seems as though there was a lapse in that record-keeping.

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Richards.

Sen. Dr. Richards: Thank you, Minister, for the response. Can the Minister give us a status update on the decanting of the *Gulfstream*, and that process so far of its contents?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. International operators were retained by the Government, T&T Salvage, in collaboration with another sister company. They are currently looking at a further estimated 11,000 barrels of oil. The process
has been—or fuel. The process has been delayed because this is, of course, on the Atlantic side, with an overturned vessel on a reef. So every time there are rough waters or bad weather, they have to cease for safety reasons. It is expected that the decanting of the fuel remaining will be completed by the end of July.

**Sen. Dr. Richards:** Can the Minister indicate if the EMA or any such agency has been engaged to ascertain the level of environmental damage on the reef or any other surrounding area?

**Mr. President:** Minister.

2.05 p.m.

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much. The EMA has been involved but as well as the IMA. We have also brought in other international experts in this area as well as some local experts, and they have been monitoring and doing the necessary evaluations of the effects on the environment, which so far, fortunately, have not been as disastrous as it could have been.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Can I ask the hon. Minister, through you, whether the Government has been able to source the contents of the cargo and its origins, simply meaning, Mr. President, whether the Government of T&T was able to determine where this particular vessel, known as the *Gulfstream*, collected all this oil that traversed through our waters, that capsized off the coast of Tobago?

**Mr. President:** Minister.

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much. That process is akin to fingerprinting the particular fuel. That has been done in terms of determining the equivalent of the DNA of the fuel, and we have asked that that now be sent to all of the refineries in the area and in the region for identification. So it is ongoing.
US Visa Fee Increase for Global Musicians
(Government’s Intention to Address)

111. **Sen. Dr. Sharda Patasar** asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:

Given reports that on April 01, 2024, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services instituted a 250 per cent visa fee increase for global musicians, can the Minister advise:

(i) whether the Government intends to enter talks with US authorities to bring relief to Trinidad and Tobago musicians hoping to work in the US; and

(ii) if the answer is in the negative, what alternative measures are being taken to open markets for Trinidad and Tobago musicians to work internationally?

**Mr. President:** Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

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

**The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. The imposition by the United States of America of a fee in its visa application process is an internal procedure of the United States authorities that is not within the purview of responsibility or jurisdiction of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. However, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts provides significant support to local musicians, artistes and entertainers seeking regional and international opportunities through, one, the provision of assistance to musicians for regional and international travel for the purpose of work in the cultural sector. This assistance has allowed local musicians and entertainers to participate and showcase Trinidad and Tobago’s rich and diverse culture in South Africa, Nigeria, England, Dubai, Bolivia, Grenada,
Monserrat, and American states, such as New York, Miami, Washington, North Carolina and Texas.

Two, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts evaluates and provides recommendations for musicians in the cultural sector, ensuring that those persons are able to have free movement under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and travel within the region hassle free. This is done through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts’ Artist Registry system. Through cultural agreements, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts provides opportunities for musicians and persons in the cultural fraternity to explore global markets. Trinidad and Tobago currently has 13 cultural agreements with countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Central and South America.

Additionally, on March 21, 2024, the Ministry collaborated with the Embassy of the United States of America in Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs to host an information session on visas for local musicians, artistes and entertainers seeking to perform, teach or coach in the United States. The session was held at Queen’s Hall, St. Ann’s, and it was sought to sensitize and educate local artistes on the differences between petition-based and non-petition-based visa applications and the requirements of the US authorities. The session also involved information on instructions and directions on how to complete the online application form and prepare for in-person interviews.

The session also served as an ideal opportunity for persons to clarify questions they had on unique cases, gain advice on the appropriate visas to apply for, and make contact with the US Embassy for further assistance. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts also presented on the Artist Registry for cultural workers, a certification system for individuals and organizations from Trinidad and Tobago that persons can use as supporting evidence towards their visa application.
Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Patasar.

Sen. Dr. Patasar: Do we have any information on the average number of musicians who usually perform in the US?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: No, I do not have that information.

Rising Number of Stray Dogs in T&T
(Measures Taken to Address)

117 Sen. Dr. Paul Richards asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:
Given public concerns about the rising number of stray dogs in Trinidad and Tobago and the lack of facilities to care for them, can the Minister provide the following:

(i) the reasons for the inefficient execution of duties by regional bodies in collecting and caring for stray dogs across the country; and

(ii) what measures are being taken to address said inefficiencies and the care of stray dogs?

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Thank you, Mr. President. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government in conjunction with all 14 municipal corporations is primarily responsible for the implementation and the effective administration of stray dog control measures. In this context, the San Fernando Dog Pound was completed in the year 2022 at a cost of $1.292 million, and a perimeter wall was constructed in 2023 at this particular pound at a cost of $391,350, all funded by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. To service the northern corporations,
the Ministry has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the TTSPCA
and provided financial assistance to the TTSPCA in the sum of $508,457 to assist
the TTSPCA with maintenance repairs and ongoing operational expenses.

The following additional plans and programmes are also in process and
relevant to this response:

1. a review of legislation that governs dog control, stray and dangerous
dogs with the view to make necessary amendments and/or upgrades,
taking into consideration new systems and new technology to ensure
efficiency and effectiveness;

2. assessment of the feasibility of the four shared pound facilities,
including a review of operation, staffing and management of these
facilities and in the dog control units of the various regional
corporations;

3. development of protocols and guidelines to provide operational
standards for the proper care of animals and the facility adhering to
internationally recognized guidelines;

4. establishment of the National Dog Control Database which will hold
information on all registered dangerous dogs, including registration
details, microchip numbers, breeds and year of birth;

5. review of the role and responsibilities of the dog control units in
light of the local government reform process;

6. development of training programmes to ensure the safety of dog
control officers and other handlers, and staff of pound facilities and
dog control units; and finally,

7. preparation of a public awareness campaign, inclusive of education
drives on spay and neuter, responsible dog ownership, public
responsibility under the Act, the role of government agencies, Ministries, corporations, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, NGOs, and a special campaign targeting schools.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Dr. Richards.

**Sen. Dr. Richards:** Thank you, Mr. President. I know the Minister is not the substantive Minister, but in a recent interview on Power 102 Digital, the Director of the Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals indicated that while the subvention is there, there has been a marked increase in stray dogs and cats reported in several divisions in Trinidad and Tobago. So the question is, is the Ministry in touch with the TTSPCA in terms of what is happening on the ground despite the provisions and the plans that you have outlined?

**Mr. President:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** The answer to the question most directly is, yes, Mr. President. The Ministry and the Minister are in touch with the TTSPCA on all observations and developments with respect to stray animals, dogs, cats, et cetera. So there is awareness and communication, and the factors remarked upon by the Senator are exactly what would be triggering the processes that I have outlined, the seven additional plans and programmes, including the public awareness campaign and a focus on the responsibilities of citizens and owners of animals with respect to contributing to this social challenge as the Senator has flagged.

**Mr. President:** Senator.

**Sen. Dr. Richards:** Can the Minister indicate if the actual regional corporations are active in their collaboration with the TTSPCA given the Director, Mrs. Kuruvilla’s, indication in the interview is that they have all but abdicated their
duties since the COVID-19 pandemic to date?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Well, Mr. President, I am not in a position to validate or verify references to the regional corporations abdicating their responsibilities or not fulfilling their relevant responsibilities, but as I have attempted to do in some detail, outline the measures being taken and the support provided by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, the funding that has been applied to the treatment of this particular issue and an indication that the Ministry is working on standards, processes and follow up with all of the regional corporations, and that is the best way I am able to response at this time.

Mr. President: Sen. Nakhid.

Sen. Nakhid: Mr. President, the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs mentioned that there is a public service campaign, I would like to know when did it start, when will it start and what was the cost to the taxpayers?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: I do not want to quote Sen. Wade Mark who referenced earlier, Mr. President, the closing of the fridge door and the fact that there may have been a failure to hear clearly. What I indicated, and it is on the Hansard record, is that there are a number of additional plans and programmes. So with respect to additional plans, number seven was preparation of a public awareness campaign, inclusive of education drives on spay and neuter, responsible dog ownership, public responsibility under the Act, the role of government agencies, NGOs, and a campaign targeting schools. So that is with reference to a plan so it renders the supplemental question neutered.

Mr. President: Sen. Nakhid.
Sen. Nakhid: Mr. President, I do not see what is the problem with the question asked. I understand what he said. I am merely stating, does he know when, to begin. It is a particular question on how much is the cost to the taxpayers. If he does not have the information, he should just say so.

Mr. President: Senator, question asked, question answered. You have any more supplementals?


Rights of the Child Convention Articles
(Details Related to Policies)

123. Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye asked the hon. Minister of National Security: Given the rights granted to children under articles 5, 7, 8, 9, 14 and 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which relate generally to their rights of access to parents and family life, can the Minister outline the policies and practices governing children’s visits to incarcerated parents in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. President: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Mr. President. According to information received from the Commissioner of Prisons as it relates to the rights of access to parents and family life, the following guides the process in respect of visits by children to incarcerated parents in Trinidad and Tobago. Circular Memorandum dated February 23, 1987, outlines the procedure to be adopted when a minor is desirous of visiting his or her incarcerated parent. It further delineates the requirements by prison authorities to approve such visits as follows, and I quote:

An inmate convicted or remanded who has been in custody for a continuous
period of at least one year will be allowed visits. It should be noted, however, that special consideration is given to persons incarcerated for a shorter period of time. For example, if an incarcerated parent is terminally ill or if extenuating circumstances regarding the inmate or the child exist, a child’s visit will be facilitated upon request from either party. Again, I quote:

A person sentenced to death shall be afforded the same privilege as those enjoyed by both remanded and convicted inmates, and such visit or visits will only be entertained on Saturdays during the hours of 8.30 a.m. and 12.00 noon. Notwithstanding the aforementioned day and time regarding said visits, which is usually 15 minutes in duration, subject to prior approval, special consideration for additional time and specific days on which the said visits can be facilitated is considered and must approved by the Commissioner of Prisons.

General Order 88 of 2015 policy regarding visits and visitors to the prison establishment, a birth certificate must be produced by the legal guardian or parent on behalf of the minor for the undertaking of such visits.

2.00 p.m.

This may be waived based on the interview of the prison welfare officer and his or her assessment of the nature of the relationship. Further to children’s rights to access to parents and family life as guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the above-mentioned practices, when home visits to families of incarcerated persons are conducted by prison welfare officers, if any issue with a child is discovered, a visit between parent and/or the primary caregiver and child is arranged with a view to resolving these issues. Visits are further permitted under special circumstances, for example, migration, domestic dysfunctionality, trauma,
or other referrals from the school’s social work department. Within recent years, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, in its rehabilitative drive, has been very flexible, accommodating, and focused on the values and benefits of children’s visits and access to incarcerated parents. Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Sen. Thompson-Ahye.

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: So, hon. Minister, what I get from what you have said, is that it is not really the norm, it is in special circumstances that these visits are allowed, yes? You do not have a programme where parents and children can visit, once the parent is in prison, that the child can request a visit. You talked about sentence of death and illness and things like that. It is not the norm then for visits?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. F. Hinds: They are of course the norm, and I gave examples of exceptional and other circumstances where visits are facilitated.

Mr. President: Senator.

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: Alright, so, you say it is the norm. So as I understand it, if a prisoner is in breach of the rules, those visits are suspended. Would you not agree that that would be infringement of the child’s right to visit with the parent, to enjoy some measure of family life with the parent who is incarcerated?

Mr. President: I will not allow that question Sen. Thompson-Ahye. Do you have another supplemental?

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: Can you say that you have both virtual visits and physical visits and if virtual, how is that conducted?

Mr. President: So the first question would be asked of the Minister, virtual or physical?

Hon. F. Hinds: I am uncertain as to whether there are virtual visits, though I
would not be surprised given the experience that this nation and the world had during the COVID experience, and flowing from that, but certainly, face-to-face visits are the ones described here today, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Sen. Thompson-Ahye, you had a second part to that question, do you want to ask it again?

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: Pardon me?

Mr. President: You had a second part to the question, do you still want to ask it?

Sen. Thompson-Ahye: I understand that for the virtual visit there is one television. Do you know if there are any plans to increase the number, so you can have video-conferencing? Computers, sorry.

Mr. President: Minister, Minister.

Hon. F. Hinds: I would rather avert the risk of speculation today, but I can get specific answers from the Commissioner of Prisons, and I could make them easily available to the hon. Senator, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Senator Dr. Paul Richards.

Sen. Dr. Richards: Question No. 124, is it? Because it was turned down.

Mr. President: Question 124 has been deferred, yes. Sen. Maharaj.

Protection of Children Against Vaping

(Update on)

127. Sen. Sunity Maharaj asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Can the Minister provide an update on the progress made towards implementing legislative and regulatory protection of children against the health risks associated with vaping?

Mr. President: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, again, Mr. President.
Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Vaping is a relatively new construct, only in formal existence since 2003 and there are many health effects that have been attributable since its use. There is a growing body of scientific evidence which is beginning to elucidate the deleterious health effects of vaping, especially among children. Some of these include:

- Vaping can increase one’s risk of developing asthma and other lung diseases and may lead to scarring and organ damage. Vaping is a gateway to the increased use of cigarettes, which carry inherent known risks.

2.25 p.m.

Vaping can lead to possible physical injuries, such as burns from explosions or malfunctions during the use of the device, and some vaping products contain nicotine, which carries all the attendant risks, such as addiction.

In this regard, the Ministry of Health, through its National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme and the Tobacco Control Unit, has developed and implemented the following initiatives to increase awareness and reduce the harmful risks associated with vaping amongst children and other key populations.

One, the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, Organization of the American States, conducted the regional training of trainers in the Universal Protection Curriculum, practitioners service prevention, in the Caribbean region during the period May 29th to June 5th in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The UPC School-based Prevention Interventions course is designed to build the skills, capacity and expertise of the substance use prevention workforce in the Caribbean region by creating a cadre of national and regional UPC trainers to effectively implement evidence-based drug use prevention,
interventions and practices. There were 24 participants in the training course, consisting of 12 from Trinidad and Tobago, and 12 from various Caribbean territories.

Secondly, since January 2023, as a preventative approach to vaping amongst children and other key populations, the Ministry of Health conducted 12 health education sessions at various schools across the country and sensitized approximately 1,200 students about the health risks, dangers and alternatives to e-cigarettes and vaping.

Thirdly, the Ministry of Health continues to conduct its community outreach sessions about the dangers of vaping, and through the request of partner agencies, such as the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, on March 05, 2024, conducted a lecture on dangers of e-cigarettes, vaping at the Civilian Conservation Corps for its Chaguanas induction programme.

And lastly, the regional health authorities frequently conduct sessions on e-cigarettes and vaping at the Lung Cancer/Thoracic Malignancy Unit, North Central Health Authority, and the Smoking Cessation Clinics at the South-West Regional Health Authority. These targeted interventions and actions will be a precursor to inform the Ministry of Health’s policy position and recommendations to reduce the appeal of e-cigarettes and vapes, thereby reducing the health risks associated with vaping amongst children and other key populations. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

EXPIRATION OF QUESTION TIME

Question time having expired the following questions (128 and 129) were not dealt with:

Steelpan Manufacturing Grant Fund Facility

(Details of)
128. In relation to the Steelpan Manufacturing Grant Fund Facility for the period September 2023 to present, can the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry provide the following:

(i) the number of steelpan manufacturers that have received grants; the names of said grant recipients; the quantum of funds received by each recipient;
(ii) the dates of approval of each grant; and
(iii) the conditions, including local content requirements, attached to the grants? [Sen. Maharaj]

Shooting Incidents at Harpe Place and Cocorite
(Support to Affected Persons)

129. In light of the mass shooting incidents which occurred at Harpe Place and Cocorite, can the hon. Minister of National Security outline the systems used to provide financial, social and psychological support to relatives, police officers and other affected persons, in the aftermath of such events?

[Sen. Prof. Hutchinson]

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE
Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2023
(Extension of Time)

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. President, having regard to the Second Interim Report of the Special Select Committee of the Senate appointed to consider and report on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2023, Fourth Session, 2023/2024, Twelfth Parliament, I beg to move that the Committee be granted an extension to July 05, 2024, to complete its work and submit a final report. Thank
you.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. President:  Minister of Finance.

Hon. Senators:  [Desk thumping]

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2024) BILL, 2024

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):  Thank you, Mr. President. I beg to move:

That a Bill to supplement the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2024) Act, 2023, be now read a second time.

Mr. President, before the Senate today is a Bill that has two clauses. The first clause is short title and the second clause seeks a supplementation from the Consolidated Fund of the original appropriation for fiscal 2024, in the amount of $2,328,099,600, and this supplementation is for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2024. So that is the last clause in the Bill, and after that is the Schedule, which would give the various increases for the various Heads, which comprise: the Service Commissions; the Tobago House of Assembly; the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Labour; the Ministry of Public Utilities; the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries; the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government; the Ministry of Works and Transport; the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs; and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. This Bill was approved unanimously in other place on Friday.
The Senators would also have been circulated with a document, which gives some details of the supplementation. It goes through each Head of Expenditure, and gives a brief explanation as to the purpose and intent of the supplementation in each Head of Expenditure. A Head is a Ministry, by the way, for those who may not know, and “Item” would be something like Goods and Services, or Personnel Expenditure. That is an Item. And then within each Item, we have a Sub-Item, such as Other Contracted Services, which would find its way into the Item of Goods and Services. So it is, Heads, Items, Sub-Items. Let me now provide further information for hon. Senators.

Firstly—and let me state at the outset that, as is customary, when the Ministry of Finance asks all of the Ministries and departments that are funded through appropriations—because there is also another type of expenditure called “direct charges”. Those are not appropriated. Direct charges are automatic. What we in this place and the other place discuss, debate, and approve are appropriations. I will give you an example of direct charges. It would be the salaries of judges, for example. We do not appropriate that. Those are directly taken out of Consolidated Fund without parliamentary action.

So when we communicated with the other Ministries and departments to find out whether they required supplementary funding for the balance of fiscal 2024, as is customary, we were presented with a very large number, in terms of requests. And this is not surprising because whenever we do the budget exercise every year in August and September, we send out a Call Circular around May/June to all Ministries and departments and ask them to submit their proposals or their requests for their appropriation for the upcoming fiscal year. Whenever we usually get them—we start to get them in July/August and so on—the requests always are far
more than the revenue will allow.

So let us say, for example, the revenue is estimated at $50 billion, or $55 billion as the case may be—the requests are always in the $65/$75 billion range because Ministries and departments always ask for the maximum, and when we do the budget exercise, it is impossible to accommodate a request of say $65 billion when you are looking at revenue of $50 or $55 billion, for example. So what the Budget Division does is, it prioritizes, it looks at the pattern of expenditure in previous years and it comes up with an appropriation. Then at the middle of the year, more or less, the Budget Division makes another interaction with Ministries and departments, which quite often results in a supplementation of appropriation. The sums involved are, in the opinion of the Government, urgent and critical, and we believe that we have cut it down to the barest minimum.

So if I go through the various supplementations, the Service Commissions is being—we are seeking a supplementation for the Service Commissions of $4.140 million, and that is to meet legal costs for ongoing court matters and to facilitate payments for specialized assessment exercises for senior officers, such as Commissioner of Police, Commissioner of Prisons and so on.

The next Item is Head 15—that was Head 6—Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly, where the Budget Division, having looked at a request from the THA—the request was of the order of $153 million to pay for costs associated with the clean-up of the oil spill. And let me make it very clear that the costs or requests submitted by the THA has nothing to do with the costs incurred by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, which had its own separate exercise, in terms of dealing with the clean-up. So the Assembly requested $153 million but on examination of the invoices and the actual expenditure, the officers in the Budget
Division could only justify a sum of $50 million, and the cost would include clean-up and remediation, lease and rental infrastructure, marine support services, security, materials and supplies, catering and refurbishment.

The next Head is the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, Head 23, where we are seeking a supplementation of $124.3 million, and that is to facilitate the payment of moneys owed to local attorneys, $30 million, and foreign attorneys, $90 million, for the provision of legal services; to pay for maintenance of software at the Companies Registry; to meet operational costs; and to cover the cost of rental accommodation for the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force of this fiscal year.

The Ministry of Education is asking for a supplementation of $144.2 million, and that is for payment of arrears of increments owed to teachers in accordance with revised terms and conditions of employment. And what happens here is that quite often something would be in the pipeline and would not be completed or settled at the beginning of a fiscal year, and there may be no guarantee that matters would be settled, and I give will you an example. In this fiscal, we have had to pay out over a billion in back pay to certain public officers whose representative organizations accepted the Government’s offer of 4 per cent over six years, but we have others who have not.

2.40 p.m.

So that one does not know at the beginning of a fiscal year when you are dealing with collective bargaining whether agreement will be reached during the fiscal, but in this particular case the agreement was reached on a payment of arrears of increment owned to teachers in accordance with revised terms and conditions of employment. That was not provided for in September and we are
asking that it be provided now.

With respect to stipends awarded to invigilators and supervisors during the January 2024 CSEC and CAPE examinations, as well as payments for services rendered for the June CSEC and CAPE examinations, there has been an increase which is related to the increase in the minimum wage. There is also a requirement for payment of salaries to short-term employees who worked on the completion of the arrears exercise pertinent to the members of the teaching service. Again, it was not anticipated that a whole-of-government approach would be required to deal with the teaching service. In fact, virtually the entire Government worked with the Ministry of Education in the months of October, November and December to fulfil the undertaken given to pay back pay to teachers by Christmas of 2023.

In addition, MTS requires additional funding to provide maintenance, training and security, maintenance and security in particular to schools, so there is an amount required for that. If I could just give a further breakdown of the $144 million, $17.5 million is arrears of increments in accordance with the revised terms and conditions of employment; $15 million is for an increase in stipends awarded to invigilators and for the payment of salaries to short-term employees who worked on the back pay exercise; $12.7 million is for current and previous years’ bills which included in part effects of the increase in the minimum wage in January for MTS.

Then we have arrears of gratuity to contract officers, and gratuities are quite problematic sometimes because in order to get gratuity, contract officers have to have all of their pension and leave records up to date, and quite often people move from Ministry to Ministry and their records are not up to date and it takes quite a while to resolve it. So it is always difficult at the beginning of the year to
determine exactly how much gratuity payments will be made during the year. You have to remember education is a huge undertaking with over 20,000, I think, persons associated with that Ministry.

Then we had the cost of school supplies and the book grant to needy students, and that is $20 million, and then salaries to staff of the National Schools Dietary Services, that is the school feeding programme for meals for students and salaries to the end of the fiscal.

Then with respect to the Student Enhancement Empowerment Programme STEEP as it is known, there is a requirement of $12 million for training materials, personal protective equipment for trainees and so on.

The Ministry of Health is asking for the sum of $495,286,000 for payment for the new Ministry of Health administrative building which is on a build/lease/transfer arrangement where interest payments are made or interest on principal payments are made on the financing over a period of time at the end of which the building will be—the ownership of the facility will revert to the Government usually for the payment of $1, but that is the build/own/lease/transfer model. It is a form of off-budget financing. It does not form part of the PSIP.

Rental payments with respect to the Ministry of Health’s previous head office, car park space, PAHO headquarters which were actually two offices at St. Clair and in Port of Spain. Part payment for outstanding invoices on hand over 90 days at NIPDEC for pharmaceuticals including CDAP, and also a number of trade payables to the RHAs, $40 million for the north-west RHA, $60 million for the eastern RHA, $48 million with respect to the new Sangre Grande Hospital and north-central, $121 million, South-West Regional Health Authority, $60 million.

Mr. President, I made a point the other day and I have actually gone and
checked the actual numbers. When I was the Minister of Health in 2002, the actual expenditure, I went and I got the number, was $1.1 billion. With this supplementation of $495 million, the expenditure by the Ministry of Health in 2024, if they spend all of this, will be $7.9 billion. So that the expenditure by the Government on health care in Trinidad and Tobago with no significant increase in population over the last 22 years, the expenditure has gone up virtually by eight times. During that same period, revenue, government revenue has only gone up four times, so that the increase in expenditure on public health is twice the increase in the growth in revenue over the period. In fact, the percentage spent on health in 2024 is approximately 15 per cent of revenue, whereas in 2002 it was 7 per cent of the revenue. So, we spend a lot of money on health care in Trinidad and Tobago, a significant amount of money on free public health care.

The Minister of Public Utilities requires additional funding in the sum of $527,800,000 to assist TTPost to deliver sensitive and confidential mail, and the demand for these resources, this specialized mail service, is due to the fact that TTPost was recently awarded contracts by the American Embassy to deliver passports and visas within the country, and in addition to deliver credit cards on behalf of local commercial banks. So there is need for much stronger and more confidential mail delivery by TTPost. That is $1.1 million, and then TTPost owes the Board of Inland Revenue VAT, so we are providing TTPost with that money so it can clear its arrears with the Board of Inland Revenue.

Then the perennial issue that we face every year is the subvention to WASA, where for years we sought to reduce the cost of WASA to the Treasury, but to date there has not been any significate dent in the annual expenditure which exceeds $2 billion a year.
With respect to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries requires a further $579,000 million for the fuel subsidy, and that would make the expenditure in 2024 on fuel subsidization by the Government by, at least, a $1 billion and the arrears coming from previous years are huge amounts.

The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government we are seeking a supplementation of $95 million to pay salaries for contract officers, to facilitate persons on short-term employment, to deal with the effect of the minimum wage and to pay gratuities and also to increase the amount available for scavenging services in a number of corporations, San Fernando, Chaguanas, Diego Martin, San Juan/Laventille, Sangre Grande, Mayaro/Rio Claro, Siparia and Princes Town. There are various amounts here, $4.6 million additional for scavenging in San Fernando; $3 million additional for scavenging in Chaguanas; $2.2 million for scavenging in Diego Martin, these are all additional sums; $5 million for San Juan/Laventille; $2.5 million for Sangre Grande; $1 million for Mayaro/Rio Claro; $1.5 million for Siparia and $1.7 million for Princes Town, all additional. The other money that we are seeking to supplement for local government really falls into the rubric of increases due to the minimum wage and scavenging services.

With respect to the Ministry of Works and Transport additional funding is being sought in the amount of $155,677,000 to assist the Drainage Division to execute its river clearing and desilting programme in 2024, $20 million for that to deal with bridge repairs, slope stabilization, road rehabilitation, et cetera, an additional $58 million for that. The installation of traffic control devices, intelligent transportation systems along the Eastern Main Road and upgrade of traffic signal systems to video detection sensors, as opposed to inductive-loop
sensors.

For those who may not know what that means, in the past there would be sensors in the road under the asphalt which would detect the presence of a vehicle, and now the Ministry—they did not work properly, they would damage easily and so on, and now the Ministry of Works and Transport is upgrading to video detection, motion detection above ground which would be less, far less susceptible to damage. Basically the moneys for the Ministry of Works and Transport is for infrastructure work and payment of gratuity and some loan payments taken out many, many years ago. The Point Fortin highway, for example, there is a $500 million loan taken out many years ago which requires a loan payment in September 2024.

For the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, we are seeking $4.944 million for remedial work to buildings resulting from a mold infestation. Terminal benefits for locally recruited staff in London, and upgrade of IT equipment at the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs’ headquarters and overseas, and critical refurbishment on government properties abroad.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is seeking $21 million to pay the National Carnival Commission for outstanding bills incurred for Carnival 2024, $5.3 billion to repair the National Academy for Performing Arts, to repair the HVAC system, the elevators, payment of arrears for electricity, janitorial services, et cetera, at NAPA, and similarly for—that is $9.6 million, and similarly for SAPA the Southern Academy for Performing Arts, the maintenance of the building, payment of arrears for electricity, janitorial, et cetera, in the amount of $6.1 million. So those are the details of the supplementation.

It is also my responsibility to report on the fiscal outturn for the first six
months of the year. Before I do that, I just want to put some facts into record because there is so much nonsense that is published in the newspapers and uttered by persons who know better at the University that it is necessary to keep repeating the truth so that people would understand what is really going on. So that one of the documents I have here which relates directly to revenue which is required to pay for the supplementation and the original appropriation is the details of the Henry Hub Natural Gas Spot Price.

Now when the budget was read the natural gas spot price in September of 2023 was $2.64; that is Henry Hub. That dropped to as low as $1.49 in February—March actually, March of 2024. Now the budget is predicated on a natural gas netback price of $5, and I do wish those who know would educate the public as to how natural gas prices are derived and how revenue is earned rather than just engaging in superficiality. I have printed some information with respect to various markers for Henry Hub Natural Gas futures price which is—the acronym is NYMEX. That is the exchange that it is traded on.

2.55 p.m.

In Trinidad and Tobago we have a formula to derive the netback price which gives us a price that is well in excess of the Henry Hub price. Henry Hub is a place in the United States where many, many years ago, when we originally constructed the Atlantic LNG plant, the vast majority of our natural gas which was liquefied in Point Fortin was sent to the United States. In those days Henry Hub, 2006/2007, Henry Hub was as high as $13 per MMBtu British thermal unit. Henry Hub began to slide after that and in fact, when we came in, in 2016 we were faced with a Henry Hub price of below $2.

I have just showed you that, in 2024, Henry Hub dropped to as low as $1.49
per MMBtu in March of 2023. But, these prices are so volatile that you have that price of $1.49, and guess what the price is today? Mr. President, $3.14. So between March of 2024 and June of 2024, the Henry Hub price of gas has moved from $1.49 to $3.14. In fact, I have seen a remarkable recovery in Henry Hub over the last month. It has gone up by $1 over the last month and has gone up now by $1.65 over the last three months.

We have been able to negotiate and that is good news and let us hope it stays that way. We have been able to negotiate—we as a Government and primarily driven by the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who is with us in the back there, have been able to negotiate a formula for our netback price of gas, which is an average, based on consideration of four different natural gas price future markers. I have spoken about Henry Hub, but there is also the Dutch TTF Natural Gas marker, the UK NBP Natural Gas marker, and the Japan/Korea Marker. And, by way of example, in October of 2023, when we were debating the 2024 Budget, Henry Hub was at $3.06 at that time, the Dutch Natural Gas price, the European marker, was $15.72, the UK NBP Natural Gas marker was $15.29 per MMBtu, and the Japan/Korea Marker was $18.29 per MMBtu.

Our LNG facility—the owner’s astute and shrewd businessmen of large multinational corporations, long ago, as the price of Henry Hub started to drop from $13 of MMBtu back in 2007 down to $2 in 2016, and even below $2, they started to reorient the destinations that we ship our gas to and moved away from the North America. I think we only do about 10 per cent or 15 per cent for the most, if so much, of our gas is exported to North America and the rest, the 85 to 90 per cent, was exported to South America, to Chile, in particular, and then to Spain.

Now, as far as I know, it is a blend of Europe and the Far East. And we—

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our Ministers, our Prime Minister, our Minister of Energy and Energy and Energy Industry—through a lot of hard work, putting in a lot of hours have been able to negotiate a formula with one of the major oil producers and it is also close to finalization with another, that we get a price that is a mixture of all of this. So, if Henry Hub is $3 and Japan/Korea is $18 our netback might be $5. So that when we project forward in September to give us our netback price, we take account of the forecast for these four: Henry Hub, TTF, NBP and JKM.

To give you an example of the volatility during the height of the Ukraine conflict in August of 2022, in fact I downloaded the prices on the 29th of August 2022. The Ukraine war was at its max to that point. Henry Hub was $9.35. So compare that to March of this year $1.49. It gives you an idea of the volatility. But the other destinations, the price was astonishing.

Sometimes I would hear the Minister of Energy and Energy Industry talk about prices like $50 and I just did not believe. But I have pulled this thing down now, and on the 29th of August 2022, TTF was $79.92, NBP was $74.93. It is so high. [Laughter]. Japan/Korea, $68.67. Now, we do not have those kinds of—we are not fortunate to have those kinds of prices today, but we are still in a place where Henry Hub has risen to $3.15 and JKM, NBP, and so on $11, $12, $13 that sort of thing. I have seen a $1 increase in virtually all the markers over the last month or so, and that $1 could increase revenue from petroleum by as much as 10 per cent. So let us say our revenue from petroleum is TT$30 billion for the year, that $1, if sustained from a 12-month period, could result in an increase in revenue for Trinidad and Tobago of at least $3 billion. Conversely if it drops down, because we are an oil and gas-based economy.

But what we do during the budget exercise—and you know everybody is an
expert in this country, except the ones who are not and there are plenty who are not. There is an administration called the United States Energy Information Administration. Every month the US EIA comes out with its forecast for energy prices for the following year, the following month, and so on. I pulled down the October 2023 forecast of the US EIA, which is one of the premier, if not the premier forecasting energy price agency in the world. In October of 2023 the forecast by the US Energy Information Administration for oil, the oil price for 2024, was $95. There are other agencies, there is Fitch, there is Standard and Poor’s, there is World Bank, there is IMF, European Energy Agency and so on.

What we do in the Ministry of Finance, we take the average of all of them. So we would check with the US EIA, we would check with European Energy Agency, we would check with the World Bank, we would check with the IMF, we would check with Standard and Poor’s, we would check with Fitch, and we come up with a basket of predictions and that is how we came up with our prediction of an oil price of $95. Unfortunately, there has been a fall off—sorry of $85. I apologize, let me go back. The prediction from the US EIA was $95. We decided to be conservative at $85, but that has not been realized. For the first six months of the year we have seen an average oil price of just over $80, so there has been a reduction there.

With respect to gas it has been more severe and the gas is so unpredictable, because you look at conflict in Ukraine, conflict in Gaza, Israel, Palestine, other tensions in the Middle East, you have climate change, you have global warming, you have drought, you have flood. You would think with all of these things going on, you know, all of this conflict, that the price of natural gas will remain elevated. It did not. It has gone up now, but there was a period for the last couple months
where it just went down and it made absolutely no sense. In fact, predicting natural gas prices is one of the most difficult things to do in the world.

When one looks at the geopolitics, one would see however that the United States, which used to be the third largest producer of natural gas in the world is now the largest producer by far, with fracking and shale gas and so on, the United States is just pumping natural gas. Henry Hub is a pipeline of gas. It is internal to continental to United States. The overproduction I would have to say by American natural gas producers has suppressed the price of natural gas. But then as I say, very peculiar, it has doubled in the last three months, so we will see how it goes.

3.05 p.m.

We have based our predictions for the shortfall in revenue on what happened before. When I prepared everything for this budget—for this supplementation exercise, I did not take account of the fact that we are seeing a surge in natural gas prices. We will see how that works out at the end of the year because these things can be very volatile and very, very sudden.

But there is another point that needs to be made because, as I said, we have people in this country that talk such nonsense and they know better. If one looks at the original appropriation in any given year, and the supplementation in any given year—go back 10 years and look at the original appropriation appropriated by Parliament and then look at the supplementary appropriation that takes place in April, May, June of any given year. Go back 10 years and you will see that in every single year, the total of the original appropriation and the supplementation is always significantly more than actual expenditure, and there is a reason for that. It is based on cash flow.

So we must appropriate—you have heard me talk about what the money is
for. It is for essential things, such as the Water and Sewerage Authority, for the fuel subsidy, for the trade payables in the public health system, and so on, but we always manage. This is what we have been doing for the last nine years, for every single year. An interesting year, in particular, was 2016, because in 2016, we had to use the budget of the UNC. The UNC had prepared a budget for fiscal 2016. They did not think they would lose the 2015 election, so they prepared a budget—a fantastic budget of $66 billion for that year in 2016. We had to cut that. Oil had dropped from $100 in 2014, to $40 by the time we did the budget in 2015, to $25 the next year, so we lost $20 billion in revenue. Gas plummeted from $8 down, to less than $2. So we could not spend what had been appropriated. It is actually 66.967 was appropriated, and we end up spending just over $52 billion in that year. And that is how things are done.

So that those who want to talk about what this supplementation is all about, do some research and see whether the Government in any given year spends the entire appropriation. But we must appropriate, because the other thing people do not understand, if you do not appropriate, then you do not have the legal authority to spend the money, and sometimes I have to explain that to my colleagues as well. Sometimes some of my ministerial colleagues figure we could just wave a magic wand and money will drop from the sky. It does not, you have to appropriate it. That is our legal system. But we manage based on cash flow, so we manage expenditure.

We have inescapable expenditure every month, we have debt servicing, we have salaries and wages, we have social grants. Every month, we have to pay almost $500 million in social grants, Senior Citizens’ Pension, disability assistance, public assistance and so on. There are all these big hits on expenditure.
immediately. After that is all done and we deal with what we call “mandatory expenditure”, we then deal with what we call “discretionary expenditure”, and discretionary expenditure would be goods and services, the Development Programme and so on. So what we do, after we appropriate, we manage, and this is precisely what we are going to do in this year, and we have been doing it for the last nine years and I do not anticipate any issues.

Last year, for example, we had a supplementation, the usual noise was made, but we ended up with a fiscal deficit that was lower than projected. We had projected a deficit of close to $4 billion, we ended up with a deficit of less than $3 billion last year, for example. Proper, prudent, sound management, and this is what we will do this year as well.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: But as I said, if you do not appropriate, you cannot spend. So if, for example, one of the trade creditors in the medical field decides, “Look, you are owing me too much money and I have decided I will no longer supply medical gas until you clear your arrears, or at least you clear everything that is overdue by 180 days or 120 days,” then you are in problems. And this is why we go through this supplementary exercise. In the five years of the administration before us, they supplemented the budget every single year as well, sometimes by $3 billion, sometimes by $4 billion, sometimes by more than that, and it is a necessary exercise. It has to be done but, as I said, we will manage.

So, Mr. President, I have explained what we are about—

Mr. President: Minister, you have 5 more minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes. And there is just one thing I would like to end with. As the internecine and internal warfare continues in the UNC, in their leadership...
struggle—I do not know what is going on in that party—as they continue to fight amongst themselves, every single one of them is looking for relevance. Every single one of them wants to make the papers. Every single one of them wants to “buss de mark” first, no pun intended.

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Every single one of them wants to “buss de mark” before the next one. So I had to listen to the Opposition Leader talking arrant foolishness in the other place on Friday, and I had to read it in the papers this morning; arrant foolishness, misleading, untruthful, downright political dishonesty. And I just want to put on record today, I have seen an article in the *Express*—and again, the media is complicit in all of this, you know, because I am sure the reporter who wrote that story, and the editor that reviewed it and approved it, had in their possession the documents referred to by the Opposition Leader, and I am talking about this foolish and ridiculous false accusation that the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has made a decision to increase the rate of value added tax. Total untruth.

The document that was available to the media had calculations of how much revenue you would lose if you reduced VAT by 1 per cent, and how much revenue we would earn if we increased VAT by 1 per cent; how much revenue you would lose if you reduced personal income tax by 1 per cent, how much revenue you would earn if you increased personal income tax by 1 per cent. It is a working paper that is presented to all Ministers of Finance; has been for the last 30 years. But the document contained no decision and no recommendation to the Cabinet, and the Leader of the Opposition had that document in her possession.

And what I find intriguing about that *Express* story this morning is it reads out a whole set of things and says, increase corporation tax, increase individual
income tax, increase value added tax, and I have the document right here, and it has decrease X, increase Y; decrease X, increase Y. And how come the newspaper and the Leader of the Opposition did not read the whole document that said if you decrease VAT by 1 per cent, you could lose $500 million in revenue. If you decrease corporation tax by 1 per cent, you will lose $300 million in revenue. Why they did not read that part? And this is what we have to deal with in this country, political dishonesty. I condemn it and urge the media to be more responsible. I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

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

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you, Mr. President. You know, confession, it is said, is good for the soul, especially—

**Sen. Nakhid:** Some people.

**Sen. W. Mark:**—when you are a Catholic. I am a Catholic, so then we used to go and confess to the priest. Yeah? Mr. President, may I begin my contribution by thanking you for giving me an opportunity to speak on this Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2024) Bill, 2024, in which the Minister of Finance and the Government is seeking to increase the 2024 budget allocation by an additional $2.328 billion for purposes of our discussions.

Mr. President, the Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure that you find in the yellow books point to an expenditure of $68 billion. When you add $68 billion to this $2.328 billion, we are having a situation, Mr. President, if all goes well, and if at the end of the day the Minister reports, the reality is that close to $70.7 billion could be spent at the end of fiscal 2024. I heard my colleague, the hon. Minister,
talk about the Government of the UNC expending some $67 billion in one particular year, but I have seen where in 2023, this Government expended $69 billion; $69 billion. We are talking about $67 billion, but you went to $69 billion.

**Sen. Nakhid:** Nothing to show for it.

**Hon. Senator:** Nothing.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Mr. President, it is in the Auditor General’s Report. I have it here. So, Mr. President, let us deal with what we are here to deal with. The Government has come for an additional $2.3 billion, and in the document that was circulated to us in this Senate, we are told that insufficient or no allocation was provided in several of the Heads of Expenditure, and as a result of that, Mr. President, the Government, through the Minister of Finance, has come for this supplementary appropriation. But in coming for this supplementary appropriation, we have to determine—because the Minister of Finance has already told Trinidad and Tobago that the economy is in some difficult and dangerous waters. The Minister is on public record, both in the other place, in the public spaces, telling us, Mr. President, that because of falling oil and gas prices, as well as production of both oil and gas prices for 2023 into 2024, we are expected, as an economy and as a nation, to have a budget of fiscal deficit of close to $9 billion. Those are the words of the Minister of Finance in the House of Representatives, and it was published in the newspapers.

So we have a revenue crisis in this country where expenditure and revenue are wide apart, and the Minister is admitting that we could find ourselves with this supplementary appropriation being approved at the end of the day with a $9 billion deficit, or budget deficit.

**Hon. Senator:** It may be more.
Sen. W. Mark: That is what we are being told.

3.20 p.m.

So, Mr. President, we are also being told by the Government that, it is not only a fiscal crisis that we are facing, but you also have a foreign exchange reserves crisis that we are facing. Because when you understand the workings of our economy, Mr. President, you would realize that there is a gap between what we are able to trade and earn foreign exchange, and what we are unable to trade. Some people call it the tradable sector that generates revenue and some people call it the non-tradable sector. And if we do not understand how our economy works, you are going to have a difficulty in the foreign exchange reserve levels in our country.

So, here it is we are being asked to supplement the budget by $2.3 billion. But, Mr. President, we have the data, close to $2.3 billion is going towards recurrent expenditure. And in terms of capital programme or what we call PSIP, you are talking about, just about $4 million. So where is the value added going to come from? Where is the revenue generation going to come from? Mr. President, where are the jobs going to come from?

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: That is the question.

Sen. W. Mark: Where? And then you have a Minister coming here and giving us, painting a picture as if all is hunky-dory in Trinidad and Tobago. Barbarians are at our gates.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. W. Mark: S&P, Standard and Poor’s will be coming here in July, and according to what they see we could face, I am not wishing that, I “doh” want it,
but we have to be very careful with this fiscal deficit that keeps mounting and our foreign exchange reserves that keep falling, and our buffer within the HSF continues to decline, even though the Minister is boasting it is inching towards $6 billion. If the Government did not raid and take off close to $3 billion from our HSF, we might have been closer, Mr. President, to about $10 billion today and not $5.8 billion.

So, Mr. President, we are facing an economic challenge and that is why we have made it very clear that even the Minister of Finance in a public affidavit, I have it here, “but ah study it, so ah have it in meh head”, so I do not need to go and quote it, Mr. President, but I am dealing with our economy because always remember we are talking about the fiscal package for 2024, and the Government is coming for an additional $2.328 billion. That is what we are dealing with. So, there has to be a holistic approach to our analysis of what is before us.

So, Mr. President, we have to look at our fiscal deficit, we have to look at our rising debt. I was shocked to hear our Minister of Finance telling Trinidad and Tobago that he is about to go on another road show to raise foreign exchange on the international capital market. Mr. President, do you know what is our foreign exchange, our foreign debt right now? It is close to US $5.4 billion. You know what is our foreign exchange reserves as we speak? US $5.4 billion. So if you minus that from our payment that we owe to foreigners, we are bankrupt. So what the Minister of Finance is telling us, he is going to raise, that means borrow through a bond, maybe US $500million, maybe a US $1 billion, to do what?—to artificially prop up our foreign exchange reserve. There is no genuine attempt on the part of the Government, Mr. President, to generate new revenue streams for our country.

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Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. W. Mark: We have today in Trinidad and Tobago, a modern Julius Caesar Augustus, ruthlessly oppressing his subjects, through what, Mr. President, tax, tax, tax, borrow, borrow, borrow and spend, spend, spend. That is the philosophy of the PNM. There is no other, Mr. President, any positive visionary approach to transforming structurally our economy.

So you know what, Mr. President, the Minister goes to another place and he says, if I do not get what I describe as my financial mongoose gang called the TTRA in place, “we dead”. So it is tax, tax, tax. Mr. President, Winston Churchill said, you cannot tax a nation into prosperity. You cannot do that. Mr. President, you have to diversify, you have to transform our economy. You have to attract foreign direct investors into our country. So, here it is we are going to borrow $2.3 billion but 99.5 per cent of it is going into predictable expenditure that anybody could have predicted, gratuity, contract employment, lease and rent of buildings, salaries and wages. Mr. President, those are predictable expenses. But why did the Government not budget for that? You know why, Mr. President, there is an international benchmark that says, do not go beyond 3 per cent of your GDP, otherwise the S&P and Moody’s and the IMF and the World Bank will look at you unfavourably. So you know what is our GDP in terms of the budget deficit?—2.7 per cent. So they suppress, so that they cannot make the 3 per cent and they now come back here for what they were supposed to put into the budget when we came here in October. Predictable expenditure, Mr. President. That is what I call it.

So, Mr. President, let us understand that some of the items that are before us today, and I just want to deal with a few of them. You look at the Ministry of Education, and there is an item called short-term employment in this document that
you passed on to us. You go to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, there is the same item called short-term employment. And what is short-term employment, Mr. President? They did not define it, but I as an industrial relations, experienced person understand what short-term employment mean. Mr. President, it means that if you are employing somebody for three months, maybe a minimum of six months, short-term employment. So you can employ persons, max, six months and then fire them and bring them back for another six months.

My understanding is that in the public service today the Government has created close to 20,000 workers on short-term contracts in Trinidad and Tobago, undermining the Public Service Commission that is responsible for hiring and disciplining and transferring workers. That is the job of the Public Service Commission, not a Cabinet. And the Cabinet continues to undermine the Public Service Commission. So here it is in this document, Mr. President, that we have before us, the Ministry of Education is given a certain quantum of moneys for short-term employment. As I said, so too the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. And, Mr. President, I looked through this document and I have seen no policy. There is no transparency, there is no accountability. We do not know how people are being employed on short term. You must have a party card, you must wear a balisier to get into the Ministry of Education. Look, even the Auditor General had to comment on the dangers faced by Trinidad and Tobago’s Government by continuing to employ people on short-term employment or short-term basis or tenure or periods. But the Government continues, Mr. President.

In the Auditor General’s Report for 2022, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago spent $220 million of our money on short-term employment and there is
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Sen. Mark (cont’d)

no policy established by the Government to determine how people are employed. So it is their friend, their family, their party hacks. That is a criminal offence, that is an economic crime. You cannot use my money, Mr. President—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. W. Mark:—in that kind of way.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark just be careful about the phrase that you are making—

Sen. W. Mark: I apologize to you, Sir.

Mr. President: Yes. You could be imputing improper motives so just be careful.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, all I am saying is that you cannot use my money, because every time I get pay I am missing money. You know why? “The tax man take it out” and you are taking my taxpayers money and employing people and you cannot tell Trinidad and Tobago what is the policy for employing these people. Mr. President, that is wrong. In 2023, the Government of T&T spent $300million according to the Auditor General on short-term employment. How can that be fair? And when we asked them for answers, we get no positive response. So the Government is a lawless government? Is this a renegade government? They can do what they want? They can break the law, Mr. President? What is going on? So that is an area, Mr. President, I bring to your attention which is in the document, this short-term employment matter.

Mr. President, we go to health, CDAP. I want to deal with CDAP. The Government is indicating, Mr. President, that $202 million have to be approved for outstanding invoices because it is 90 days and above. The creditors gave them 90 days, NIPDEC, and NIPDEC cannot pay. So they come to the Government through this process to get the $202million to meet their expenditure to all these people who are supplying them with pharmaceutical products. Mr. President, the
question is this, why is the Government threatening? According to what I saw on television, it is like a signaling effect. The hon. Prime Minister indicated in the House of Representatives, I was glued to my TV looking at it. And, Mr. President, what did he tell the country? What is wrong if we reduce our allocation to CDAP, from $400 million to $250 million? And then of course the Minister just told us, the hon. Minister of Finance that is, just told us when he was there in 2007 it was 7 per cent of revenue. Today it is 15 per cent, Mr. President.

3.35 p.m.

So what is the Government telling us? That is what you call a signalling impact or effect. They are going to cut CDAP. They are going to let the ordinary people, Mr. President, go into their shallow pocket to pay for pharmaceutical products. That is what the Government is doing. But I want to warn you, I want to warn the Government, the United National Congress will not tolerate any cut in CDAP.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** We warn you, do not touch CDAP.

**Sen. Dr. Browne:** Mr. President, Standing Order 46(1). There is nothing in this Bill related to cutting CDAP.

**Mr. President:** So, Sen. Mark is allowed to make the observations that he wants to make. But also Sen. Mark, in making that observation, do understand the general purpose of what we are doing here today, which as we all heard from the Minister of Finance, is a supplementation to various Ministries to do certain things. So just keep your comments in relation to that so that it may remain relevant. Continue.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I want to ask the hon.
Minister of Health in his absence: Is the Minister of Health, in his absence, aware that NIPDEC is importing and distributing pharmaceuticals to pharmacies in this country that are unregistered? Mr. President, may I repeat? Can the Government—I have a list of products in my possession, which the pharmacists are telling me they are seeing for the first time coming from Hungary, coming from Spain. We never bought pharmaceuticals from Hungary, never bought from Spain for my information, but those things are on the shelf. Who is importing it, Mr. President? NIPDEC. I understand to import products that are unregistered, Mr. President, you need a special import permit, and the only person who can allow a special import permit to be issued is the Chief Medical Officer.

So we are asking the question today: Is the Chief Medical Officer issuing special import permits to procure pharmaceutical products from Hungary, and Spain, and other countries that we have never imported pharmaceutical products from in the past? As a question, we would like the Minister to answer that. And further, to whom is this special import permit being issued to? Is it being issued to a group of special financiers of the PNM who are importing drugs into this country?

Mr. President: Again, Sen. Mark, just be reminded of the imputation of improper motives when you are making such statements. Continue.

Sen. W. Mark: No, I have names you know. If you want me to call names, I will call names you know.

Mr. President: No, still—

Hon. Senators: “Oooooh.”

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, have a seat. Just be so guided along the lines of imputation, just be careful of how you are phrasing your sentences.
Sen. W. Mark: I take full responsibility for what I am saying because I have the evidence.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. W. Mark: I take full responsibility for what I am saying because I have the evidence. Mr. President, may I indicate that we want the Government to conduct a special investigation into the issuing of special import permits to certain people, certain companies in this country to import pharmaceutical products, and we do not know to whom. We want to get an investigation into that particular matter, Mr. President.

I understand, Mr. President, you know men suffer from prostate—they have challenges. I understand they used to bring in generic plus the brand—a brand drug. You know what is being done now, Mr. President? The monopolists only bring in the brand drug for prostate cancer or challenges. It is costing you $750 to purchase a pack of these products, whereas, Mr. President, the generic you can get a two-month supply and it will cost you $240. You know no generic on the shelf? So ordinary citizens who suffer from prostate challenges what are they to do? If they do not have $750 to buy it they will die. They will have to go to the hospital, Mr. President, in pain.

Sen. Mitchell: Mr. President, please, 46(1). This is not about the public buying medication.

Mr. President: So, Sen. Mark, whereas you may have started this particular point, linking it in line relation to CDAP and where the supplementation is going, the Minister’s Standing Order does hold relevance in the sense that you are going a bit too broad in relation to what is before us. Bring it in please.

Sen. W. Mark: All right, Mr. President, I move on. I move on. They are “tizick”
whenever I stand here.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:**  Mr. President, let me make it very clear. There are two other issues I want to raise before I go on to a very critical one. I want to deal with the issue, Mr. President, of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, and I want the hon. Minister to do some checking out of what I am about to say. The calculations for back pay for our staff, local staff, my information, has been miscalculated. I would like the hon. Minister to go and recheck and redo the calculation that we are about to approve because it is undercalculated, and they are entitled much more money than what is before us today. That is the first thing.

The second thing I want to ask the hon. Minister: When we spent millions of dollars on repairing and upgrading our missions abroad, I want to ask the hon. Minister, through you, are these missions owned by Trinidad and Tobago? The London mission, for example, or Chancery, is it leased or is it owned? And if we conduct, Mr. President, and we invest millions of dollars into repairs, who is going to be the final beneficiary of that? So I am asking the hon. Minister to clear the air when he is speaking on all our missions abroad. Let us know whether those properties that are being repaired, and upgraded, and enhanced, whether they are owned by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I need to get clarification and the people would need clarification on that particular matter, Mr. President.

Mr. President, you know Sri Lanka had a crisis and the crisis dealt with foreign exchange reserves. They crashed. Mr. President, because they used to import fuel and food, there was a crisis in Sri Lanka. Riots took place. President run out of the country, Prime Minister run out of the country. You know why, Mr. President? The masses got angry and they rose up together. The question that I
want to tell this Government, to advise them, be careful. The rate that we are going and we are getting—I see the Minister—There are Ministers in this country—“I ain’t calling no names”—that continue to sell us pipe dreams, oil, gas. We are being told by the hon. Minister of Finance, “Hold on. Hold on, Mr. President, we need to take three years of sacrifice. You know why? Because, Mr. President, gas is going to flow just now out of the Dragon field.”

But, Mr. President, I want to ask the Government whether they are aware of ConocoPhillips’ court award which says that any dealings with Venezuela PDVSA, and the State of Venezuela, with Trinidad and Tobago involved, the money must come to them first. So what will happen? Let us get some answers. And, Mr. President, I want to also ask the Government as we are on this matter of energy, because that is an Item here, whether the Government could confirm or deny that Shell has taken a final investment decision to invest in the Dragon gas project? I understand Shell wants a license of 15 years.

**Sen. Dr. Browne:** Mr. President, Standing Order 46(1) with respect to relevance to this Bill.

**Mr. President:** Yes. So, Sen. Mark, that particular Standing Order is relevant.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Okay.

**Mr. President:** Again, we are dealing with supplementations to Ministries for very, very specific reasons. So you are not allowed to broaden the debate too much in your relation to the stating of your observations. Continue.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. President. I am guided. Mr. President, I want the Government—you know, we are very fortunate because you see people are so fed up with this dying regime which they want to bury fast, fast, fast. We get documents in our mailbox every day. So I have a document here called
Cabinet Note 1032, dated the 21st of May, 2024. I have that in my mailbox. Somebody came and drop it for me. It exposes, Mr. President, all the denials that are being made here.

I really want to ask the Government, Mr. President—it is 24 pages you know. I would not read it for you because I will not have time. But, Mr. President, I want to ask the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in their scenario planning where the gap between revenue and expenditure continues to widen, and the Government is in a state of panic, so what are they doing? They are giving themselves options. Options to do what, Mr. President? To generate alternative revenue measures to deal with the gap that is expanding between the expenditure and revenue. That is what the crisis is in Trinidad and Tobago.

So when we tell Trinidad and Tobago and the Government that we have a document here from the Ministry of Finance, signed, sealed and delivered, that says that you intend to increase VAT up to 15 per cent from 12.5 where you can get $1.7 billion in revenue.

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

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah. Right? You intend to increase VAT; you intend to increase corporation tax; you intend to increase the rate of banking tax; corporation tax; you intend to remove subsidies on social programmes, on grants, on allowances, on free services. That is what the Government told the country, and that is what is in a Cabinet Note. So is the Government denying, Mr. President, that they have no intention of increasing VAT, they have no intention of increasing corporation tax? We just want to know.

Sen. Mitchell: Mr. President, I have an intention of raising Standing Order 46(1) please.
Mr. President: No, one second, one second, one second. Are you raising 46(1) or—Okay. So the Senator is responding to the wrap-up of the Minister of Finance where he did raise that issue. Continue, Sen. Mark.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, I know I have a few minutes more of the time. All I am saying is that the Government is telling us that they do not intend to do certain things, but I have a document from the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Appendix IV, saying that they are going to have a new tax bracket for high income individual, 32.5 per cent. If you are earning more than $2 million, Mr. President, you are going to be called upon to pay 32.5 per cent. They say for every one percentage increase in VAT, they will be able to get close to $500 million.

3.50 p.m.
So the question here, Mr. President, I have a list of all the revenue-generating measures that the—

Sen. Sagrampsingh-Sooklal: Can I see it?

Sen. W. Mark: No, I am not showing you. You are a Cabinet Minister. You must know.

Hon. Senator: Nah, I “doh” know anything about that.

Sen. W. Mark: You have seen it already.

So, Mr. President, let me address you, please. All I am saying is that the Government must come clean and tell Trinidad and Tobago that they are economically bankrupt, they have collapsed the economy, they are broke and therefore, they have brought measures through the Cabinet, to do what?—to raise close to $4 billion, and where is that billion coming from? It is coming from me,
and you, and our family. Our back is “bosey” now. We “cyah” take no more pressure—

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

**Sen. W. Mark:**—no more taxes. The people are saying no more taxes. They “cyah” take more. I want to warn this Government, you know, Mr. President. You are going to have a social riot in this country if you continue to pressure the poor people in this county. You cannot continue putting tax, after tax, after tax on people. The people’s standard of living has crashed in the country. You have collapsed the country, and then you are coming here to tell us you want more money? From what? You want blood out of stone?

**Sen. Nakhid:** That is what they want.

**Sen. W. Mark:** You cannot do that.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** Mr. President, the Government is seeking to provoke the population, and if you continue to provoke the population, you are going to have social unrest in the country.

**Sen. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Are you are inciting?

**Sen. W. Mark:** That is what you are going to get.

**Sen. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Are you inciting? Are you inciting?

**Sen. W. Mark:** Yes, I am inciting. I am inciting. Yeah.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark

**Sen. W. Mark:** Yeah, Mr. President, let me address you, please.

So, Mr. President, all I am saying the thing is that we must face the reality of T&T, we are in trouble. Fiscal deficit is on the rise. Debt is on the rise, Mr. President. Income is falling in Trinidad and Tobago. Balance of payment is in
trouble. Oil and gas production is down. Oil and gas prices are down, Mr. President. The Government must come here real, and sit with us, and come up with a plan to plan to rescue Trinidad and Tobago. We will work with the Government. We want to work as a collective to rescue our county, but you must be real. You come with real plans. You must tell us the truth. Credibility, integrity, trust and confidence, critical, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I know that I have a few seconds again. With your leave—

Hon. Senators: No.

Sen. W. Mark:—I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to bring to you and to the people’s attention the economic bankruptcy of this dying administration. Call the elections now.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. W. Mark: Let the people decide one way or the other, Mr. President, on the way forward. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Patasar.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Dr. Sharda Patasar: Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to present to this debate. That was quite a spirited contribution by Sen. Mark. I will just take some time to compose mine. So I am coming here—I am coming here time after time as somebody who comes from the humanities, somebody who comes from the creative arts, and my discipline is very much inward looking. So while we acknowledge the material world, a lot of it has—a lot of it asks the question, essentially, who am I and where am I in this grand scheme of things?

So I was contemplating calling this contribution the “trickster at the door”,

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but it is not meant as an insult because the trickster really is the power of discrimination. He keeps the threshold. He is that essential power that tells us how to navigate this space. So while my—I hope my voice cooperates a bit today.

So I am coming to this debate from the position of an artist to say that when I look at the budget, when I look at the construct, the allocations, they tell me a story. What strikes me in the budget is that we are a diasporic people. We are a displaced people—although much of the world can say that now about themselves—but we are born of a fracture, and we are born of fractured time, disrupted time. So our role was and still is, despite independence and a republic, largely as an ally to someone else’s project. That is the way I see it. So that observation, I think, was made by Dr. Williams when he spoke about the idea of modern Trinidad, because he is coming at it as a historian who knows this, who knows that there is a need to a move towards that sense of wholeness. My question, therefore, is whether we consider, or how do we consider development in Trinidad and Tobago? How do we define that?

So I listened today to the Minister of Finance, in last Friday’s presentation, speak about the international confidence in Trinidad and what I thought about was that, okay, we have achieved somewhat some semblance of international confidence, is it not the time for us to build national confidence and national trust? And I say this without any malice because I agree that from time to time, we have practical tasks to accomplish as a country, we have boxes that must be checked to accommodate international standards, but one of the central preoccupations of my work and my thinking has been this idea of home, and I have a very strong sense—a strong sense of self-governance, self-governance that is rooted in the needs of the county.

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So when I looked at the successes—we talk about energy prices, we are talking about success in trade and industry, but what about the other needs? What about people’s standard of living, health and wellness? Health and wellness accommodates that whole area of crime that we know seems to be getting out of hand. We have unemployment, which is widespread. So I am just thinking about this within that scenario, that the allocations that I am looking that seems very centred on simply maintaining—we keep maintaining, but where are we going from here?

**4.00 p.m.**

What is the national development plan, if there is any? Have we asked those questions as to—when I ask people the question: What does development look like to you? I am greeted with some blank stares and then the answer that follows tells me that people do not usually see things in a visual and feeling way. But I think it is a question that has to be answered very seriously as to what development looks like to us as a displaced peoples that still are dependent on others and consider where we go from here.

So NAPA, the National Academy for the Performing Arts, and SAPA have been allocated costs to maintain the facilities. We are looking at salaries, I had a question about salaries when it pertains to SAPA, what are the contract salaries there. But additionally, where are we going with this vision of a national university? I know it does not fall in the budget debate but I think it is a question to consider because it definitely figures in budgetary allocations.

So my contribution is pretty short. Just to reiterate, I feel that the allocations are mainly aimed at maintenance but we now need to consider at this point what our success looks like. I think it is a time that calls for a step down from
information-based decisions, a need for collaborative governance where people leaning to the power of “the no” because when you are met with a “no”, it is asking the question what do you need for that to become a “yes”. So we need, at this point, a reimagining of the nation and for acknowledging the personal and collective responsibility that we have. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I would like to pick up where the last speaker ended because the last speaker, the hon. Independent Senator, Sen. Dr. Patasar indicated to the country in her contribution that there is a need for hope. She reminded us that what we need, as opposed to the previous speaker’s cries for social unrest, is we need to be a responsible people.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: And in being a responsible people, as the Independent Senator quite eloquently put it, we need to take charge of our destiny. We need to be the ones that will determine our destiny.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT in the Chair]

And the Senator referred very briefly, in passing, to certain contributions I assume she has heard over time with respect to a number of areas including the energy industry and sector. And I can say here today, Mr. Vice-President, without fear of any contradiction whatsoever that from the period 2016 to date, certainly in the energy sector, this Government has done exactly what the previous Independent Senator spoke about.

You heard brief reference to it by the hon. Minister of Finance where we
refused to be bound by contracts that were set decades ago, setting prices to something you heard, indices, an index of measurement of gas called Henry Hub because in our view, it was archaic and in our view, it was time for us to set our own formulas so I will touch on that in a short while. But I join with the Senator because she has touched a chord in my own being and this Government is striving to do that, in that we must break the shackles of colonialism and we will set our own paths.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: And the record would reflect just yesterday at our international energy conference, that was certainly one of the submissions I continued to make that we will not let where we can avoid it, those who have less interest in Trinidad and Tobago, which unfortunately sometimes may very well be those who put themselves forward to lead a government in Trinidad and Tobago and we will not let them set our fate and destiny.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: And that is a good segue, Mr. Vice-President, to set the record straight because there was a lot of screaming and shouting by the previous Senator, Sen. Mark, about foreign exchange reserves, and if you were to believe the submissions being made, one would think the sky is falling. But there is an international body that most countries in the world subscribe to and they are taskmasters and they go into countries and they do measurements, and that body is the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund. And part of being a member of that Fund is that on an annual basis, they go into a country and they do something called Article IV Consultation, where they go and they sit not only with the Government, not only with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Trade and
Industry, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in this country and others, but what the population may not know is they also meet with private sector.

In this country, they will go and they will test what we have said with the upstream: the BPs, the Shells, the EOGs, the Woodsides. They will also go and test what we have said with the petchem producers, the petroleum chemical producers at Point Lisas and they mark the country. They give it a scorecard, they look at it from an economic point of view and they have the international markers. So when I heard Sen. Mark, I literally scratched my head and said to myself but if I were to listen to that contribution, I would be living in a different realm. So for the population of Trinidad and Tobago, to give you an independent assurance that this country, Trinidad and Tobago that we live in is very, very different from most of what I heard described by Sen. Mark.

I would like to refer to a press release from the IMF dated the 5th of June, today is the 11th so just a few days ago and the IMF, after doing an Article IV Consultation in Trinidad and Tobago, which I am proud that this Government has never avoided. So for nine years, we have participated in every Article IV Consultation and on the 4th of June, this is what they said:

“For the first time in a decade, Trinidad and Tobago is undergoing a gradual
and sustained economic recovery. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to have further expanded by 2.1 percent in 2023, reflecting a strong performance of the non-energy sector. Inflation has declined sharply…’’

This is not us saying it and I can guarantee those, including the commentators who use the print media, that if the IMF Article IV Consultation had gone badly for Trinidad and Tobago, they would have all been singing from every rooftop to say what has happened. But this is the reality, this is here in black and white for the globe to read and I continue:

‘‘Banks’’ credit to the private sector continues to expand…’’

Those words by definition are a different reality and a truthful reality to what we have heard because it means that the banks are loaning more money to the private sector, private sector is borrowing money to expand business and to invest in Trinidad. This is what the IMF is saying. They go on to say:

‘‘Banks’’ credit to the private sector continues to expand and the financial sector appears sound and stable.”

Thank God because there are many countries in the world, including in the region, that would not get that rating.

‘‘The current account is estimated to remain in a surplus in 2023, and international reserve coverage is adequate at 8.3 months of prospective total imports.”

And I pause because a big part of the submission of Sen. Mark is that foreign exchange crisis, it is more difficult to get. Nobody is denying that because the country became accustomed to foreign exchange availability that simply was unsustainable. But to come here and to say that in a few months’ time, we would
be facing a foreign exchange crisis is completely false. It is an untruth. It is misleading and it is misinformation. The IMF is saying here:

“…international reserve coverage…”

And for those who do not know, that is the foreign exchange coverage.

“…is adequate at 8.3 months of prospective total imports.”

There are countries, if you go and research, in the rest of the CARICOM region that are less than three months foreign exchange reserves. There is a country that we constantly hear reference to, you should be like country X, that has less than two months’ foreign exchange reserves. The Member also did not include the HSF fund because you see how you really calculate real foreign exchange is what is contained in the Central Bank being held there as well as fortunately again, Trinidad and Tobago has a Heritage and Stabilization Fund that is in US dollars.

So I assure the country whilst it may not be as good as we would like it to because I am sure we would like to have 12 months’ coverage, 24 months’ coverage but there are very few countries in the world that do not print that type of currency that have this level of foreign exchange reserves and they go on to say:

“The fiscal deficit in FY”—fiscal year—“2023 continued supporting the recovery and was better than budgeted, while public sector debt remained below the authorities’ soft debt target.”

So far from what we have heard. The IMF has given us a good rating and score card.

“Economic growth is projected to gain momentum in 2024, supported by the non-energy and energy sectors, and inflation is projected to remain low….International reserve coverage is expected to remain adequate as 7.5
months of prospective total imports.”

That is what the IMF is saying.

“External public buffers in the Heritage and Stabilization Fund are large…”—are large.

That is the IMF’s language.

“…at about 20 percent of GDP.”

So citizens, we are not taking solace in this, we are not sitting back on our laurels, we continue to work very, very hard for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** But the point to be taken is that this responsible Government will do what is right for the people of Trinidad and Tobago as is evidenced by the most difficult taskmaster, the IMF. And to remind people, the IMF is the borrower of last resort—the lender of last resort to borrowers. Many of our CARICOM countries, the same Suriname we refer to, is in an IMF programme. Barbados, Jamaica for decades now, in an IMF programme.

**4:15 p.m.**

We have fortunately managed to keep ourselves away from an IMF programme in the 90s. And under the last nine years, including during a period of COVID, we have managed to stay away and come out with a good score card, and I think for that, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we are grateful.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** Then they go on so to say when you get now to the:

“Executive Directors”—they—“agreed with the thrust of the staff appraisal. They welcome Trinidad and Tobago’s sustained economic recovery, sharp decline in inflation in 2023, and strong external position…”
And it is there for the world to read, and I invite all citizens who are really interested in what is the truth and what is the proper score card of our country, as the, Independent Sen. Dr. Patasar said, as we take hold of our destiny and make the choices that will affect us.

I would like now to move on to specifically the Ministry of Energy & Energy Industries because the supplemental appropriation for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries stands at around $570 million, and that is all for the fuel subsidy. Because despite what you are told, the Government continues to maintain it at a serious cost to taxpayers—it is not a cost to Government because people need to understand, Mr. Vice-President, that all that Government is doing, if they are being responsible, is managing the country on behalf of all of us.

So, the Government—one of the difficult tasks that a government has, if acting responsibly, is how do you manage the resources. So, it is like a person in charge of a household that knows the salary of the household is $5,000 for the month, but there are different needs, and there are different wants by all of the members of the household. The child may have something that he or she desires. The spouse may have something that he or she desires, and those are the calls being made on that $5,000. But a responsible person managing it must decide, how much do I put in savings, how much do I spend for school, how much do I spend for health care, how much do I spend for security, and how much do I spend for transport? And in part of our management of that, this Government continues to maintain a real fuel subsidy where this year it is projected to be over $1 billion, close to $1.2 billion.

You have to make a decision as a government. Do I spend $1.2 billion in fuel subsidies for people when they go to fill up their cars at the pump? I will
carry some of the cost using taxpayers’ money, or do I spend that instead on education? Do I spend it on the school feeding programme? Do I spend it to make sure that there are drugs in the hospital? We heard a whole lot of disarray by Sen. Mark about, and again, personalising an attack on the CMO, which I denounce here today because it is not the CMO who decides the importation and use of drugs. It is not the individual, the CMO. There is a body of experts, including pharmacists, and including public health doctors, that decide whether drugs should be imported for public use, et cetera. So, I just wanted to put that to rest.

So, we are spending $1.2 billion in a fuel subsidy this year, and we are getting from the Ministry of Finance at the mid-year review an additional $570 million. Not because there was a shortfall in the budget, because we knew that would happen. But, because at the time being responsible in a decision where we had to prioritise money, that is what was done. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries runs an account. It is running the account as the fuel subsidies come in because, you see, we do not set fuel prices globally. That is another point that has to be understood. The price of oil, gas and fuels is a global price. We purchase that fuel.

I will come in a short while to deal with, and to, completely put to rest this argument that if the refinery was operating there would be no fuel subsidy. And if the refinery was operating, there would be less cost to Trinidad and Tobago. And if the refinery was operating, we would be forex positive. All are completely false and to put that to rest immediately, I can use some historical data as to what this country, with successive Governments, has spent on fuel subsidies. Because you have made a decision.

4.20 p.m.
You have $5,000 to run a household. Do I spend $4,000 gambling it away, and have a $1,000 for the rest of the family? Do I spend $4,000 out of that $5,000, going off on vacation, and when we come home, we have less food, I cannot send the children to school, if I need drugs—pharmaceutical drugs—I cannot do that, I cannot pay for the children to go to the doctor? That is how you do it irresponsibly, and worse yet, have a governance structure, where out of that $5,000, $3,000 goes missing and it is spirited off, as we have seen in previous administrations. So let us start.

In 2008, this country spent $3 billion in the fuel subsidy. Could that money have been used in different ways? The truth is, in 2008, oil production, gas production was high and prices were high. Let us go to a midpoint. In 2012, the fuel subsidy spent was $2 billion; in 2013, $4.9 billion; in 2014, 7.2 billion spent in fuel subsidy. That will be a whole education budget and national security budget together, wrapped in one, and another Ministry. In 2015, $5 billion spent in fuel subsidy. I pause. Those were all years where the refinery was opened, it was in operation, oil production was higher than it was now. So why were we spending all of those billions on fuel subsidy at that point? So that puts to rest immediately the submission I have heard it made by those on the other side, and those outside who continue to hold on to the argument that the refinery, if it was still operational, there would be no fuel subsidy. Look at it, 2013, $5 billion—$4.9 billion; 2014, $7.2 billion; and 2015, $5 billion.

In 2019, the fuel subsidy was $1.9 billion. That is how much we spend on a fuel subsidy. It was then reduced in 2020—of course, it was COVID—it was $96 billion; 2021, 285. That is not how much the subsidy costs, that is how much, out of the budget, was put towards the payments of subsidies. So it is a running
account, we are always in arrears, and this $579 million is to help us to deal with the arrears. In 2022, we spent $1.6 billion in fuel subsidy, and 2023, $1.8 billion in fuel subsidy.

So, Mr. Vice-President, one can see immediately that even when the refinery was opened, the fuel subsidy was running into the billions of dollars. The argument that it was a forex earner, and a net forex earner as well, is completely untrue, because you had to be purchasing almost 100,000 barrels of oil a day, using foreign exchange to purchase that crude oil, put it into the refinery—and then one of the things people constantly overlook is in the sale of products—the majority in the sale of products do not earn foreign exchange, because the refinery’s refined products had to service and be sold for the domestic market. So do not listen to those who will try to mislead you that it would be a net forex earner. That is completely false. And we all know the history of what happened, unfortunately, with Petrotrin’s operations as a result of the refinery.

And I will just use this opportunity to remind the population, in 2014, Petrotrin registered a loss of $361 million, but by 2015, its loss was $1.2 billion. The decline had begun. The country had seen a thick line in its total domestic oil production, from approximately 144,000 barrels of oil per day in 2005, to 98,000 barrels of oils a day in 2010. So that decline that you began seeing between 20—look at that, a short period of time. Between 2005 and 2010, a five-year period, the country’s oil production dropped from 144,000 barrels of oil per day to 98,000 barrels of oil per day. So no amount of screaming, and misinformation, and attempts to mislead the population by those on the other side will change the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is a mature province and our reserves are declining.

When I read sometimes the propositions being made by those who should
know better, attacking our attempts to ensure future gas supplies from nearby Venezuela, which has the largest oil reserves in the world and has gas reserves that are larger than Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Suriname put together, right across the border, I ask myself, as a Trinidadian, but why would anyone want to attack that initiative? Why would anyone want to attack something that will lead to a future for Trinidad and Tobago? And this continued recycling of the narrative, that all this Government is doing is putting all of its eggs in the Dragon basket, and in the Venezuelan gas basket, that is completely untrue.

We have gone out in a matter of a few months with a shallow water bid round, an onshore, nearshore bid round, a deep water bid round, but the truth is our province, meaning our reserves that we have, are always going to be limited by our boundaries, and we have been exploiting oil for 100 years, and utilizing gas commercially for five decades. It is going to decline. We do not have the land mass as the United States, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and these other places. We simply do not. But we have shown, not only is there hope, but we have achieved the success, and that bothers some.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** Just today, I had a meeting with executives from Repsol who flew from Spain because we have been engaging with them for another initiative we are working on. We have the deep water gas that we are working on with Woodside. We have just had a successful shallow water bid round, despite how persons may try to sell it, because there is limited acreage left, there are limited reserves left there. That is what happens when you exploit it. EOG, BP and Shell have put in bids, and they all make sense because they are next existing infrastructure. But do not keep attacking these initiatives, because it is not for
Hon. S. Young (cont’d)

Young, it is not for the PNM Government, this is for the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: And it must bother some that we have been able to go to Washington, D.C., in the White House, and to Miraflores in Caracas, and come away with a specific licence for Dragon from OFAC, where others have failed, and to get a 30-year exploration and production licence from the Government of Venezuela for the Dragon gas field. That is the reality. And whilst they were constantly attacking that one deal, we remained quiet and continued our competence as we worked hard—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young:—and confidently for Trinidad and Tobago, and two weeks ago, another licence came, a specific OFAC. But three weeks ago, those on the other side and the nay-sayers, some of who exist in the realm of media, were saying, “BP pulls out of Cocuina-Manakin.” We stayed quiet because I knew in January of this year, when I went ahead of the hon. Prime Minister to Washington, D.C., and I went to meetings in the White House, and walked in there with executives from BP to meet with the decision makers in the White House—not for myself, I never even took a take in the place—but to argue for the future generations of Trinidad and Tobago why we should be given the opportunity to bring gas to market through Trinidad and Tobago—and you know what? The Prime Minister came a few days later, I went back to the White House with him, we went back in the White House, continued the conversations, he met with the Vice-President of the United States, two weeks ago, we got another specific licence for the Cocuina-Manakin field.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]
Hon. S. Young: And the same BP that they were screaming at to leave the table, is right there with us as continue to negotiate. Next week, you will see something else happen, and these are the positions of hope, these are the instances that are material and tangible, that provide a future for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: Personally, I had those on the other side write to the United States Government when they were all worshiping a defeat of some President Guaidó, and those on the other side wrote to the United States and said, “Sanction the Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, and sanction Young.”


Hon. S. Young: It did not bother me, you know. I do not need to go a place other than Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: But we persevered. We continued to do the work. We have saved millions of dollars, I am certain, in fees as we sat—we are also criticized, “What are you going to do this for?”, because who better to go and to do it? This is not a Government that is always looking to spend taxpayer’s money in an irresponsible manner, that we saw between the ’10 to ’15 period.

And I want to remind the population, whilst I am on that—because very often you hear them saying, “But what you borrowing more money for? Why are you borrowing?” In September 2010, the net debt of this country was $45.4 billion. Now, if I listen to those on the other side, you would think that they never put this country in a cent more debt in a period of time where oil production and gas production was much higher, and prices were much higher. We have not had a day between 2015 to, to date, where oil prices have been at $120 a barrel. Under
the administration of ’10 to ’15, it was. And let me tell you, by the time they left in 2015, our net debt of Trinidad and Tobago was $76.5 billion, $30 billion borrowed. And the difference is, when this Government borrows money, you never hear about the money going through this contractor to that Minister’s pocket, or through this contractor to that Minister’s pocket.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** We have cases in the High Court now, EMBD is one, $400 million borrowed in August 2015, spent by September 2015, three weeks later, and in the court to be determined, a Government Minister sending messages to public servants, “Bring the cheque so I could pay X and Y.” That is what this population should remember. So $30 billion borrowed during that period of time.

And I want to remind the population, $17 billion in cash taken from NGC’s coffers. If we had that billion—$17 billion in cash when we came in, we could have gone Dragon alone, we could have gone Cocuina-Manakin alone, we could do more projects on our own for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and not have to rely on our other partners. The Minister of Finance spent some time talking about where we derive our revenue from, because we are a hydro-carbon economy. When we came in, our gas was all factored on something called Henry Hub, which is an American price. We have seen in the last few months, Henry hub dropped to below US $1.50.

So whilst we have had a bit more deficit this year than we expected, I can tell the population of Trinidad and Tobago here today, that what we began, again, as a confident government, and as a competent government in 2018, with the spotlight on energy, when all the nay-sayers said that we were going to run all the foreign investors in the energy sector, and we went forward publicly and said, “We
want to get more revenue for the people of Trinidad and Tobago,” we successfully negotiated, I am proud to have lead that team, and we came up with—Sen. Patasar would be proud. We did not allow our minds to be confined and shackled with the slave mentality of, “Well, just one factor, and just Henry Hub.” I said to our experts, I said, “Some of our gas goes to Asia, some of our gas goes to Europe. Let us not put all of our eggs—our gas price—in only to gas prices.”

So you know what we have here today in Trinidad as a result of this PNM Government? We have a formula that is a third based on oil prices—Brent—a discount of Brent. So if gas prices go down and oil prices go up, we have factored that, that has gone into the formula. And that is what worked when Henry Hub and others prices were crashing, and oil prices were above $85 a barrel within recent times, a third based on Brent, a third based on Asian markers called JKM—Japanese/Korean Marker—and a third based on European prices.

4.35 p.m.

And that is what we did for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And the result of that was, over the period of time, even at its lowest, we have derived 20 to 55 per cent more than had we stayed stuck on Henry Hub.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: And that is what this Government did. That is what this Government has delivered, and that is how we have managed, even though we had decreasing production, to keep the revenues where they were.

And I want to tell people, because they are making a lot of hay about what the Minister of Finance said when he cautioned that the next few years would be difficult. Because you see, you negotiate a gas block today, it does not come in immediately tomorrow. The production does not go up. They have to do the
work. They have to get the infrastructure. They have to get the production going. That takes somewhere, depending on how complicated it is, between 24 months to five years and sometimes beyond, for example, the deep water.

From 2027 go forward, the gas production will escalate because of the hard work that has been done here. Between the ’10 to ’15 period, not a single gas sales contract was negotiated for new gas to Trinidad and Tobago. But one deal was negotiated though, one deal, one deal was negotiated with a new plant. The public servants wrote in black and white to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs: Do not do that deal. It is bad for Trinidad and Tobago. They proceeded. It would have been consummated on the election day, Monday 7th September, 2015. It was the public servants in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs that put in red ink on the file to the Attorney General: Do not sign the AG's opinion. That was all that was outstanding; red ink. Because he was putting pressure on the public servants on the day of the election. That singular deal and the only deal that those on the other side negotiated in that whole period of ’10 to ’15 in the energy sector has cost this country, through NGC, billions of dollars in losses, billions of dollars that we continue to face impairments and billions in losses.

Is that who we want to manage things? But we must sit here and listen to the screaming and the shouting and the theatrics and talking about social unrest. Any patriotic citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, the last thing on our mind would be social unrest. Are we happy? Nobody is happy all the time. Do we want things to be better? The answer is yes. But what are we doing to get it better? I have given a little bit of an exposé here in my short time, Mr. Vice-President.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Minister, you have five more minutes.
Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. I have given a little bit of an exposé, because it is limited time, to let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know that we are working hard, we are working on your behalf and we are working for the future.

I would just like to touch, very briefly, on a couple other points in that five minutes. There was reference to the hon. Prime Minister in the other place in the debate last week Friday by Sen. Mark. And again, I was there sitting next to the Minister of Finance in the Standing Finance Committee when he talked about the health allocation and CDAP. At no point in time has this Government, either the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister, said that we are going to reduce CDAP. After the Minister of Finance made his contribution in the Standing Finance Committee, boom, miraculously but not surprisingly, the mischief from the media was that he is going to reduce CDAP and that he said it. It does not exist. Go back and look at the recording. Go and read the Hansard. So the hon. Prime Minister came in his contribution, and in a responsible manner said if times get hard and things get hard and we are not there, what is wrong with looking at your expenses. And he then gave the country the assurance that this Government was not reducing CDAP. So I repeat it here today, again, that is not this Government's intention at all.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: ConocoPhillips, let me deal with that very, very quickly. An arbitral award was made in 2018, for certain entities owned by ConocoPhillips against the PDVSA companies. And that arbitral award, surprisingly by a court in Trinidad, in an ex parte hearing, when the world knows that the Government has been involved in Dragon gas deal, made an order, an acknowledgement of that
arbitral award. We are currently with attorneys studying what it means. But I can
tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago here today, that on the face of it, it will not
affect us and the deals. Because again, “me eh come down last”. When we were
structuring the licence with Venezuela that is now a public licence published in the
Gazette of Venezuela, it is with the Government of Venezuela, sovereign to
sovereign. There is something called the corporate veil. You cannot pierce the
corporate veil to go after the shareholder. So the continued cries and screams that
they want it to collapse, it is not going to collapse.

Cabinet Note 1032, yes there was a Cabinet Note 1032, there is an Appendix
IV to that, that is a document that is produced every budget and every mid-year
review for every Minister of Finance from time immemorial, where the public
servants in the Ministry of Finance produce calculations that show if you adjust
this upward, it means X; you adjust it downward, it means Y. So, it formed part of
the Cabinet Note in an appendix. This Government is not seeking to raise VAT.
That was never discussed. It was never considered because we are not doing it.
But the public servants who have a responsibility to put all host of calculations
before the Government, when we are doing our business responsibly, that is what
they will do. And if you go public and you look at that Appendix IV, you will see
that it shows, if I raise tax this is what I mean; alternately if I drop the tax, this is
what it means. And that formed no part of our consideration and discussion.
Because the Government is not doing that.

But I understand the desperation. I understand the desperation. But in
closing, Mr. Vice-President, I thank you and I thank the Members of the Senate for
your time. I just want to continue to give the people of Trinidad and Tobago an
assurance, especially in the energy sector, we will continue to do the best that we
can humanly possible in a very volatile global energy sector, where prices go up and down to secure a future, for the future of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

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

**Sen. Damien Lyder:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute today to this Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2024) Bill, 2024. Let me first start off my congratulating Sen. Mark, as well as the next Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar in the other place, for completely, completely showing and exposing the ineptitude of this Government to diversify this economy and to bring to us more pain and sufferation for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, when I listen to this Bill here today and I listen to the hon. Minister of Finance and most recently the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries try to defend it, I cannot help but feel it for the Minister of Finance; I do. He has been through quite a lot in the last few months, Mr. Vice-President. So it must be hard to deliver this here today. I mean, when I think about the amount of legislation that has been rushed to the Senate to try to keep us off the EU blacklist, and here we are today in 2024, June 2024, and we still are one of 12 countries that sit on this EU blacklist, I feel it for the hon. Minister of Finance. Mr. Vice-President—

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, you are very early in your contribution.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** It is an opening.

**Mr. Vice-President:** However, it is not relevant to what you are responding to.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I hope I am allowed to open, Vice-President. I am simply opening because, the Minister of Finance stated that this was the supplementary appropriation and also about the state of the economy.
So when we are talking about the state of the economy these things are relevant, Mr. Vice-President. It is his duty to talk about the state of the economy.

**Mr. Imbert:** Standing Order 46(1), relevance. I spoke about revenue and expenditure.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Lyder, as you know the Bill at hand is on two specific areas. You are actually veering way off of it and you are going to be bringing too much into your contribution and I ask that you keep it relevant to the Bill at hand and what has been raised.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. When I look at this Bill here today, I am certainly confused as to why we are here asking for this $2.3 billion more, after nine years of PNM mismanagement.

Mr. Vice-President, year after year, budget after budget, we hear a government bringing to this nation these false promises that the economy is going to be doing well, that we are going to be thriving, Mr. Vice-President. And year after year we come at the mid-year review to hear the Government asking for more money, pushing our debt even higher. Mr. Vice-President, for the benefit of the newly-minted Independent Senators who are here today, let me remind some of these statements made in previous budgets, by this Government, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President—

**Mr. Imbert:** Point of order, 46(1). We are not speaking about previous budget debates here.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Lyder, the context is very crisp, but you cannot go outside of the realm. We are dealing with an appropriation of expenditure for this financial year.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I just stood
up here and heard a Minister of Energy and Energy Industries go at length of total irrelevant things and we sat down here and allowed him to say what he had to say. But I have to start up my argument as to why we have an issue with a lot of the money being spent here today, Mr. Vice-President. Because a lot of the money being spent here today, in fact most of the money being spent here today of the $2.3 billion that is being spent here today has nothing to do with diversification and growth, Mr. Vice-President.

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** So, you must allow me to state what was the theme of the budget for 2024, which I was trying to get to, after being rudely interrupted, Mr. Vice-President. And the theme of the budget of 2024 was “Building Capacity for Diversification and Growth”.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Vice-President, 46(1).

**Sen. D. Lyder:** That is the theme of the budget.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Vice-President, 46(1). This is not a budget debate, it is a supplementation; it is very narrow.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I am responding to the fact.

**Sen. Mark:** You are a stranger. Have some respect.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senators.

**Sen. Mark:** You are a stranger here man.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Mark, the Standing Order is upheld. Kindly keep your arguments and points to the Bill at hand.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Yes. Mr. Vice-President, after trying to be muzzled here, by the Government, let me state for the record that we are here talking about an appropriation of $2.3 billion to add to a budget that was themed: “Capacity for
Diversification and Growth”. That is what the budget was themed. And you want to ask us to put on more debt of $2.3 billion, most or almost 98 per cent of it for nothing to do with diversification and growth in this country, Mr. Vice-President, and that is the—

**Mr. Imbert:** Point of order, 46(1). This is not a budget debate. We are simply supplementing appropriations.

**Hon. Senators:** [Continued crosstalk]

**Sen. Mark:** He is trying to [Inaudible] the Opposition.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senators, Senators. Sen. Lyder, if you contribution and the debate has to go on, we will do so by the Standing Orders, which are the rules of this House. Please focus on what we are here to debate. It is not a budget debate.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. So, when I look at the lofty amount being asked for here today, Mr. Vice-President, you must understand my absolute shock and amazement that I have here today, when the Government talks today about diversification and, I will not say building capacity again, but when we look at the allocation, Mr. Vice-President, I am stating here today I see nothing in this $2.3 billion for diversification and growth. I am seeing nothing here for that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Point of order.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I am seeing nothing here for that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Point of order 46(1). I was very careful to state what the supplementation is for and the document sent to the Senate states what the supplementation is for. The Member cannot speak about things that are not before us.

**4.50 p.m.**

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Lyder, you labouring around a point that I ask you to
move on from and move into relevance for the debate, please.

Sen. D. Lyder: So anyway—thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, so the Government is here asking for $2.3 billion right after they cannot explain where $2.6 billion is to the Auditor General and want us to approve $2.3 billion.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: 46(1).

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder. Sen. Lyder this is not on the Order Paper, it is not on the Bill.

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder. Sen. Lyder taper your—and guard your contribution towards what we have to deal with here today. And I am asking you not to defend it once again when you stand up.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, you know, while I was looking at this debate in the other place right, on television, for the appropriation of $2.3 billion more added to our debt, Mr. Vice-President, you know, it reminds me of past times. That every time they deliver something like this, a debate like this, in the past the Chambers of Commerce would come out with some sort of nice to say about them and so on.

Mr. Imbert: 46(1).

Sen. D. Lyder: I am speaking directly about this.

Mr. Imbert: I did not form part—

Sen. D. Lyder: What is going on here?

Mr. Imbert: I would also cite 53(1)b. 53(1)b.
Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Senators. Senators. Once again, Senators. Senators I am on my legs. Sen. Lyder, I caution you once again on your contribution and the angle you are taking. Please keep it relevant and every time you have to rehash you are repeating yourself. 53(1) held as well.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you Mr. Vice-President. I do not know if stick break in ears, today but, Mr. Vice-President, I refer directly to the Bill being debated today that was debated in the other place while I looked at it on television. I am speaking directly towards that. And I think it is relevant—


Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 46(1), I did not refer to the debate in the other place, and this Bill was not referred to the debate in the other place.

Sen. Nakhid: But that was in the other place. That is not true. You did refer to it.

Sen. D. Lyder: Come on, come on, come on. I am watching on TV and I am allowed to respond.

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice President: Sen. Lyder. Sen. Lyder, please move forward with your points. Please move forward with your points.

Sen. D. Lyder: When I was doing my research on this Bill after continuously being interrupted because they cannot face the truth—

Sen. Nakhid: Yes.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: —when we tell them the truth. They cannot face the truth that they decimating this economy—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]
Sen. D. Lyder: —and put us in more debt.


Sen. D. Lyder: But Mr. Vice-President, let me tell you. Let me tell you. While I was preparing for this debate, I read the newspapers. I had to read the newspapers to listen to what other people said because I do not want this Government to come and continuously say, “Is the UNC”—

Mr. Imbert: Am, 46(1), any report in the newspapers cannot be on this Bill before the Senate today because those reports would be tomorrow. So, it is not relevant.

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder, that is just a point of use of English. Continue.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Thank you for being fair to me today. Because Mr. Vice-President, what they do not want to hear, what they do not want to hear is the responses coming from the private sector and the business chambers about what we are discussing here today because they looked at it on TV just like me, Mr. Vice-President. Just like me they listened to all 12 of these Heads of expenditure being read out by the Minister, being explained by the Minister. They too, listened to the Standing Finance Committee on television—

Mr. Roberts: On big screen.

Sen. D. Lyder: —to see what was explained. On big screen. Some of them are in despair, Mr. Vice-President. Let me tell you how much despair they were in. Let me tell you how much despair they were in. Because, according to the Guardian on Saturday the 8th of June, that would have been right after. Hear this and I quote:

“The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce…” worries
“…about the expansion of…the fiscal”—debt—“deficit.”

We spoke about that today. Mr. Vice-President. People are worried about the deficit, the $9 billion if they spend all the money. Probably going to be more, Mr. Vice-President before we are done. But $9 million at least adding—

Hon. Senator: Billion.

Sen. D. Lyder: Billion, sorry at least. Thanks for correcting me, I am glad you corrected me. Mr. Vice-President, the same papers, the Guardian, the Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce, is not encouraged by the review. I was not encouraged either. I looked on, Mr. Vice-President. I was not encouraged when I saw this.

Mr. Imbert: 46(1). We are not dealing with any review here—

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Imbert: —of appropriation. There is no review on discussion here.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen Lyder, as you bring in external information and sources of information about the debate today please keep it relevant to what was piloted by the Minister of Finance.

Sen. D. Lyder: How it was relevant, Mr. Vice-President, the fact that according to the Guardian Business on Saturday the 8th of June, in an article entitled: “Budget review disappoints business groups.” All the business groups disappointed, and—

[Interruption]

Mr. Imbert: 53(1)b. Point of order. Continuous repetition after being warned repeatedly. 53(1)b, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. Nakhid: It is his discretion. You want to tell the Vice-President what to do?

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Nakhid, I am sure you are going to have your time to speak. [Inaudible]. There is a Standing Order for that. Sen. Lyder, continue
focusing on the following.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Mr. Vice President. So, Mr. Vice-President, imagine we are here today debating a Bill asking for $2.3 billion, making a record total spend in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Vice-President, they spent it for $70.7 billion, Mr. Vice President, $70.7 billion. Mr. Vice-President, you know what this is? I heard the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries speaks about $30 billion by the UNC putting debt. You know how much more debt this Government and PNM are putting on? Close to $70 billion more in debt, they are putting to this. Over $130 billion this country is in debt.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: And the hon. Minister of Energy talks about the UNC with $30 billion. Our great-grandchildren will have to pay for this debt, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, so we are looking at a $9 billion deficit, imagine that. That is more than $6,500 more debt that each citizen in this country has to now take on their backs, Mr. Vice-President. Over $130-something billion, they have taken us to, and then you telling me, and I heard it here earlier, you telling us here to expect three more years of hardship? Yes, I heard several people including the Minister of Energy reference that. But it was in an Express article on June the 6th when the hon. Minister of Finance stood up and told the nation that more than three more years of hardship and the Minister of Energy discussed it.

Mr. Imbert: 46(1). He is going into the past. We are debating a supplementation Bill.

Sen. Roberts: [Inaudible]

Mr. Vice-President: Pause. Pause. Sen. Lyder. Do your best to keep it in context, please.

UNREVISED
Sen. D. Lyder: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Vice President. I am responding to the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Mr. Vice-President. I do not know, I think the hon. Minister of Finance was out of the Chamber, so he may not have heard. But let me tell you here today. I put it to you that this—it is evident that this Government has now become intellectually bankrupt, Mr. Vice-President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]


Sen. Roberts: Only now?

Sen. D. Lyder: And you know, the hon. Minister, in case I get stuck again, the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries stood up here and I think he spent about five to seven minutes talking about the IMF and Article IV and went in-depth about the IMF. So, I would like to respond to the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries here today, Mr. Vice-President. Because he made mention that the UNC never dealt with the Article IV. Let me remind this entire Senate here today, that it was in 2014, Mr. President, that we had the consultation with the IMF with the Article IV.

5.00 p.m.
And let me tell you what they told us to do then. Let me tell you what they told us to do then. They told us—at that point in time, they told us that we must reduce subsidies—fuel subsidies. That is what they told us. We must reduce fuel subsidies at that time. But the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar decided, and she knew that that would cause hardship upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and she refused to do it while the economy was growing, Mr. Vice-President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: Mr. Vice-President, they advised us as well too, they advised us to
increase VAT and to take away exemptions from VAT. That is what they advised us in that Article IV that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries speaks at length about. But guess what? The hon. Prime Minister at the time, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, did not listen to that. She exempted 7,000 food items from VAT—

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:**—knowing that the people of this country were suffering, knowing that those below the poverty line needed to survive. Mr. Vice-President, the IMF went ahead in Article IV and told the then UNC Government to rationalize social welfare, which is basically cutting programmes—social programmes.

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** Point of order, 46(1).

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I am responding to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Hon. Senators:** [Interruption]

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Yes, I am responding to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** That is an old—[Inaudible]—consultation.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I am responding to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I am responding to that—[Inaudible]

**Hon. Senators:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Lyder—

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Yes.

**Mr. Vice-President:**—you have a small window to get to that point. Go ahead.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Yes. Yes, I am getting to that, Mr. Vice-President.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Yes.

**Sen. Roberts:** A small pin or a small window?
Sen. D. Lyder: Mr. Vice-President, it is okay. I will not be shaken today, Mr. Vice-President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: The truth will come out. The truth will come out on this Government today, Mr. Vice-President. The truth will come out, because when the rest of the Chamber is telling the truth and speaking loud now, we go speak loud inside ah here, Mr. Vice-President. We will speak loud in here.

Kamla Persad-Bissessar—as I close this point, Kamla Persad-Bissessar did not cut the programmes. In fact, she increased the programmes, the milk grant, the baby grant, the social welfare grant. She increased grants. That is what she did. But, Mr. Vice-President, what did the PNM do?

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, 46(1). I “doh” know where the Senator is going with this ramble.


Mr. Imbert: No, you are not.

Sen. D. Lyder: Yes, I am.

Mr. Imbert: No, you are not.

Sen. D. Lyder: Yes.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder, you are going way beyond your remit here today.

Sen. Roberts: I think you did not listen to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, you know. He spoke about—[Inaudible]

Mr. Vice-President: I am on my legs.

Hon. Senators: [ Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: I am speaking to Sen. Lyder.
Hon. Senators: [Continuous interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder, the detail to which you are going is way off the debate today.

Sen. Roberts: The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is way off.

Sen. Nakhid: “If he feeling oppressed”—

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. Vice-President, a point of order, Standing Order 51(e), (f) and (g).

Mr. Imbert: But he is challenging the President.

Mr. Vice-President: Let us not let the emotions get the better of us today. Sen. Lyder, and all those involved here today, present, please allow the dignity of this House to remain. Continue.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, the Government continues to mislead the population, as they did today, talking about the IMF report, how we are in a safe place. That was the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries stating that. That is why I was getting to that point. So the point is, is that they continue to mislead us, according to some Express front page article on the 6th, Mr. Vice-President, the same one that I got stopped for. They mislead us about being stable but tell us that we have three more years of hardship, Mr. Vice-President, but we are stable, so where is the contradiction here? But I will move on.

Mr. Vice-President, going now to the allocations in the Bill—I will focus on the Bill here now. And when we look at Head 80—my dear friend is here with me—for $21 million to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. When I was listening, Mr. Vice-President, to the hon. Minister here today, justify it here today and in the other place, I heard that there was a lot of money for old payments to the
NCC. I heard of payments for services in the past for Carnival, for SAPA, millions to be spent on Carnival, Mr. Vice-President. I heard them speak about the fact that they had to fix some HVAC and elevator at NAPA, and paying contractual services and, you know, I felt very—I was at pains. I was at pains.

You see, Mr. Vice-President, I was expecting a lot more here for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. In fact, I was hoping a lot more. And it seems as though when the Minister says that all these Ministries ask for all these amounts of budgets and put this money in, right, and it is so much more, it seems as though the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is always the bastard child in this, Mr. Vice-President, you know. So I feel sorry for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, and I cannot blame him for the lack of productivity coming out of that Ministry because he has been starved of funding, and it is evident here today. With $21 million being spent on past services and maintenance, I see nothing that is going to help us get growth and diversification.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: And this Government spoke at length—always speaks at length about tourism being a pillar of diversification in this country. What pillar is that? The pillar that crumbled in Rome when Rome was defeated?


Sen. D. Lyder: Pillar of what, Mr. Vice-President? Mr. Vice-President, I will say it to you here today, this Government, through this Appropriation Bill and through everything else, has abandoned tourism as a pillar of diversification in this country.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: They have abandoned it, and the results show, you know, Mr. Vice-President. The results show. When you spend money in this Bill here, on just
recurring expenditure and nothing to grow, do you know what happens? You go in decline, your business goes in decline.

Let me explain to you how it goes in decline because when, in 2015, the United National Congress was in government, do you know we had over 442,000 visitors in land and sea to come to Trinidad and Tobago? Do you know that? Mr. Vice-President, it was under a PNM—just before the COVID pandemic, that number then dropped to 390,000 from 442,000. And do you know, right here, it dropped again, Mr. Vice-President, just last year to 310,000 visitors here to Trinidad and Tobago?

So we are talking about spending $21 million on recurrent expenditure but yet, we are seeing a Government fail in tourism where we have lost, in the first part before the pandemic, some 80,000 visitors, Mr. Vice-President, and now, over 130,000 less visitors coming to our shore today. Mr. Vice-President, that is PNM failure for you.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Lyder: That is PNM failure for you. And do not let them tell you about the Carnival figures, all of this money going to pay for the NCC, right—of this $21 million going for the NCC. But let me tell you the Carnival figures, because I did my research too with the CSO, not by guess, Mr. Vice-President.

When the UNC was in government—the last year we were in government, 2015, we had 48,000 visitors for Carnival; 48,000. You would not believe, Mr. Vice-President, again, pre-pandemic, 2019, they dropped to 42. They are in decline. And then, Mr. Vice-President, when the rest of the world woke up after the pandemic, while Mexico, Cancun were booming, Antigua, booming, guess what?—35,000 visitors, a 26 per cent decline under this PNM Government in the
last Carnival, and we are appropriating money to pay the NCC. “Well, boy, dey finally get one good employee there now.” “Dey finally get one good employee there now”. And I am sure she will hold this Government to account.

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I am sure. I am sure of it. I am certain of it, Mr. Vice-President. And, Mr. Vice-President, when I look again at Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly, I see some $50 million being allocated for the clean-up of a national disaster that impacted Tobago by epic proportions. And, you know, it cannot escape me that when I looked at a *Newsday* article dated June the 5th, which is titled:

“Chief Secretary: $50m extra not enough for oil-spill clean-up”

—that was Farley Augustine who lives there, who is fighting the people of Tobago and knows what is needed, asking for the money, not only to clean up the oil spill, Mr. Vice-President. When he ask for $153 million, you know what that is for? That is not just for the clean up, but that is also to assist many of those companies, many of those people who were impacted by this oil spill, many of them who sit within the tourism belt, Mr. Vice-President. So that money is important to try to rejuvenate an industry that has been broken by an irresponsible Government who did not have the national security apparatus to protect our waters—

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:**—and allow that boat to come in and spill that oil, and not a single dollar in this Appropriation Bill for national security. And to this day, I listen to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries telling us, still confirming to us earlier today, besides going to the White House, that they still do not know who the owners of the boats are. They still do not know who to charge. So the taxpayers of
Trinidad and Tobago are going to have to foot the bill for the irresponsibility and for all of those ships, all those coast guard ships that are parked up in Teteron without fuel, so they cannot—

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I would have thought I would have seen some money for fuel, Mr. Vice-President, in this Appropriation Bill, for all of those boats that are parked up in Teteron that we see, all six Damen vessels and two Austal vessels, that the Prime Minister said he could sleep safe at night now because he has Special Branch—but all those boats parked up with no fuel, and an entire tourism industry, an entire island and the beauty of Tobago destroyed because of the irresponsible nature of this Government, Mr. Vice-President, and that is why they will pay for it. It was 41—

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:**—it is going to be 2-0 across there when the general election comes.

Mr. Vice-President, it seems now that the only tourism we have in this country now is tourists coming in to interview gangsters. We have gangster tourism here now, Mr. Vice-President; gangster tourism.

**Sen. Dr. Browne:** Standing Order 46(1), this is not a budget debate.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Lyder, once again, I will ask you to keep relevance in the matter.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Thank you. Yes. So, Mr. Vice-President, as I close off that point, as I close off that point on tourism, I just want to say to you that unless this Government besides this $21 million being appropriated here today in this Bill, if this Government does not get us off the watch-list and off the different advisories
coming from Canada, US and New Zealand, we will continue to decline in tourism, unless they spend money on tourism and on national security to bring the tourists here.

No amount of $1.2 billion spent on an airport wing in Tobago is going to impress us. Okay? And two hotels that “eh” seem to build as yet is going to bring tourism if you do not put the money and spend the money on tourism. Mr. Vice-President, $21 million for recurring expenditure, when they already were starved in a budget, is totally insufficient. Mr. Vice-President, and I will move on here now.

Mr. Vice-President, I was looking at Head 42, which is under the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. I was hoping if the Minister would be able to just confirm—I know he read out some expenditure but I was wondering whether any of that expenditure, he can tell me if it is yes or no, is for this Ministry for the desilting of rivers. I saw an article—maybe he can tell me in his wind-up. I saw an article in the newspaper, Mr. Vice-President, I think it was the Newsday article on June the 8th, when Sen. Avinash Singh—sorry, the Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries had said that some $17 million was given for clearing and desilting of drains, and this was an effort by Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. I want clarity if that $17 million is there for that. He said this would benefit farmers substantially. That is what he said.

So if it is $17 million, I am happy it is appropriated there, but I am saying to you, $17 million can barely cut it, Mr. Vice-President. After nine years of this Government allowing the river courses in this country to grow mangroves and silt and neglecting it—a drizzle will fall and farmers’ land will be flooded out. So $17million is nothing, Mr. Vice-President.
So I only hope under the Ministry of Works and Transport, where I see about $50 million being provided for the Drainage Division, I only hope that after nine years of neglect, with an election pending, right, I only hope that the people will benefit and not have to lose all their possessions in their homes this year again, not have so lose their fridge and stove, not have to lose their livelihoods and some of them, their lives. Because it is an election year, Mr. Vice-President. We know that. So we hope the marginals will be happy with what they spend in that area, Mr. Vice-President. We hope the marginals will be happy.

But, Mr. Vice-President, once again, another pillar of diversification neglected by this Government, agriculture; another one neglected. I was looking through these 12 over and over, listening to the television to hear them speak about the worst problem that is impacting the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, who are farmers. This problem of praedial larceny, this unit still continues to be underfunded, under-resourced and not a single dollar put inside of this to protect the farmers of this country, Mr. Vice-President, who continue to complain about their lives and livelihoods being impacted by crime in this country, this out of state crime in this country. So nothing there for Rural Development and Local Government.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to speak about something now. I heard a lot spoken about foreign exchange and foreign reserves and so on, Mr. Vice-President, right? Because if you are not going to do anything for farming in this country to bring, to reduce the over $5 billion food import bill. If they are not going to do anything about that then we have to look for other ways to try to bring foreign exchange in this country because we have a foreign exchange problem. I just
heard the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries say, “No, the problem is not that bad. We have eight months cover”. That is what he told me here, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, let me tell you this. I want to say this to you. In 2015, Mr. President, when the UNC Government left office, we left official foreign reserves at US $9.93 billion. That is where we left it. You know where this Government has taken it today, Mr. Vice-President? Let me tell you where they have taken it today. In 2019, right before the COVID pandemic, they took it down to $6.32 billion and now we are in 2024, it is at US $5.36 billion. They have taken more than $4 billion. Almost half, they have wiped out almost half of our foreign reserves, Mr. Vice-President. This is not fiction, that is fact, Mr. Vice-President.

So when I come in this Appropriation bill today and I look at Heads 23 and 39, I have a concern. I have a concern when I listen to the justifications on the livestream and I heard it here with the Minister here today again. Mr. Vice-President, under Head 23, a large portion of this money, $90 million, about US $13 million which is under the Office of the Attorney General. About US $13 million being used for foreign lawyers, to pay lawyers outside. Foreign exchange gone again.

Mr. Vice-President, when I look at the $107million principal and an additional $50 million in interest, TT dollars payment to Head 39, which is part of a repayment for RBL at WASA, I noticed the Minister went way past that fast. He did not get into the details but I was watching TV, I saw the details, Mr. Vice-President. A loan, through WASA. You know how much this loan is for, Mr. Vice-President? Let me tell you how much this loan is for. US $60million, this loan is for.
Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have five minutes remaining.

Sen. D. Lyder: So we are talking here Mr. Vice-President of roughly US $35 million more in these two pieces, heads of expenditure. US $35 million more gone.

Sen. Mark: And we have a scarcity.

Sen. D. Lyder: And we have a scarcity of US dollars, Mr. Vice-President. And who is going to be impacted by that Mr. Vice-President? When we know more than US $1.5 million in foreign direct investments have exited our shores. When we hear, the Minister tried to talk about Petrotrin did not give us any US dollars. It was US $300 million a year Petrotrin was bringing in and circulating around this economy. All of that is gone. Along with all those manufacturing plants that shut down, $1.5 billion in foreign direct investment gone Mr. President, under this Government. Mr. President, let me tell you, it is not me alone. Let me tell you, in a Trinidad Express on the 6th of June in an article entitled: “Economist: Imbert’s concerns on economy justified”, Dr. Vaalmikki Arjoon. Yes, he says:

“Last year, the State borrowed approximately $12.39 billion to meet fiscal obligations. Lower hydrocarbon exports, capital flight and reduced...”

—Foreign Direct Investment. I am not saying it alone you know.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. Vice-President, Standing Order 46(1).

Sen. D. Lyder:

“...have helped shrink...”

Sen. Dr. Browne: This is irrelevant to the Bill before us.

Sen. Lyder:

“...forex...to $5.36 billion....”

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke about this.
Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder, a standing order is being raised. When that is being done, you take your seat.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: In your wrap-up, keep it relevant please.

Sen. D. Lyder: Yes, thank you Mr. Vice-President. Responding to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who says “We okay with the foreign reserves”. I am saying to you that Vaalmikki Arjoon says the reserves dropped to $5.36 billion and is artificially propped by external borrowing and raiding. Well, he did not say raid, but I am saying raiding the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Artificially propped, Mr. Vice-President.

So when I hear the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries tell us “We have eight months cover”, it is artificial conversation the goodly gentleman—the goodly Minister—is speaking about today, Mr. Vice-President. That is what it is. So that is what it is and who gets impacted here when all this foreign exchange is gone down to $5.36 billion dollars? When it is all gone, you know who is impacted? The small, medium and micro enterprises Mr. Vice-President, who cannot get $500 in a bank. And up to now they boasted about a SME grant out of EximBank. Not grant, facility for SMEs, and not a dollar as yet but they are talking about foreign exchange being safe.

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President: Relevance, Sen. Lyder, you have one-minute remaining.

Sen. Lyder: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President: Sorry, sorry, sorry you have two.
Sen. Lyder: Mr. Vice-President, I do not need two you know, I only need one because I think, Mr. Vice-President, the way in which they were jumpy, jumpy, jumpy like ants in their pants they realize the truth is all coming out today.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Lyder: They realize they are being debunked today and the media will pick this up. The media will pick this up, Mr. President. So, Mr. President, as I close, it is no longer an assumption anymore. It is no longer an assumption anymore. I am fully clear that not only the UNC, but also other citizens in this country, including, including the business chambers, who were once very quiet are now very vocal. When you see they get vocal, Mr. Vice-President, you know, “we in trouble. You know we in trouble because it impacting their pocket now. It impacting their pocket now.”

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Lyder: “So dey focus now, Mr. Vice-President.” It is clear to me that the Government is bankrupt of ideas, devoid of vision, and absolutely incapable of managing the affairs, financial or social of Trinidad and Tobago by—when I read this appropriation, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, this supplemental appropriation has fallen short and missed the mark as it pertains to this Government’s overall theme for this year in the budget, which is Building Capacity for Diversification and Growth. This Bill does not help diversification. It contributes nothing to economic growth and it sees billions more of our taxpayers’ money being used by this Government to pay old debts for mismanagement, and it puts us in a position where our country and our economy will continue to fall off the precipice right into the net of the IMF. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]
Miss. Vice-President: Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Dr. Maria Dillion-Remy: Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for the opportunity to join in this mid-term review of the economy. Every time I hear a debate, be it budget, followed by mid-term review, Mr. Vice-President, I cannot help but think, I hear the same themes all the time. The first one, from the Government, is that the economy is not doing as bad as it could be. In other words, we are doing far better than others say, and very well as far as the IMF is concerned. I hear also the Opposition calling for—call a general election, because the Government is not doing well. The economy is in shatters and, you know, I would really hope that at some point in time, we would get to the kinds of discussion that really truly talks about how our nation is developing.

The appropriation that is requested is for 2.3 billion of which Personnel Expenditure is 17.5 million; Goods and Services 660.06 million; Current Transfers and Subsidies 1.059 billion and Development $4,238,500. I would, in examining the 2.3 billion as others have said a lot of the money is going towards Recurrent Expenditure; paying arrears of Salaries. Nothing is wrong with that, except that when you are going to a situation where you are—it is a significant rise in the appropriation for the year but again, I, like some of the other Senators who have spoken I would have preferred to have seen more evidence that we were seeking to go along a line of further development. Development, 4.238 million for the DP, Mr. Vice-President, and of the 2.3 billion that is being requested, a meagre 50 million is being allocated for Tobago for the oil spill.

Mr. Vice-President, as it has been said already, the oil spill has been a significant challenge, declared an emergency by the Prime Minister. I remember
when I looked at how the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly first approached this disaster, I really was warmed by what I saw in terms of the collaboration between Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the—at the level of leadership, and also the collaboration between the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the TEMA, et cetera. I really was pleased with that. I think that kind of collaboration is really what we need to continue to be doing in a serious way. And when I say in a serious way, I mean, there is so much politicization of things, that we never seem to be able to discuss things in a meaningful way. Every time somebody says, “a”, the other says, “You did that and therefore, we are not so bad.” I am very concerned that this is the trend in which we are still going as a nation and as leaders. So, point one I want to make is about the unity and collaboration that occurred between the Ministries and stakeholders for this oil spill cleanup.

Mr. Vice-President, as we are well aware, the oil spill resulted in massive environmental disturbance of the sea and the nearby surroundings, damaged the island’s mangroves, a threat to the tourism and fishing sector. It affected the economic state and livelihoods of many in Tobago. In a media briefing at the Ministry at Tower C at the Port of Spain International World Waterfront Centre on Monday the 6th of May, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, hon. Stuart Young, announced that CAFTA had approved of a donation of US$250,000 that is probably about 1.4 million. Am I right? Also, Trinidad and Tobago was granted the authorization to access the funding from the International Oil Pollution Fund via a 1992 Civic Liability Convention to cover a vast majority of the damages in terms of the cleanup costs in the wake of the damage, that is approximated to be US$30 million.
So Tobago is being allocated 50 million for the same oil spill that was described as a national disaster of a 2.3 billion supplementary allocation and most of that 50 million is going to be coming from external sources, i.e., this International Oil Pollution Fund, et cetera. So I am asking: What really is the—Yes, we have a national disaster and I would imagine that if it is a national disaster, you will treat it as such. And therefore, the allocation that would go to Tobago for this is going to be significant.

Now, the Minister of Finance has said that Tobago had applied 453 million and they did not have sufficient documentation. But my understanding is that a lot of money has been spent and I do know that from what was said again, by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, that in the allocation, how the distribution of work went in Tobago, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was responsible for a certain part around the ship and the Tobago House of Assembly was responsible for the coastline. The Minister also said that there was no mention in this allocation that is being requested here, about how much money is being requested for the Ministry of Energy, no money here for that. But 50 million to Tobago and I am just wondering, how can this be when you are asking for $2.3 billion. You have a national disaster in Tobago for an oil spill that has created havoc in Tobago and only 50 million could be allocated to Tobago. Minister, I am concerned and I would really like to have that reviewed.

Yes, you have indicated that that is all that the funding, all the documents that were prepared, that is all that could have been accepted by the Budgets Division. But you know, and it has been said, there are many areas that need to be costed. Clean up, remediation, lease, rental, infrastructure, marine, support
services and consultancy security, materials and supplies. That is what you said the 50 million is for. Between now and the end of the financial year, more funding would be required for the rest of the cleanup. As I said before, the majority of funding intended designated to Tobago is coming from external sources. So, I am asking what priority or percentage of the pie was Tobago given from what is being allocated from the Consolidated Fund? We do appreciate the work that has gone on in terms of the linking with the international sources, but I am disappointed to see that this has not been treated in a more meaningful way.

The THA had also said that, and it was mentioned by Sen. Lyder, the THA had also requested funding for the payment of contractors who have been cleared after they had the forensic audit and there are many contractors now that need to be paid. As we know in Tobago right now, there is a significant decrease in what is going on in terms of the construction sector because of things that are happening. And now that these people are cleared after the results of the forensic audit, they are not going to have the money to pay them. So, in other words, the lack of employment through the construction industry is going to continue.

The Loop TT news on June the 6th and a Guardian media newsroom article on June the 8th the Chief Secretary said:

“We’re owing practically all the contractors in the clean-up effort. We have not done the relief for the fisherfolk as yet…and certainly we will make that priority number one out of the $50 million because we want the local economic economy to bounce back…”

But:

“The Chief Secretary” also “emphasised that the need for resources to conduct studies and rehabilitation works across several affected areas.
These works include re-sanding beaches, beach construction, and conducting…”

In other words, there is a lot of work still to be done and, I do not think the 50 million is sufficient.

I am asking the Minister of Finance to reconsider. I am asking the Minister of Finance to look at other areas in which Tobago could be allocated more funding, so that the rest of the cleanup exercise and also the payment of contractors, so that the economy, in terms of the Tobago economy, the spinning of the economy in terms of the services that are offered by contractors, and buildings and roads, et cetera, could be addressed. Minister, Mr. President, I thank you.

5.35 p.m.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Culture, Tourism and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell): Thank you very much, Mr. President. If I could just respond very quickly to Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy on the matter of the $50 million to the THA—and I know my colleagues will respond more comprehensively, as well as the Minister of Finance in his wrap-up. But we have to bear in mind that in the clean-up exercise, it was a collaborative effort, and while the THA incurred some liabilities with respect to the clean up, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, and Trinidad agencies—I should say, Trinidad and Tobago agencies based in Trinidad, that went over there, also bore some of the expenses, the liabilities. And it is ongoing, and we are sure that there are more and more liabilities that will come up, and those will be discharged with, because we are Trinidad and Tobago, and as

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you have said, we have dealt with it in a very collaborative way between central government and the THA.

Mr. President, of course, I thank you for giving me the opportunity. Like many others on this side, and I am sure many other persons in this House, when we debate, we often wonder what those persons, who are looking on, whether in the public gallery or on television, what do they think about the debate, the issues under consideration and what do they think about the quality of the debate. And I say that, because had I not been in this House, I would have been confused. So I have to take the opportunity now to bring this debate into a state of discipline, in consideration of the matters that are properly before the House. Because we have heard two Members of the Opposition thus far, Sen. Mark and Sen. Lyder, and it is semantics, theatrics, irrelevance, political rhetoric, that we have been hearing for the past nine years, here in this debate. And the population here looking on perhaps, I believe, they do not understand what are the matters under consideration in this debate.

So I know this is frowned upon, Mr. President, but I have to do it. We are debating, the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2024) Bill. 2024. And in the Explanatory Note, it says:

“The object of the Bill is to supplement the appropriation provided for by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2024) Act…by authorising the issue from the Consolidated Fund in the sum of…($2,328,099,600).”

And when you go into the Bill, there is a short title of the Bill, and then clause 2—because it is one—it is just two clauses, the short title, and clause 2, and the Schedule to the Bill.

Clause 2 says:
“A further issue from the Consolidated Fund in the sum of…($2,328,099,600) is authorised for meeting expenditure for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2024, and appropriated in respect of the Heads of Expenditure set out in the Schedule to this Act.”

And the Schedule to the Act lists out all the Heads that are to be supplemented and the amount of the increase.

Now, it is important, not only to state that between the years 2010—2015, the People’s Partnership Government, every single year, brought a supplementary Appropriation Bill, and it was debated, and the budget of the current year was supplemented or varied—so it not unknown to Members opposite. It was done. They know exactly what is being undertaken here, and the question, of course, is: Why are we supplementing the budget? The Minister of Finance, the hon. Prime Minister, many Members of the Government have said time and time again—and the Members of the Opposition know, they know that a budget is a forecasting exercise, it based on the best information that you have at that point in time, and things change, other matters of expenditure came up.

Some Ministries, in previous years, may not have needed all of the expenditure and therefore, it is varied. Some Ministries, like in this Bill that is before us, they need some more expenditure. There are line Items, as identified in the Standing Finance Committee’s Report, that need to be supplemented for one reason or the other, and I could discuss those reasons here as it relates to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

Mr. President, in my response, of course, to Sen. Lyder, I do not want to be drawn into this game, this wildness that I like to refer to, of widening the debate,
because the Senator was all over the place, talking about every single thing that was irrelevant to the matters that are properly before us. He was bold enough to suggest that under the People’s Partnership Government, that tourism was in a boom, citing some very spurious CSO details. What boom? You had several Ministers of Tourism. What did Stephen Cadiz do? What did he accomplish? What did Chandresh Sharma accomplish? What did Rupert Griffith accomplish? Every time a Minister in the People’s Partnership Government became a Minister of Tourism, they were never even in the country. They were flying all over the world to trade shows with their companions. What did they accomplish? It is very bold.

And if you permit me again, Mr. President, I would respond—Minister of Energy and Energy Industries responded, in great part, to Sen. Wade Mark. But Sen. Wade Mark suggested to the Minister of Finance, “If you do not get a financial mongoose gang, the TTRA, then we are in trouble”—something like that, and “You cannot tax a nation into prosperity.”

5.45p.m.

Intelligent people in the population know that a government raises revenue through taxation. We all know that. This Government is not raising taxes or introducing new taxes. As a matter of fact, we decreased the value added tax. The Property Tax Act was passed in 2009. Recently, there was an amendment as we operationalized the Property Tax Act, of course, the Property Tax Act that they, while they were in Government, did not repeal and in fact planned to implement the property tax on the citizens. Recently we amended it and we decreased that tax.

The only tax—income tax remains at 25 per cent, corporation tax remains at
25 per cent, except in the case of banks and in the case of multimillion-dollar revenues, it goes to 30 per cent. Excellent tax environment. But this Government has come with a policy, “Listen, Board of Inland Revenue, it is within a Ministry, an institution of that importance and of that magnitude should be better off and have the flexibility of a semi-autonomous statutory body and therefore we are moving towards the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority.

It is not to implement new taxes. It is to collect the tax, the taxes that are owed efficiently to put into the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** We have heard many experts and they have reduced it to writing into reports. They say that the tax gap in Trinidad and Tobago is a whopping $15 billion and that is what we are aiming to reduce, the tax gap, a whopping $15 billion.

If the UNC’s lawyers and their foolishness, if they would stop taking every matter to court and attempting to delay the collection of tax services in Trinidad and Tobago, would there be a need for borrowing? Would we not reduce our debt situation?—$15 billion annually. And then Sen. Mark tries to malign, again, the CMO who has been awarded this nation’s highest honour—

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—for his work in keeping the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, notwithstanding the attacks of the UNC and their lawyers.

Here is what the allegation is—and this is why I say, the Members opposite have said absolutely nothing. They are simply playing to the gallery. It is just a bunch of theatrics, political rhetoric of absolutely no value, always wanting to be
somebody who “buss” some mark. Here is the allegation, the allegation is, when you crystalize it, that the CMO, using a procedure in law, issued permits to import drugs into this country. That is the allegation, you know. That is what he said when you crystalize what he actually alleged.

We recently had the Ministry of Health before us in a different place and that matter of the importation of drugs and the permit process, we interrogated that at length and they disclosed to us what that process was. Sen. Mark is on that committee.


Sen. Hislop: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: So, Mr. President, I am here to discuss, now that we are back on the train, I am here to discuss the supplementation of $21,048,000 proposed for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts that was considered and agreed in the Standing Finance Committee. That money under Head 80, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, is really to supplement three statutory boards under the remit and control of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. That is the National Carnival Commission, NAPA and SAPA; the National Carnival Commission in the amount of $5,000,300, NAPA in the amount of $9,645,000, and SAPA in the amount of $6,103,000.

So, Mr. President, I will start off with the National Carnival Commission, and these moneys are to supplement the Votes that are responsible for the construction of facilities and security services, liabilities in relation to those that were incurred during Carnival 2024. As we know, Carnival is our largest festival. In fact, it is probably the largest festival in the region. It is the largest festival in the region and it is our biggest in terms of a tourism season. It is our largest, most
important event within the tourism calendar in Trinidad and Tobago.

While some of us think of Carnival as the two days prior to Ash Wednesday, Carnival really begins in earnest on the 1st of January, that is when we start to get involved in a lot of Carnival events, Carnival activities, Carnival competitions. In fact, Carnival competitions and events began as early as December 2023, and following the Carnival of 2024, it was a resounding success.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** It is not “me say so”, every media outlet reporting on the Carnival indicated that Carnival was a resounding success. Not only was it safe but it was completely enjoyable and attended to by many citizens and visitors alike.

Prior to Carnival there was a planning session, planning sessions of many of the stakeholders, including the Ministry of National Security, the Port of Spain City Corporation, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, the National Carnival Commission, and it really was a collaborative effort. So there was a greater participation in 2024, Carnival 2024 than in many other years. If I could report in Panorama, for example, there were over 8,000 steelpan players who participated. There were 15,000 patrons who physically attended the Panorama events and it was a 20 per cent increase over last year. Where do we get these numbers from, we get these numbers from ticket sales and of course from the fire service who reports on the numbers attending the Panorama events and other events in the Carnival.

There were other events; there was the John Cupid Carnival Village, which saw over 100,000 patrons going to that Carnival village. There was the Calypso Fiesta, Dimanche Gras, Junior Parade of the Bands, the parade of the bands
Monday and Tuesday, and J’ouvert celebrations all across the country, and it was heavily subscribed, heavily patronized by persons from Trinidad and Tobago and overseas.

The NCC is charged in the most parts for constructing these facilities for the hosting of these Carnival events. We know the NCC constructs the North Stand, we know all of the other stands on South Quay and all over Port of Spain, but it goes further than that. They construct fences, they construct stages, there are barricades, sound system, tents, toilet facilities; all of those things are done by the NCC, all items of expenditure. And more than that, even in other parts of Trinidad—

**Hon. Senator:** [Interruption]

**Hon. Senator:** You are disturbing your colleague.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** —in San Fernando and in other parts of the country the NCC is responsible for constructing those facilities. With the increased number of events, the increased patronage, and of course the increase to the inputs that go into the cost to construct these facilities, the amount allocated was simply not enough. It was not enough and it is necessary to supplement this line Item, the construction of facilities. The cost simply has gone up and the NCC undertook to construct more facilities for more events.

In the case of security, because we are also supplementing that line Item that speaks to security with more patrons, with more events, you are going to need additional security, and therefore this line Item also has to be supplemented, and it would take the amount provided for in the Appropriation Bill to $145 million. So it was about $140 million in the Appropriation Bill and with this supplementation you take it to about $145 million, and this $145 million is a significant investment
in our economy.

Let us look at the returns on the investment, the returns on the State’s direct investment into Carnival 2024. So, for example, in terms of visitors—Sen. Lyder came and, you know, Sen. Lyder asked a question about visitors in this Parliament—I do not know if you recall, Mr. President—and just before the answer was given, he quickly, quickly retreated, withdrew the question, “Nah, ah doh want de answer. Ah doh want de answer”. He asked a question on the visitors for Carnival 2024. So this year’s celebrations attracted approximately 41,444 visitors by air to Trinidad and Tobago over the Carnival period, which is January 26 to February 13—41,444 visitors by air. But, of course, if you review the period, the real period of Carnival, which is January 1st to Carnival Tuesday, it revealed that 59,217 persons visited the country.

When you look at visitor spend in the exit surveys of what people spent, those visitors coming by air and using the airport to leave the country, visitors stayed on average 13 days and spent on average US $2,251 or TT $15,313 on food, entertainment, accommodation, transport, et cetera. In terms of cruise, we also had a number of cruise calls during the Carnival season, and during that period, January 26 to February 13, we also welcomed 20,423 passengers via cruise calls with an average visitor spend of US $43 or TT $292, and that amounted to around $5.97 million in terms of the cruise passengers. So when you look at the overall spend over the Carnival period just from visitors, people who are not ordinarily resident here coming into the country and spending into the economy, we are looking at approximately $640 million.

6:00 p.m.

That does not take into consideration the local spend that average persons
like myself, and Sen. Sinanan, not Sen. Lyder, he leaves this country, the spend that we, on costumes—

**Hon. Senator:** “Yuh sure right”

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—on food, on Carnival events, Carnival fetes, the local spend, you are looking at well over a billion dollars. You are looking at well over a billion dollars. And Sen. Mark asked a question, he asked a question, where is the job creation? Where is the diversification? This is it, it is right here. In terms of job creation, the NCC alone held over 40 events for Carnival and all in all, about 15,000 jobs were created directly and indirectly from this festival alone; 15,000 jobs. We have persons who are vendors, costume designers, musicians, dancers, choreographers, event planners, marketing professionals, transport providers, caterers, tuners, arrangers, drillmasters, pan stick makers, the printers, security, short-term labourers, stage technicians, and the list goes on. It is a massive economy. This is where the jobs come from, and some of these jobs are sustainable because some of these people go to other countries to do these same types of jobs during their Carnival celebrations. So, by supporting the Carnival, supporting these industries, we are investing in the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** I do not think that the Opposition is so obtuse as to not see that. They are playing to the gallery. And, of course, when you look at the margin; you invest directly $145 million through the NCC into the Carnival and you stimulate $640 million, in terms of visitor spend, and then you have local spend, and if you take it up to a billion dollars, look at that margin. Mr. President, $145 million to stimulate economic value within your country, of a billion dollars.
So, I think, through you, to the Minister of Finance, we need a little more money.

**Hon. Senator:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. the Hon. R. Mitchell:** We need a little more money.

**Hon. Senator:** To stimulate a little more, yes.

**Sen. the Hon. R. Mitchell:** To stimulate a little more.

If I turn to NAPA and SAPA, Mr. President, if you recall we debated legislation in this Parliament to create two statutory bodies for the management and control of our performance spaces, NAPA and SAPA, and since the passage and the proclamation of those two Acts, and of course, those two Acts, the objectives are:

“…to promote the development of culture and the arts…

…to provide state-of-the-art facilities for culture and the arts in Trinidad and Tobago

…to showcase cultural and artistic events…

…to provide technical training in culture and the arts…”

Since then, the Boards of NAPA and SAPA have been appointed, and they have been quickly operationalising those two new statutory bodies. As you recall, Mr. President, they were previously managed under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, or in the past, whichever Ministry had the responsibility of culture. It was inefficient. It was an inefficient way of managing these two very valuable performance spaces that we have here in this country. So, we created two new statutory bodies, and we placed the management and control of NAPA and SAPA under these two statutory bodies. Since then, the Boards and the Management of NAPA, they have been quickly operationalising. They have done a number of their policies and they have been recruiting. There were a number of employees
who were previously employed with the Ministry, who have now transitioned over to NAPA and over to SAPA.

6.05 p.m.

With respect to NAPA, 81 members of staff have transitioned from their short-term contract employment at the Ministry, over to their longer-term contracts with NAPA, and since December 2023, there have been 21 new hires, and a further 21 to be hired before the end of fiscal 2024. And it is to be noted that NAPA not just employs administrative and the operational staff, but we have also placed the three entities, the National Steel Symphony Orchestra, the National Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as the National Theatre Arts Company, we have placed those companies, as well as the management of Stollmeyer’s, under NAPA.

With respect to SAPA, which has a smaller approved organizational structure, 22 members of staff have transitioned from the Ministry. There have been four new hires since December 2023, for a total of 26 employees. Between now and the end of the fiscal, the board and the management of SAPA, they are expected to hire 16 additional employees. So Sen. Dr. Patasar asked the question, what about contract employment? That is the reason for the need for the supplementation as it pertains to contract employment in NAPA and SAPA. There has been operationalization of those two bodies, they are hiring staff and now there is the need of supplementation to take them from the mid-year, which is now, until the end of the financial year. And therefore, we expect the $3,514,842, in the case of NAPA, and the $2,253,319, in the case of SAPA, to be well utilized until the end of the financial year.

With respect to the operationalization, of course, now as it is more flexible, and there is a board directly in control and managing these two performance
spaces, there have been more bookings, there has been more use of these performance spaces, and with more use, there is need, of course, to supplement the maintenance. We spoke about the HVAC, the air-conditioning system, we spoke about—Minister mentioned the elevators, there are safety systems to also be tested and to be improved, and that is where the additional moneys will go to, as well as with increased usage, you will have increased electricity usage, so they will go towards the payment of arrears and, of course, the payment of the electricity bills from now until the end of the year. So that is where that supplementation is going to, and those things, the increased usage and, of course, the Ministry’s, or rather the board’s ability to efficiently and quickly operationalize NAPA and SAPA in the way that it has, those things were not foreseen at the beginning of the year, but it has been done and now there is that need to supplement.

So, Mr. President, in conclusion, I am grateful for the supplementation provided for by the Ministry of Finance. We know where the supplementation is going. We have heard about the need for the supplementation and how it will be used, not only to stimulate the tourism sector, but to also assist in the cultural sector for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and with those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Sen. Roberts.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Anil Roberts: Thank you, Mr. President. The hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts said that budgeting is a forecasting exercise. Well, it is clear that this Minister of Finance “does forecast” like Seigonie because that is why we
are here. His forecasting failed, his forecasting flopped and now we are here asking for more money, while you have not even accounted for the money that you spent before.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** The hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts gave a detailed analysis and clear, precise content of the way the money will be spent in his Ministry, the contracts, the value, the value to the people, and that is how a Minister should account for taxpayer’s money. I am glad the hon. Attorney General has arrived because he could take example from his colleague about how to account for moneys spent by his Ministry and not tell the population that it is a secret. So I commend the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. But he said that the People’s Partnership’s Ministers were flying all over and we had nothing to account for and so on, but his Prime Minister is a pilot, he is never here and we cannot see anything—

**Sen. Mitchell:** [**Inaudible**]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** But you said it, Sir. Sir, he said it—

**Mr. President:** Have a seat. So, again, it is the wind-up. He is now starting his contribution—

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Thank you.

**Mr. President:**—and creating the context. Continue, Sen. Roberts.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** I mean, I sat quietly. I sat listening to my colleague, the hon. Minister.

**Sen. Lyder:** You were quiet.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** While his colleagues were not interested, and they were chatting and disturbing him, I was listening. I “doh” know why he is disturbing me already,
“ah now start”.

**Hon. Senators:**  [Laughter]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** The hon. Minister also said that the PNM diversification plan, this PNM, this iteration, in 2024, that the population can stand and applaud the PNM for creating Carnival. Hon. Minister, Carnival was around long time. Diversification means creating new revenue streams. You did not know it used to have a thing called Canboulay? We have Carnival, Carnival is sweet, Carnival is great, Carnival generates revenue, Carnival creates jobs, and for the Minister to come here and say that this year was a bumper harvest, it is not true because it was a short Carnival, and in a short Carnival, many promoters lost money. I mean, Stink & Dutty made money because the hon. Minister got a complimentary and he went down there and “lime”, so it looked good. So I agree that there were lots of successful events. But for the PNM to come to the population and say, “Vote for us, there is Carnival,” I mean, that is shocking. They are bankrupt of ideas. That is why we are here coming to ask for money after they did not account for the last set of money.

And for the final point for my hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, while he accounted very well, I want him to explain at some juncture why on May 29, 2024, the North Stand, where “I does go” and listen to pan, is now coming down and band launching for Carnival in June, but they are now taking it down to put it back up in November. I am sure that does not make sense. There must be a better way to spend the resources of the country than to take down a North Stand and put it back up five months later. So I think he should address that.

It never ceases to amaze me—first and foremost, the hon. Minister of Finance said that this part of the appropriation and so on, the supplemental part of
it—he gave us a great analysis and different amounts of expenditure, and what is discretionary expenditure, direct expenditure and so on; very good. It was very good. But when someone hears “supplement”, it means that after you eat a nutritious meal, X amount, 30 per cent protein, 60 per cent carbohydrates, 10 per cent fat—you require extra supplements when you are going to exercise, you go to lift iron to build up your body. So after you have done a great job, you supplement. But when you have failed, when you have collapsed, when the economy is shattered, when we are bankrupt, how this could be a supplement?

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** “We starving”. “Yuh doh” start with supplement, you start with a good meal. In this instance, a good meal would have been diversification, revenue streams, impact on the economy, job creation. “Dem” come to supplement starvation. It never ceases to amaze me that a PNM Government could bankrupt an oil and gas economy—for the second time, eh, so it is not a fluke. They did it. They did it up to 1981—

**Sen. Lyder:** Professionals.

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—and then other people had to come in and save the economy and go to the IMF and so on. Well, we are coming around again, so the people better vote quickly because they boasting that the population must applaud that the PNM did not go to the IMF. But if the population “leave dem dey, de IMF door waiting like honey paper for fly”.

The second time they bankrupted the economy—and they come into Senate and the Parliament and act like “dem more vex than we”. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries “stand up dey” and angry, but he is in charge. He has decimated the energy sector that has existed since 1908. If they left it on
automatic pilot, we “woulda be good”, but they went and impact—they went and made decisions, they went and mash up “de” whole thing, and now they coming to say, “Wait till 2027. If Maduro good, we go be good.” I do not think that the population can hold onto that.

The signs of a bankrupt economy—because I heard the hon. Minister of Finance saying that we are doing well, “We may have hard times, but we are doing okay and we have negotiated well, and especially the Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, they negotiated because Henry Hub was too low, and they went and they looked at Hong Kong, and Japan, and Dutch ratings and it was up at US $17/$18 per MMBtu. It skyrocketed to $79 per MMBtu and the netback price—we did well.” But the hon. Minister of Finance, who is normally very detailed, very efficient, as he—because I was waiting for the end of the story because he “give meh” all the introduction, he “gih meh” the lead-up, and “ah” waiting for the climax. I was waiting for him to tell the population that due to their great negotiations, due to their unbelievable talks and flights all over, that they got, from their negotiations, a netback price, if I see—“ah” now studying my daughter, nine years old, she has exams next week and she is doing mode and mean and median. Okay?

So if I say that the hon. Minister said there were four prices that they looked at, and those four prices are above US $17/$18 per MMBtu, if I use the mode, then Trinidad and Tobago should get something about 17 or 18. If I use the mean, then we should get approximately—if it is down to 2—Henry Hub is down to US $2 and they are up at 17, we should get about what $9.50. I mean, I said, “Well, oh my goodness, thing looking nice under this PNM.” Then the Minister failed to tell us, he just said, “Well, we did all of this, but it might be so, but really and truly, we
are still stuck at a netback of $3 per MMBtu.” So what was all the song and dance? What were all the discussions about this large price over yonder that does not impact us?

Their negotiations did not impact us, they have done nothing, and the energy sector and gas production and gas prices have been decimated. So that is what we have to do. And when we see that the economy is bankrupt—they say we are not bankrupt, they saved us from the IMF. Well, how they saved us from the IMF? And the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries came here and read out from some report that the IMF gave the honourable Government, but the problem is, anybody knows, garbage in garbage out, the IMF cannot go down and subpoena our books and get into accounts. The Auditor General cannot even get our accounts. So what the IMF will do is take information from the Ministry of Finance. So whatever “dem” tell the IMF, the IMF will analyze that and tell us.

The problem is we are living here, the IMF is not living here, so we know the truth, we know the pain, we know the sufferation. But the PNM says that everything is good because people “gone” in a reggae concert Saturday, that is what they believe. The reggae concert “buss”, you know, because only about 8,000 people—they needed 10,000 people to breakeven—

Sen. Mitchell: “Nah, nah”.

Sen. A. Roberts:—but come—they needed 10,000 people to breakeven, less than 10,000 people, therefore, it “buss”. They said, “The economy big because Trinis like reggae.” That is the PNM. This cannot be serious.

6.20 p.m.

They bankrupted the economy and I want the citizens out there, if the PNM does not want to hear, how do you tell if an economy is bankrupted? We are
struggling to pay wages. We are hearing of the Minister of Finance all over “de” place saying that, since three years ago at “Spotlight on the Economy” where they were discussing their brilliance and so on, that they have to borrow money to pay wages. They cannot pay back pay. They cannot pay more than 4 per cent. They have to go 0-0-1/0-1-0/0-1-1-0. That is what they said. So that is a sign of a bankrupted economy, borrowing to meet recurrent expenditure, drastic collapse of credit rating.

In 2014/2015 our credit rating was AAA+. It is now BBB- and they celebrate that. They celebrate that. I never know you could move from swimming a 50 metres in 21.5 seconds, get big and fat and swim the 50 in 31 seconds and say, “Whooi, ah finish de race.” That is what the PNM does. They are boasting about a B credit rating. If “yuh” child who always getting As bring home a B, you will watch them and say, “Popo, what happened? You were frightened? Yuh did not do good in the test?” You would be worried. Not the PNM. They celebrate incompetence.

Negative foreign direct investment. Negative. Money and all running from the PNM. Not only citizens, not only brain drain, not only our brightest staying out, but money, investment is leaving the country, foreign direct—

Sen. Mitchell: Mr. President, 46(1) please.

Mr. President: What is the—


Mr. President: Okay. So, Senator, just always tie it back into which one of the Ministries you are talking about that is getting the supplementation when you are making your points.

Sen. A. Roberts: I am talking about the Minister of Finance, the Ministry of
Finance, the Ministry and Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts because they did not diversify. They did not increase the money. I am talking about all the Ministries here that we are coming to give them more money. I am even talking about the Auditor General. I am talking about Head 46, I am talking about the Ministry of Education. I am talking about the Public Utilities that people cannot get water. I am talking about the US $570 million from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries that they say is for fuel subsidy, and the PNM finds fuel subsidy is bad, well let me deal with that one time then.

Sen. Lyder: “Umm hmm”

Sen. A. Roberts: Fuel subsidy is bad? What world did I wake up in and say that every citizen who is born here who has a birth paper here whether it is hand written because you are old like me, or whether “yuh” get computer-generated birth paper, every citizen owns a piece of the resources of this beautiful country—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts:—whether it is oil, gas, sand, sea, salt, Carnival, culture. We all, no matter what creed, what race, own a piece of the resources. A government, it happen to be them, they are nearly on the way out, but when we are in charge, as a government the resources do not miraculously become ours. We are just custodians there to manage the people’s resources. So what is a fuel subsidy? A fuel subsidy—and this was determined, discussed each year that Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the UNC was in government. I was a Minister sitting there. They kept coming with this argument that the fuel subsidy is a drain on the Treasury. Just like the argument made here by the PNM.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries today you would have
believed that the fuel subsidy was like illegal guns coming through a porous border the way he was speaking. The fuel subsidy as Kamla Persad-Bissessar asked those who said, that that is not responsible spending. She said and I heard with my own ears, but I believe that it is. And she asked a question and I ask the citizens out there, because there is a clear difference now between the economic policy of the PNM which is fuel subsidy is terrible and will save the money for PNM’s discretionary spending, which I will deal with just now, and the UNC says, a fuel subsidy benefits everybody, from baby in womb to a 100-year-old woman, whether “yuh” have car or not, it keeps prices down. It keeps transport cuts down. It keeps bus price down. It keeps maxi price down. It keeps the price of goods down. It keeps pharmaceuticals down. The knock-on effect and the inflationary pressures put by removing a fuel subsidy impacts each and every citizen.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts: But the PNM comes to tell me today through the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and not as vociferously through the Minister of Finance that the fuel subsidy is irresponsible spending. Well, let “meh tell yuh” something. You know why they talk about fuel subsidy?—because the fuel subsidy it will come out direct. The hon. Minister told us about direct charges. They cannot impact that. No government, whoever in charge, that “hatta” pay, so salaries. That is why they do not want to increase public servants. They do not want to increase police. They do not want to increase army. They do not want to increase fire because once you increase that “yuh hatta to pay dat, and when yuh hatta pay dat”, if the pie is of a certain size and the element going to the people is large, then the Government has less money to spend on discretionary spending.

So the hon. Minister of Finance said that he is a responsible Minister of
Finance and a responsible Minister of the PNM Government. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said, the UNC and the People’s Partnership is irresponsible because fuel subsidy and wage negotiations and back pay and grants and food cards and so on, we are irresponsible because we put the money for the people. Well, let us see the PNM’s discretionary spend, because when you come here and “yuh” cut, and what was most notable today is the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said, “we knew when we were budgeting when we were forecasting that there would be a need for $500 m-m-m-million for the fuel subsidy, we knew that, but we left it out”. He said that on Hansard today.

Hon. Senator: What?

Sen. A. Roberts: That is what he said. So they knew. So they left it out to try and look good last year September because they know they are coming now for supplemental appropriation, and so they spend the money on their discretionary spend and let us see what some of their discretionary spend is. Three hundred million on Bridgemans and so on. What the Prime Minister, the hon. Prime Minister described as crooked money; $600 million on two cutlass vessels that nobody asked for; $233 million to keep Atlantic Train 1 open for two years, but it was kept, maintained for four years.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. President, 46(1).

Sen. A. Roberts: That is their discretionary spending, wasting $500 million.

Mr. President: 46(1)?

Mr. Imbert: Yes. None of that is related to the supplementation or the original appropriation for 2024.

Mr. President: So, Sen. Roberts, you spoke to this particular line Item which is the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the amount of money that is being
supplemented by, you even tied it into direct spend versus discretionary spend. I think you made your point on the discretionary spend, so you can move on from that.

Sen. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate that, but I just to—I would not show “yuh, yuh know, but you see is two piece ah” paper. It is plenty discretionary spend that is totally useless. So do not tell me that a fuel subsidy is bad spend when “yuh” want to build a health Ministry and part of the Ministry of Health funding here—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts:—part of the Ministry of Health a supplement from Head 30—whatever Head from the Ministry of Health is for the payment for the administrative office of the Ministry of Health that they did a Milshirv deal and we have to pay over $400 million over 18 years for a building that is worth $165 million. That is in the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order.

Sen. A. Roberts: “Eh heh”.

Mr. President: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: There is no appropriation for Milshirv in this or the original 2024 budget.

Sen. A. Roberts: You spoke about the Ministry—funding and so.

Mr. President: So again, Sen. Roberts, you are talking about the Ministry of Health and the supplementation to the Ministry of Health, and the same point is being made in relation to the money that is being supplemented for this Ministry.

Sen. A. Roberts: Yeah.

Mr. President: You called out the Head, called out the amount—

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Sen. A. Roberts: Right.

Mr. President:—and then talking about the money that was not spent or was spent elsewhere. That entire point has been made regardless of which Ministry you are calling out.

Sen. A. Roberts: Yes, Sir.

Mr. President: So what I will ask you to do is, come in with a new point because that point has been made.

Sen. A. Roberts: Alright. Okay, Mr. President. This point that I am making here on Head 28 Ministry of Health, the hon. Minister of Finance who went through every Head, Head by Head by Head, he was good going on the Head. Right? He said that part of the money for the Ministry of Health was to begin paying this public sector, private sector deal that they created for the construction of the Minister of Health administration building, and that is what I am discussing here. That the health sector we cannot get great service, we cannot get health services, we cannot get Panadol, but they are coming here to ask for supplemental appropriation to pay for a building that is absolutely useless. It is beautiful. It looks good, but it was unnecessary, and this links back to the point of the PNM’s discretionary spending. They “doh” want to spend money on, as the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said. He said, the fuel subsidy, if we “doh” spend that, we will spend it on hospital, on education, on school feeding. Well these PNM had no shame—

Sen. The Hon. A. Browne: A point of order, Mr. President. Standing Order 53(1)(b). I think the point has been made and reinforced and made.

Mr. President: So that is the point that I was making, Sen. Roberts. The fact that whether you call the Ministry of Health, whether you call the Ministry of Energy
and Energy Industries, and as much as you talk about the supplementation to those Ministries, the point that you are making discretionary versus direct expenditure, it is the same for the number of Ministries that you are making. So come with a new point.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** No problem

**Mr. President:** You can come off discretionary and direct.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** No problem, Mr. President. What I will talk is about heart and soul, about policy, because the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said, that some of this money will go to school feeding. Well, I hope that they add on an extra $20 million because whatever the PNM is putting in school feeding, first of all, they have reduced school feeding from 76,000 meals per day, breakfast and lunch down to 48,000 pre-COVID. Then now they have reduced the quality of the food going to our children where it is a policy that they get “ah piece ah meat” once a week. So, I am saying, if you come here for supplement, supplement that. Tell me you are going to take “ah $30 million to feed meh people children, meh children in de country. Tell meh dat”.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** But do not tell me “yuh coming for millions of dollars to pay lawyers, but it is secret. Yuh taking millions of dollars to pay rent. Yuh taking millions of dollars to pay for a building that dey fren” get a contract for. Come and ask for more money to feed our nation’s children.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Even Dr. Williams in 1981, Dr. Williams the head of the PNM just before he died, school feeding programme produced 51,000 meals back in 1981. This iteration of the PNM is even worse than Dr. Williams was in 1981,
they are only providing 48,000 meals and now it has chicken, it have no beef, it have nothing. Children eating like vegetarian. I am a meat mouth. My children need protein. They need their muscles. Their brain needs fats and lipids to concentrate, so come here and increase that allocation for our nation’s children.

We continue.

The Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said that Trinidad and Tobago is an oil and gas economy. They said that the People’s Partnership was the worse and we were terrible. But you see, the hon. Senator gets confused, Independent Senator, because of the politics and I put to her that we are in politics so we will provide facts, we will debate and the PNM will debate. It is incumbent upon the Independents to see who is debating sense and who is manufacturing evidence. Let me give you some statistics about the energy sector, because the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries stood there—

Sen. Lyder: At length.

Sen. A. Roberts:—for 40 minutes and said that he could not without anybody possibly challenging him that he was the greatest Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in history and that the People’s Partnership was woeful. Let me just read a little bit of statistics on the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries because that is why we are here. We are under pressure. We need allocation. Our gas and oil provides us with money. Well, oil production 2015, 78,000 barrels. Under this Minister now, 38,000 barrels.

Sen. Lyder: “Ummm”.

Sen. A. Roberts: National gas production, Bcf per day 2015, 3.8 Bcf, now down to 2.6. LNG production 2015, 28.9, now down to 17.5.

Hon. Senator: What?
Sen. A. Roberts: Ammonia production, millions of tonnes per year 2015, 4.9 million tonnes, now 3.9 million tonnes; methanol production, drilling activity, let “meh” move on quickly 2,849 drilling days under the UNC. That is money, that is energy, that is money coming from the ground for our citizens, from 2,849 down to 2023, 1,227. In any comparison on statistics, not opinion, not yellow versus red, not politics, this is total, abject failure.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

6.35 p.m.

Sen. A. Roberts: Energy sector real GDP, that is what we are talking here about today, that is what we are discussing, supplemental in appropriation, real GDP energy sector 2015 in TT b-b-b-billions, $61 b-b-b billion, in 2023, $42.3 billion. Jobs in the energy sector, jobs, money, people, taxation, more jobs, more tax bracket, more money, less coming here, less deficit, correct, well, let us see. Any jobs in the energy sector? 2015; 20,500, 2023; 10,400. “The PNM is half de man of Kevin Ramnarine. Dey is half de man of the UNC.”

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts: It is big pin versus small pin clearly, and that goes on. So tell that Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, do not come in this Senate without facts to confuse the Independent Senators. I hope you heard those facts, my honourable Independent Senators. So while we banter, while we are in the political, they must be above and discern who is talking sense from nonsense.


Sen. A. Roberts: Well, when you talk about fiction. Well, I sat down in this Red House that leaking on “muh” bald head sometimes and I heard the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talked about he and his and PNM are going—and let
me quote it properly eh—they are going to break the shackles of colonialism.

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter]

**Sen. Anil Roberts:** Well I did not know we had a new Makandal Daaga, we have a new Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Ture, the PNM has brought the brand new Uriah “Buzz” Butler, Adrian Cola Rienzi, Bhadase Sagan Maraj. I could not believe what I was hearing. We have a new hero, a new fighter for the downtrodden A man who will go out there on the ground with the people.

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

**Hon. Senator:** Oh, yes.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** But then he made an error, he talked about corruption and the UNC, that every time the UNC borrowed money that “some went to ah contractor and it pass through so”. The hon. Minister, well in his case “it doh need a contractor” because since he is a Minister his brother’s company get $5 billion, his father in charge of—

**Mr. President:** Have a seat. Have a seat. Have a seat.

**Hon. Senators:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. President:** Have a seat. Again, just—

**Hon. Senator:** What?

**Mr. President:** There can be an imputation in what is being said and even sometimes the way it is being said. Just be careful.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Thank you, hon. President. Let me just say I am not imputing any improper motive. I am just saying when that hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries swore on the Bible to be a Minister on September 8th, 2015, since then great luck has fallen and befallen him and his family. “He should ah play lotto 20 times.” I am just saying he is lucky.
Mr. President: Have a seat. Have a seat. Have a seat. Again, that is called imputation. In other words, the average individual listening can impute by what you are saying a certain end. That is not allowed in the Chamber. So just be careful exactly how you are saying what you are saying.

Sen. A. Roberts: Thank you, Sir. Mr. President, it is not about imputing, it is facts, because since the hon. Minister became a Minister, he has had 50 recusals. A recusal from Cabinet means that there is some benefit being discussed to you or someone close to you. To come out from a Cabinet—

Sen. Browne: Mr. President, point of order.

Sen. A. Roberts: Point of order?

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]


Sen. A. Roberts: “Eh heh”.

Sen. Mark: Who agree to that?


Sen. Mark: Yes, Sir.

Mr. President: Just allow the Standing Order to be raised. Again.

Sen. Browne: Standing Order 46(6). Mr. President, with all due respect it is not a matter of the Member being careful. He is in violation of the Standing Order and he is persisting down the road.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Right, so Sen. Roberts, I get what you are trying to do and I get what you are trying to say. What I am literally stating is that the average citizen can hear what you are saying and take from that something nefarious is

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occurring. That is where the imputation is coming from. Just be careful.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Mr. President, well the citizens are very bright. I did not say nefarious, I said lucky, but I will move on. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and the hon. Minister of Finance, and the hon. Prime Minister, have said that we all, including us here in the UNC, and every citizen, should stand and applaud the PNM for not going to the IMF. They said that we should all be proud and we should all say that “the PNM has done such a great job”, that we the people and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are not in the clutches of the IMF. Well, I say to the PNM that who you should thank is not the IMF. You should thank K-A-M-L-A because when Kamla left the seat of Prime Minister—

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** They can laugh. Especially a Trade and Industry Minister who has overseen negative foreign direct investment for four years and “cah” account for US$26,000 for some scanner.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** She could laugh. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said that the IMF, when he was quoting from his phone, the IMF was proud of the PNM for eight and a half months cover. Kamla left 14 and a half months covered in 2015.

**Sen. Mark:** Fourteen.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** He said that they were solid because the reserve requirements was no foreign exchange crisis because the reserve—US reserve—was at US$5.8 b-b-billion. Kamla left it at $12.26 billion. So if the IMF applauding PNM they should send off fireworks, not to distract the zoo, for the UNC.
Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts: He also said that the IMF said “doh worry we also have the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund”. Well for a PNM to come and talk about that is an amazing thing. It is unbelievable, because when Kamla left it was at US$7.6 b-b-billion, today it stands US$5.8 b-b-billion, the lowest it has been since 2007. Even Patrick Manning, who “dey say dey work obeah on”, was better that this PNM here.

Hon. Senators: Yes, yes.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts: The hon Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said the Government is not sitting back on its laurels. Well I never know you could come last in a race and feel you win. What laurels it have? “It doh even have people driving a Laurel from 1984, people have to park up their cars”. There is “sufferation”. People cannot send their children to school. “Every day anywhere ah go dey saying dougla boy pressure boy. We cah take it, we cah go, ah $100 not lasting”. But they are boasting that they cannot rest from their laurels because in their opinion, they are successful. Well therein lies the problem. If you are a complete failure but you feel you are successful you will do nothing to change because you believe in your heart that you are good and all the people are suffering because of their incompetence.

Let me go onto this hon. Minister of Finance, and I want him to say that he did not say this today. Because you see this, all of this was empty before he began speaking. When the hon President said “question time is over” at 2.28.22 p.m. and at 2.31 p.m. the hon. Minister of Finance got up to start the debate on this appropriation, he started to talk about two clauses and the Schedule, the Heads, the
Items, the supplement. He went into great detail on all the supplements. I must commend him for that he touched on nearly all. He went to Head 23 to the Attorney General $124.3 million, but he did not tell us who the lawyers are. He did not tell us why it is a secret. He did not tell us what these cases are.

In fact, they are trying to say that the UNC takes the PNM to court so much that they want to cry that they cannot fight in court. We have to take them to court because they bring bad law, they bully the Opposition, there are so many of them and so few of us, that they do not listen. If they had listened to us when they were forecasting this budget you would hear that I stood up here on two occasions, the previous budget, and the last one, and asked the Minister of Finance, why are you taking such a risk? Why are you predicing the budget so close to the prices that actually now? Why you do not leave a buffer? Why you do not leave a gap? Is that not going to jeopardise our country if there is an exogenous shock and the prices fall and we will be in a nightmare? He did not listen because he know everything and everybody who disagree with him does talk nonsense but yet, his forecast fail, his budget fail, he “cah” account for the money—

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—and he is the man who has brought nonsense and that is why we are here to supplement. He talked about the Ministry of Educated and did not have meals for children. The Minister of Health—

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Five minutes. “Oh gooosh, nah, nah, nah, leh meh fast forward that. I can’t—”. The Minister of Finance let we go. He used word “volatile” six times in his 43 minutes. Volatile, everything is volatile. He said that predicting natural gas prices is the hardest thing to do in the world. I beg to differ.
The hardest thing to do in the world is to get a sensible statement out of that Minister of Finance.

6.45 p.m.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts: It has been nine years of torture, nine years of misinformation, nine years of nonsense, nine years of pressure, and the people want a respite, they want to vote, they want to see the back of this Minister of Finance. He said, “Everyone else talked and got it wrong.” Right? Yes, let us keep going. Let me read this, because it is not only UNC, eh. A report from the UWI—but I guess this person too—anybody who disagrees with somebody who fails and gets everything wrong is not bright, okay?—according to the PNM. News, Guardian, BG, 7, Thursday, May the 16th:

“Report from UWI economist…

T&T is worse-performing regional economy”

Now, we are oil and gas. When you have oil and gas, you are supposed to be a topper, topper. That is like somebody with the skillset of Roger Federer not making it in Davis Cup. It is impossible. That is like Usain Bolt falling down and coming last in a running race. You do not do that. When you have oil and gas, you are supposed to be mashing up “de” place. We are comparing ourselves to countries who have done great with sea, salt, sand, cuisine and bush, and they are exclaiming that they are good. Prof. Roger Hosein—University of the West Indies, Economist, Prof. Roger Hosein was saying, “Yeah, look who. What? I am sure he is not bright, right, because only you all bright. But when you find de laser money, tell meh.”

“While Guyana’s average annual…gross domestic product (GDP) growth
was 18 percent between 2015 to 2022…”—

Sen. Lyder: How much?

Sen. A. Roberts: Mr. President:

“...18 per cent...during that same period, T&T’s annual average real GDP growth was -2.7…”

Sen. Lyder: How much?

Sen. A. Roberts: -2.7. “Ah never see” people go under—the only time negative is good is golf, and even in golf, when the Prime Minister plays, he “does go” over par because “he so ain’t” good in everything. They continued:

“Hosein informed the Business Guardian that all data used in the report is from the International Monetary Fund…”

Sen. Lyder: “Ayeeeee”!

Sen. A. Roberts: So this is the data he got from the International Monetary Fund, showing that the PNM has collapsed the economy, that they had bankrupted the economy, that there are no revenue streams. And then today, as I wrap up—because “ah cyah go through all ah dis”. I do not even know why I listened so much to this hon. Minister of Finance, but I must commend him because in another place, he spoke the truth under oath, a signed an affidavit, saying that the economy is in desperate straits, that we need money, if we do not get that tax, if we do not scrape it out, we are going to fail, we are under pressure. He talked the truth in the court but when he comes here, it is a different story.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. A. Roberts: “Dais why Independent Senators does be confused”. Let me say—what is the truth? Are we in good hands as the PNM says? Is there no sufferation because we like reggae and we go in a concert? Has the poverty rate
not increased from 16.7 per cent, in September 2015, to 30.2 per cent? Are our children doing better in school? Are we spending more on education? Is the crime situation under control? Are people feeling safe and secure in our country? When people go to the grocery, are they sure that $100—when you break it, it disappears like a $20. They said “de blue moving like de mauve now”. Long time, when you crack a $100, you could lime a lil bit, you are looking good. Now you crack a $100, you looking for a next one. That is what the PNM has done.

So under all of this talk, while they come to ask for more money—the problem is that the PNM asked for money. They have spent over half a “tri-tri-trillion” dollars, and nothing works. The hon. Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs came, and he is getting more money in this supplement, but we just had a joint select committee on pan, but he did not ask for “no” money to put pan in all the missions, so another, again, PNM, promises never materialize. The one thing they need is an election to get rid of all “ah dem” and this Minister of Finance. The people are waiting. Thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Thompson-Ahye.

**Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye:** Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing me this opportunity. The stated object of the Bill:

“...is to supplement the appropriation provided for by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2024) Act, 2023 (Act No. 14 of 2023) by authorising the issue from the Consolidated Fund in the sum of...($2,328,099,600).”

A lot of money. There are several Heads of Expenditure to be increased.

The hon. Minister of Finance has come to us today, not like the contrite prodigal son of biblical fame who had used up all the inheritance, having exhausted

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all the financial resources he had led us to believe were acquired for Government
to fulfil its mandate. He is not singing:

“Father, I have sinned,
help me find my way.
Remember not my sins,
just let me hear you say:
I forgive you, I love you
You are mine, take my hand.
Go in peace, sin no more,
Beloved one.”

No. With apologies, for paraphrasing Bassanio in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, the hon. Minister says:

Sweet Members of Parliament,
If you did know to whom I gave the money,
If you did know for whom I gave the money,
And would conceive for what I gave the money,
And how unwillingly I left the money
When naught would be accepted but the money,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure.

Should we abate the strength of our displeasure?

Bassanio was saying, “Well, you know, I had no choice. Portia had saved my dear friend Antonio’s life by her astute handling of the case against Shylock, so I could not refuse the request to hand over the precious ring you had given me.”

The hon. Minister is saying, “Despite my prudent, astute management of the
economy, certain circumstances have occurred and like the late Max Senhouse, I need this money to fulfil certain obligations.”

Money arouses a lot of emotions. I have heard arguments today full of sound and fury. I will not be insulting and say, signifying nothing, but they have been very emotive. I actually know of an elderly man who beat his wife because she, having exhausted all the money he had given her to run the household, dared to ask for more, and despite my advice, she refused to exercises any of the legal obligations available to her, and said she was going to leave him to God. So what do we do with the hon. Minister of Finance? I would certainly not advocate any domestic violence in this House, the home of the Parliament. He is a man of God, so he is praying for our assistance, our cooperation. What do we do? I recommend that we examine the case that he has brought before us to see if it is a good case, a convincing one, and act accordingly.

We know, as Senators, there is very little we can do with a money Bill, but we can speak. Our approval is being sought for supplementation of the Appropriation Bill for 12 Heads of Expenditure, and I have said the amount before, and it says it is totalling a sum of money—and I just want to say that here we speak the King’s English, not the American English, so we spell “totalling” with two lls, not one. It does trump the King’s, and yes, the pun is intended.

So the hon. Minister is saying that the reason for his request is to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital expenditure to September 30, 2024, in areas where insufficient or no allocation was provided. It seems odd to me though that the word “recurrent” is used in circumstances of a supplementation, while the word “unexpected”, I would expect to see, is omitted. Is it prudent management for no allocation to have been made for a recurrent expenditure? I wonder. I must say, I
greatly appreciate the Senate document that was given to us. I was busy looking through *Hansard* to read what the Minister had said in the other place but it had not yet been posted, so let us look at the Heads of Expenditure: Service Commissions recurrent expenditure, $4.140 million. We advise that the funding is required to meet anticipated legal cost for ongoing court matters. Did these matters arise post-budget? I wonder. The quantum of legal fees in this country raises more than an eyebrow. The Legal Profession Act gives guidance, but some lawyers refuse to be guided. I once had a young lawyer whom I spoke to about fees for a conveyance and he told me, quite boldly and ungrammatically, that no one could tell him how much to charge. Now, I sit on the disciplinary committee every Thursday, so I would not be surprised if one day he comes before us and I have to recuse myself.

Does the lawyer’s scale of fees get thrown out of the window once the client is the State? There are certain fees that are quite justifiable. I remember hearing a very, very senior lawyer, and they were saying, “You know, his fees are lower than a lot of the junior lawyers?” I also wonder, must every dispute be litigated? There was a time when ADR was a popular buzzword in this society. We have hundreds of persons who are trained in mediation, they are trained in arbitration and restorative practices, but it seems everybody wants to show off their court clothes, so the courts are becoming more and more overburdened, while ADR seems to be a closed shop in more ways than one. The last time we spoke about ADR in this Chamber, things got pretty heated and I wondered if it would turn into a school boy’s brawl, with a senior Minister protecting his wife’s honour and a mischievous senior politician pelting innuendos across the aisle.

We must recognize that these ADR processes are very useful and it saves a
lot of money. I remember in the 1980s, sitting on an arbitration about the building of the law school, that contract, and we had an arbitrator—having gone to court and we had agreed on the arbitrator, we sat down there and in just a few days, we had a very competent arbitrator and we were able to settle that matter, and it saved hundreds of thousands of dollars for the State, because, I mean, NIPDEC is an organ of the State, so things would have worked out differently. And I want to thank the recently retired Commission of Prison, Mr. Deopersad Ramoutar, for his service to our country. He is one of the few persons in this country who understands the concept and value of restorative practices, and he proved that when there was a symposium at Hilton and we had the head of the Bar and a very popular and well-known mediator from Jamaica, and he was the only one that could give a good explanation of what was restorative practices.

But here we indulge in tokenism, while Trinidad and Tobago is burning. We need to have restorative justice, not only in our schools, but also in the society. Both children and teachers need the healing that restorative justice would bring. Are we going to wait until a teacher runs amok in a school before we attempt to fix the problems of indiscipline with a tested and tried method, which will help to build empathy and bring about peace? We need to attend to teachers who are suffering the effects of indiscipline that they cannot control.

Jamaica, long ago, since about 2014, directed its Ministry of Justice to join with the Ministry of Education, and they have several restorative justice sessions— institutions in the country. During the crime symposium, I recommended a book, *Raising Children in a Social Toxic Environment*, and I was pleased to later meet some members of the defence force who told me they had bought several copies of the book. Today, I am recommending another book, *Hacking School Discipline: 9*
Ways to Create a Culture of Empathy and Responsibility Using Restorative Justice, by Nathan Maynard and Brad Weinstein. There you will learn to reduce repeated negative behaviours, build students’ self-regulation on empathy, enhance communication and collaboration, identify the true cause of negative behaviours, and use restorative circles to reflect on behaviours, and discuss impactful change.

If we do not fix the problem of indiscipline in the schools, what will happen, and it has started to happen already, it will spill over into the streets and in the society, and no one will be safe. We love the courtroom. Today, if you watch anybody too hard, you might get a pre-action protocol letter. If the person belongs to a government entity, Government may get a freedom of information request. Judicial reviews exercise the attention of the court’s regularity, and commissions of enquiry are popular means of investigation, with request for extension, upon extension of time and a heavy financial burden for us to bear at the end of the day. We need to get rid of that financial burden. We are a society where state officials have been known to act in favour of the prosecution and the defence at the same time, with impunity, and whistleblowers are promoted out of the system. Hear no evil, speak no evil, and I thank the DPP for staying the course.

7.00 p.m.

Other Contracted Services, $3,140,000. This is to facilitate payment of specialized assessment exercises conducted through the assessment centre for senior officers of the public service. These are private entities that we are paying and if we are doing this with some regularity, can we not be more prudent and have the Government open its department and provide that specific service? Certainly, it would save money.

Tobago House of Assembly, $50 million. This extraordinary expenditure
need not detain us. It is to meet the clean-up and remediation cost associated with the oil spill and the expense is perfectly understandable and perhaps justifiable. But I have heard my fellow Senator who flies the flag of Tobago saying, it is not nearly enough. So I will bow to her, she is from there. What is expected is that once those found liable, though, meet their legal obligation, this money will be returned to the Treasury. I still have some faith in the Tobago House of Assembly and his Chief Secretary, he always greets me with much warmth and treats me with civility and I wish him well. I recognize that there are fractures between the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly and I hope they will be healed soon.

Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, recurrent expenditure, $124,300,000. Well, my thoughts on the service commission apply here. In addition, I state that it would seem some of the stated items should have been in the original budget. These are not matters that have popped up unexpectedly.

Ministry of Education, $144,200,000. Teachers are owed cost of living allowances and arrears of increments. They cannot in those circumstances apply themselves to their work and there are so many dedicated teachers. I have said time and time again that social workers are undervalued, they are underpaid and we have to do better by them. I say the same thing about the teachers. Today, graduates prefer to go into other professions, including, the police service, than join the teaching service. I understand they are better paid, more opportunities for advancement. I asked a long standing member of UTT’s staff to reason that there has been so much Victoriarization in the English language, writing and speaking and she told me they do not get the best students. The better students prefer to
enter more lucrative fields of study. We need to look at that, and some of the millions of dollars perhaps can be used to enhance the salary.

Term of employment, $15 million and security services, $12,700,000. These are for short-term employment and security services as a result of the increase in the minimum wage. It is a logical consequential increase in expenses. The expense of gratuities to contract officers whose contract expired during 2019 to 2024 is unconscionable. Why does government have people suffering for money that is owed to them? This speaks to a lack of empathy. The Government would do well to adopt the golden rule as its mantra, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Too many people are suffering because of a lack of caring. We need to do better than we are doing now. And what we find is that the little people are more likely to suffer for want of having their expenses paid than the big people. Whoever heard about a commissioner in a commission of enquiry crying out for not having been paid millions of dollars?

School supplies and book grant, $20 million. Payment to the National School Dietary Services Limited, $47 million. They were proposed in the budget. Why the necessary funds were not provided is a mystery.

Ministry of Health. While the shortfall with respect to the spanking new and beautiful Ministry of Health building might be understandable, the rental payments, the payment for drugs, utilities and other operational expenses across the various regional authorities speak to some degree of mismanagement which someone should be held accountable for. Government must understand when it does not pay their legitimate foreseeable contract expenses this has a ripple effect on the economy and causes hardship to many persons. Some people adopt their own methods to deal with consequences of this laissez-faire attitude.
I was discussing with a young man, why he had overcharged the Government for providing a service? He told me it was because government takes so long to pay and I have to deal with my expenses. He told me everyone in his field does the same thing. That time it did not work for him because he failed to secure the contract.

Ministry of Labour, recurrent expenditure, $130,538,600, contract employment. This is to meet arrears of salaries to past and present employees in the Occupational Safety and Health Authority for periods as far back as 2012. Is it possible that some of them have died, quite possible, without enjoying the fruits of their labour? This situation spans more than one government and one wonders at the claims of each of them to be a caring government. Words, words, words, as Hamlet said to Polonius when asked, “What do you read, my Lord?”

Training, at last, a bright note. Payment of arrears of stipends owed toon-the-job-trainees due to an increase in stipends is something that I welcome. The young people really are trying, sometimes, and they really need someone to give them a helping hand. Gratuities to contract workers, payment of arrears to staff of Cipriani College of Labour and Co-Operative Studies, I am happy this payment is being made. I did some courses there and I found the lecturers very competent. I remember though, a present particular Member of Parliament who taught next door and always disturbed our class, so we used to pound the partition to get him to tone down. He still has not learned.

Ministry of Public Utilities, recurrent expenditure, $527,800,000. I note the expenditure is to purchase track packs, parcel stickers, et cetera, used for delivery of sensitive mail for payment of VAT liability. I spoke on a Motion for the Adjournment about postal problems in my area in 2018. We have a spanking new
post-office but the old problems remain. A relative sent me a birthday card for my birthday on April 25th, she sent one to a friend in New York. The friend in New York said she received her card several weeks ago, I am still waiting. Months of banks statements come together, bills are delayed. I recall at the time I was preparing my paper, speaking to former Sen. Martin Daly, and he shared with me that he too was having no end of problems with late delivery of mail, which had consequences when you have bills to pay. I also have a problem with the wrong mail being delivered to my mailbox. I had to take time off to return them as the postal service time does not coincide with my movement to and from work. Minister Mitchell needs to pay attention to the postal services as when I complain I am told they are short staffed.

Thank God I have no problem with water. I thought I had and I was planning to raise cane but a sensible member of my household say, let us check, and we found out that the fault was ours as we had a defective valve. I have noted that the Minister is fighting hard on that score of, “water for all”, and I commend him for his energy. And the allocation for WASA is $522,200,000, which they deserve.

Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, $570,900,000. Quite a lot has been said by the line Minister, so we understand the problems and hope that his faith and positive outlook would be found to be justified. Hope springs eternal in the human breast especially that of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, recurrent expenditure, $95,027,500. This sum is mainly to pay salaries for contract workers and staff, newly hired staff and other workers benefits.

Ministry of Works and Transport, $155,677,000; $20,000 is allocated for
rental equipment for the Drainage Division. Is it not more prudent for us to buy our own equipment since we will have to go through the exercise of clearing and desilting all the time? All the payments seem perfectly legitimate, but not unanticipated, and again I wonder why they were not in the original budget. We heard a theory, but I would like to hear what the Minister has to say.

Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, this is the lowest figure and represents payment for repairs, maintenance, severance benefits, upgrade of equipment and infrastructure. None of these are unanticipated. So the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs seems to be a very prudent gentleman. I wish I could give him clothing allowance. Always impeccably dressed.

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter]

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:** He did not pay me to say that.

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, $21,048,000. The allocation concerns construction, repairs and maintenance of buildings and payment of arrears for services rendered. Mr. President, despite the hopeful reports from the IMF and talks of the buoyancy of the economy from the Minister of Finance, we do need to grow the economy. While there is so much concern about crime and there is so much fear, I still say hope and happiness.

Two weekends straight I was at Central Bank Auditorium, not looking for money, but for entertainment. The first week I was there to support my erstwhile student and colleague, Richard Ragoobarsingh. The play, “Love Is Ah Wuk”! The following week we went to see Calypso Rose, the story about her life and I could not help asking myself, why the Government does not see value in the arts on a continuous basis? It is not just Best Village, you know, and Carnival. There is so much that we have all over the country that we could use in many ways.

**UNREVISIED**
I recall attending the wedding of one of my former law students in the Cayman Islands. She said, Ms. Ahye you must come early and enjoy Cayman Islands. And I went there because I had a member of the Judiciary come to Trinidad to do a course with me at Radisson and I said, well it was good to see her again and they had some new legislation that I wanted to mongoose as well. So when I went there, I saw a play they had for visitors, we had to pay a fee, and it was about the history of the island. It was very dramatic, with sound and other effects, I could not help thinking, why we cannot have something like this on a regular basis for tourists and our citizens to enjoy. I have seen it in other parts of the States as well, where you see the old buggies and all of those things that send us back into time so that we can enjoy our culture. It is not beyond our imagination, we have so many talented artistes who can deal with that.

I have said time and time again, we have more talent per square mile than any other country. I have visited more than 25 countries of the world; as a teacher at primary school, secondary school and law school in the region, I have encountered so much talent that it makes my heart swell with pride. The International Institute of Restorative Practices, the International Society of Family Law and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association have all declared that I am their poet laureate. I do not think I am special. I know that when I listen to my young compatriots at the poetry slam, when I look at the youths playing pan at Panorama, when I see them singing calypso by themselves, which they have created, I know our culture is in good hands, but it needs to be harnessed and supported.

I remember a child in my class, she stood out because it was a class of mainly black children, she was the only white girl in the class and she had a learning disability. The only time that child got the respect of her peers is when I
put her to act in a concert, and I could not give her a script, she could not learn, it was all improvisation. And she did such an admirable thing, I called the teachers to look at her. It was wonderful. But again she needed that support. And once when I was living abroad and I came back and I enquired, because where she was working they said she had committed suicide. So I suppose that nobody really followed up with her to make her feel good about herself. It was very sad.

When I was in Switzerland, because my nephew had gone there to play tenor pan, they asked for him to come, he went and the next day he drowned and I had to go to see about the body and so on. I remember our Honorary Council, who is now dead, he served Trinidad very well, and he took me with him to pick up his daughter from school. When I went to that school I stood up with my mouth open because you know what, I saw dozens and dozens of chrome steelpans and he said, “Oh yes, we teach steelpan in school”. You know, I know my daughter had learned that in UWI school, but there are few schools in Trinidad and Tobago where you will find like that. All these steelpans brand and new and shiny, sometimes they have to beg for pans. We can do better than that, we really have to nurture our talents in the students, we know how widespread pan is and we know that we really need to help. That is money that would be well spent. So in the area of the arts there is much we can do.

In the area of sports, we know the Brian Lara story; we know about Brian Charles Lara. He started young and he was nurtured and look at what he has become. He is famous all over the world. I keep hearing, you from Brian Lara country? And I celebrate him, even before I met him, I was saying I am from Brian Lara country.

7.15 p.m.
But unless we train the spirit as well as the body, then we are going to be lost. We need to build character. We need to do that with our youth. So we nurture them in the performing arts, in the sciences, in academia, and we must make sure that we are building their character at the same time. We need to support parenting programmes. I remember when Servol appeared before us in one of our committee meetings, Human Rights, Equality and Diversity Committee, they complained that their parenting programme had been shut down. They were not getting any more money, and I sincerely hope that that has been, you know, resuscitated. God has blessed this country, but we really need to stop desecrating it, and destroying it, by the greed which outstrips social programmes.

We see so many disadvantaged people. Minister Cummings cannot do it all. He is trying his best, but we need to save some of our youth if not all of them. We have to take some bold decisions. We have to cut the food bills. The agriculture programmes will not bear fruit overnight, and while the grass is growing the horse is starving. Too many have too much, and the answer is not to take the scraps from the table. We need to make our society a more egalitarian one. It will take courage. You will perhaps lose friends. Power does not yield power easily and we need to do what we can to make a fairer society. That is the only way we are going to have peace. That is the only way that we can try to make people happy. We need to always try to build empathy and we need to speak to the youth.

I love to speak to the young people. I travelled on a flight from Jamaica and I could not understand why Caribbean Airlines was treating a group of people with such, as though they were celebrities. They turned out to be dancehall artists and they were going to Guyana for a concert. I sat with the young man and all through the flight he shared with me his concern about his baby mother, his new girlfriend,
his daughter, whom he loved so much. And the amount of money he was making going to that concert quoted in US dollars. I asked him how he spends his finances; why all the bling? And he said, “You know, Madam, I like to reward myself.” So that is why they do these things. They want to reward themselves so they buy all this fancy jewellery and, of course, it is in the public gaze so you feel that they are successful. But he did assure me that he is making provision and he has bought a house for himself and his mother. So he had a good head on his shoulders.

So there are people—the young people who are entrepreneurs, they are trying to build their society, they are trying to build themselves, and we need to equip them to do so. It is going to have a ripple effect in the society if we have more and more people who can see for themselves. We have to always train, encourage, and support our youth. All is not lost. We tend to focus on the youth who are not doing too well, but there are many of them that are doing extremely well and we ought to highlight that.

So, Mr. President, I have come to the end of my contribution. I have not said everything that people would want to hear, but I have said it with all sincerity because of the love of my country. Thank you.

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

**Mr. President:** Minister of Works and Transport.

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

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):** Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to contribute on the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) for Financial Year 2024, and to demonstrate through the Ministry of Works and Transport, and this Government, our
commitment is steadfast to achieve our deliverables.

Mr. President, I do not want us to forget that this is not a budget presentation.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** It is a supplementary appropriation. Having listened to some of the Members of the Opposition Bench, I do not want to comment on some of the things they said. I think I would leave that for their membership to comment on, and I now understand the pain that some of their members have gone through and why they recommend that in their current form they cannot and never defeat the PNM.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Mr. President, I intend to be very short because my interpretation of this supplementation of appropriation is where I am supposed to speak directly on the areas that I am impacted and where funding was appropriated to the Ministry of Works and Transport and not go all over the place like a Carnival band or a masquerader who lost their band like what I heard earlier.

Mr. President, the Ministry of Works and Transport, we were allocated $155,677,000 under its Recurrent Expenditure for this fiscal. The funding was actually allocated in three areas: The Highways Division, Traffic Management Branch, and the Drainage Division. Mr. President, additionally, there were appropriation for the settlement of contract gratuity for contract employees.

Mr. President, let me start by dealing with the Highways Division, which was allocated at the start of the financial year $112,100,000. We did receive an additional sum of $58 million in the supplementary appropriation and that money will be used to add an additional 34 projects. We initially were able to achieve 86
projects from an initial budgetary allocation and this $58 million will allow us to add an additional 34 projects going forward. These projects again are under our recurrent programme and it entails road rehabilitation, bridge reconstruction under the landslip, slope stabilization, and some road safety projects.

Mr. President, the Highways Division and the infrastructure in this country is no secret. Because of the impact of climate change and several factors, we do need to continue to spend on our infrastructure. Connectivity is a major part of the vision of the Ministry of Works and Transport, and in order to continue that we will have to continue to have spending on the infrastructure in this country. I want to thank the Minister of Finance who saw in his wisdom to ensure that the Ministry is funded to the best of his ability, because we all know that it is not an unlimited basket or a tree that he shakes and gets funding from. So whatever money is allocated to the Ministry of Works and Transport, one thing we guarantee is that we get value for money.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** And every cent is well accounted for, and the citizens of this country could be assured, again as I said, that they are getting value for money.

Mr. President, allocation was also made for the Traffic Management Branch where an additional $15 million was allocated. What is this $15 million, what will it be spent on? Mr. President, I have heard from the Opposition about they are crashing the economy, and the country is broke and everything negative. I think that is what—

**Hon. Senator:** Untruth.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—their slogan is so that in the next election they will
come as the saviour, but I do not think they understand they had to get pass their internal elections before and I know that is posing a serious challenge for them.

There is always a correlation between transportation and the economy. If your economy is dead and it is collapsed and everything, you will not see the amount of bustle and hustle by the travelling public. If you go to the PTSC hub on a morning, it is over 200,000 people to and from travelling in Trinidad on a daily basis. If you look in terms of the highway network, it is traffic gridlock. People going to work, from work, trades happening, trucks on the road, things are happening. So there is always a correlation. If I am to judge by the amount of activities on the road network in a country where we continue to build highways, we continue to upgrade roads, we continue to implement technology in terms of how we manage traffic and you still have all this hustling and bustling on the road, the amount of activities taking place, it does say that our economy is robust. There might be cash flow challenges like many other countries, but what we are doing is we are actually upgrading our infrastructure and using technology.

So this $15 million that we are using is, one, to upgrade the signalized traffic lights, where in the past we place the monitors under the asphalt paving. That had posed a challenge for us and in most cases after the heavy vehicles run on them for a couple of times they are damaged. What we have done now is to put these signalized traffic signals above ground in cameras where we monitor the entire intersection. I know Members on the other side do not like to hear anything positive and they will keep whispering and so, but they cannot distract me. At the end of the day what we are doing is improving the interchanges where you monitor them with new technology, meaning if there is no traffic in a certain direction the light will not go on red. They will allow the traffic to flow in the directions where
Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan (cont’d)

traffic is.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: We are installing that on all the interchanges from Port of Spain all the way up to Arima. That is what some of this money will be spent on.

Money will also be spent on integrating all the traffic lights in Trinidad, feeding backlot traffic centre in Caroni where you are stay at Caroni and monitor all your traffic signals and you can control it from that point. It is the first again for Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—and this is how we are trying to be proactive in how we manage traffic. Another area that we intend to management traffic with is the reversible lanes, meaning everybody is heading into Port of Spain from the East-West corridor, but we cannot widen the road in certain areas. Similar in Maraval we cannot widen the road. But what we are going to do is to use three lanes to come in on a morning, one lane to go out—two lanes to come in, one to go out, and on the evening two to come out, one coming in.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT in the Chair]

We are going to be utilizing digital signs and using technology for our gantry signs and so to indicate that. Right now we are using it painted on the road, but it is becoming a challenge for drivers and you have commuters using it in the opposite direction every day. So this is where some of that $15 million that we got is going to be spent. It is about improving the traffic signals around the country.

Mr. President, we also got under the drainage programme an additional $40 million; $20 million under the desilting programme, which is the 09. What will
that $20 million do? At the start of the budget the allocation for that Vote was $50 million. What were we able to achieve with that $50 million so far? Again, our drainage programme actually starts in January to ensure that by the height of the rainy season we would have accomplished our goal set out at the start. In the phase one of the programme, we embarked on 116 projects that have been completed; phase two, 182 projects. That too have been completed; and with this additional $20 million we go into phase three with another 103 projects which takes us close to 430 desilting projects.

7.30 p.m.

Now, the Ministry’s desilting project is just one Vote. We also got an additional $20 million under the Vote 28, which also assists with desilting, but it also assists with walling and paving and things like that. What we will be doing with that additional $20 million—we had 28 original projects for the first $66 million we got. This additional $20 million will give us an additional 21 projects. So this is how we account for the money that we get.

There are several other projects taking place under the drainage programme. However, we must understand that as an island, we will not be spared from climate change. The world is facing a very strange weather pattern and there is flooding taking place around the world. You look at places like Dubai, you look at right next door here, in Florida, just a couple month ago, when the entire airport was under water. The developed countries around the world are finding it very difficult to cope with the changes that are taking place with the weather. We will not be spared from that, but as a Government, we will do all that we can to ensure that we are prepared as best as we can.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]
Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: And I can give you the assurance, Mr. President, that the Ministry of Works and Transport has a very aggressive drainage programme ongoing. This programme has started a long time ago when we actually started working with the Andean Development Bank in developing a national drainage programme. Coming out of those studies, we have identified several projects to assist us, going forward, to improve or drainage channel and everything associated with the reduction in flooding.

Again, I want to say, we are not immune from what is happening around the world and in terms of flooding, we are as prepared as we can be. However, in order to minimize the flooding, all hands have to be on deck, including the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: And again, I want to urge everyone, please look at how you dispose of garbage, look at how you build—where you build and how you encroach on our watercourses. Our challenge is that the volume of rainfall is way above the capacity of our channels and anytime we reduce the capacity of our channels, we just make things worse for ourselves and for our neighbours. So having said that, Mr. Vice President, I hope I have accounted for the money that we got and how we intend to spend it. I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice President: Leader of Government Business.

Sen. Roberts: Procedure, procedure. We have to extend the time. He has been here long but he has not—[Inaudible]

**PROCEDURAL MOTION**

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery

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Procedural Motion (cont’d)  2024.06.11

Browne): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that this Senate do continue to sit until the completion of the business at hand, inclusive of matters on the adjournment.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2024) BILL, 2024

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. First, 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 critical views of our nation. On the supplementary Appropriation 2024 Bill, I heard the Minister of Works and Transport talk about the UNC’s internal elections, and I only hope that Dr. Rowley will not foster any problems for his leadership—

Hon. Senators: “Oh goood”.

Sen. C. N. Gosine:—in their internal election when they face their membership.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]


Sen. C. N. Gosine: The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries stated the following:

The amount of $570.9 million is solely to fund the fuel subsidy.

In 2022, the fuel subsidy was approximately $1.67 billion, and in 2023, it was approximately to $1.845 billion, and in 2024, it is estimated to be over $1 billion. In the budget, the Government has allocated $500 million or so, and there is, obviously, a shortfall, so this sum of money should go to the subsidy. The
Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in his own admission, had stated that they had more expenses than expected. Again, this is a prime example that the Government is jeopardizing the fuel security of our nation and not paying the fuel subsidy on time, or running up arrears on the fuel subsidy in an effort to suppress expenditure and give a misleading budget figure.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries confirmed that there will be significant arrears is 2024, as only $500 million has been supplemented, while the subsidy is expected to be over $1 billion. The Government has constantly carried over on the fuel subsidy by not paying or allocating the true amount—the real amount needed for each fiscal.

In the 2023 mid-year review, the Government, again, came to supplement a significant amount of the fuel subsidy due to arrears owned. They supplemented a total of $600 million back in 2023 for the subsidy. This act of not allocating sufficient funds to the fuel subsidy payments and carrying over huge arrears, while we understand that it is helpful to the Minister of Finance to keep his expenditure figure down by hiding the true expenditure, it threatens the financial health of the Paria Fuel Trading Company—

**Hon. Senator:** The deficit should be higher.

**Sen. C. N. Gosine:** That is correct, the deficit should be higher—and this, in turn, threatens the fuel security of this country.

In an article in Trinidad dated the 11th of December, 2022, entitled, “Financial Trouble for Paria”, the following was revealed.

**Sen. Mitchell:** What newspaper?

**Sen. C. N. Gosine:** The *Guardian*.

“State-owned Paria Fuel Trading Company Ltd was in trouble...”—and
basically—“cash-strapped, unable to pay for fuel imports or its taxes on time.”

Mr. Vice President, the subsidies owed were having an adverse impact on the company’s liquidity and its ability to procure products on behalf of the country.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries confirmed to the Parliament in the mid-year review in 2023, that that amount of arrears owed on the fuel was $490 million and that was being dealt with, with a supplementation of $600 million. So it is now mind-boggling that this year, the Government is asking for a supplementation of $570 million for the fiscal 2022 and 2023. The only period of subsidy that should be outstanding is really March to September of fiscal 2023.

7.40 p.m.

We really do not know how much the Government owes to the National Petroleum Marketing Company of Trinidad and Tobago or Unipet. Is the Government jeopardizing Paria’s ability to import fuel by affecting the liquidity of the company? We continue to be in this situation because of the closure of Petrotrin and the Minister did speak a lot about the spot prices of natural gas. In 2023, he said it was $2.64. In March 2024, he said it was $1.49 per MMBtu and in June 2024, the Henry Hub price increased to $3.14 and he used a lot of comparisons between different markets to come up with what they would use. But what we are is really an oil-and-gas-based economy and the closure of Petrotrin really affects our fuel security and the economic stability. I am getting to where it will affect our foreign exchange as well.

In 2018, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago announced the closure of Petrotrin, the State-owned company which has been the cornerstone of the nation’s economy for over a century. This decision aimed at really cutting financial losses
and inefficiencies and has since had far-reaching consequences on the fuel security, foreign exchange reserves and the overall economic stability. Petrotrin really marked the end of the local refining operations which led to an increase—

**Sen. Dr. Browne:** Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. Standing Order 46(1). Whatever point the Member was seeking to make that could have been relevant has already been exhausted. How long he is going to on that same point?

**Hon. Senators:** [Interruption]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, as you respond, I ask you to try your very best to keep it relevant to the debate at hand today.

**Sen. C. Gosine:** Mr. Vice-President, I am responding to the Minister of Energy, he did speak about Petrotrin. So this shift has exposed the country to global market volatility and supply chain disruption. Prior to the closure, Trinidad and Tobago benefited from a more self-sufficient energy model where crude oil extracted domestically was refined locally, ensuring a steady, predictable supply of fuel.

With the closure of the refining activities, the country now relies on imports to supply gasoline, diesel and other petroleum products. This dependency on foreign markets has introduced new vulnerabilities. Any geopolitical tension supply chain disruption or global price fluctuation directly impacts the availability and cost of fuel within this country. The economic ramifications of Petrotrin’s closure extend beyond fuel security, as it was a significant contributor to the nation’s foreign exchange earnings. Petrotrin played a vital role in stabilizing local currency and maintaining foreign reserves. The loss of revenue from Petrotrin has really caused a great gap in the country’s foreign exchange inflows.

Historically, Petrotrin’s export of refined products generated considerable

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foreign exchange which was essential for funding imports and supporting the local economy. This shift from exporter to importer of refined products has reserved this dynamic, increasing the demand for foreign currency to pay for these imports. Consequently, Trinidad and Tobago has experienced a depletion of foreign exchange reserves exerting pressure on the exchange rate and contributing to economic instability.

The foreign exchange shortage has had a ripple effect across the country in various sectors of the economy and that is very true. Businesses that rely on imported goods and services have faced challenges in obtaining the necessary foreign currency and that is very true again, leading to delays, increased cost and reduced competitiveness. Any citizen could try to go to the bank now and see if they could get US $100. “They cyah even geh ah US $100 to travel with and dey talking about they have foreign exchange.” Where is the foreign exchange?

Additionally, the reduction in foreign exchange earnings has constrained the Government’s ability to invest in infrastructure, social services and economic diversification—and we keep talking about diversification—further impeding our growth. Beyond macroeconomic effects, the closure of Petrotrin has also had significant, social and employment implications. Thousands of workers are now on the breadline and cannot even recover.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, as you make your point and as you are responding as well, you are going a little too far, way off. We allow a little bit of flexibility but you are going a little far off now. Can you bring it back to the debate at hand, which is appropriation and expenditure?

Sen. C. Gosine: Mr. Vice-President, the Trinidad Guardian also reported that the former Chairman Espinet, on the 17th of November, 2018—
Mr. Vice-President: Senator, Senator, we are deliberating 2024 appropriation. Can you bring your material to more relevancy and aim to wrap up if you cannot?

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Sen. C. Gosine: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. On March 2024, the Prime Minister confirmed that the Heritage Petroleum Company is more than half way through to repay its predecessor of $11.8 billion in debt after less than six years of operation and that was the consequence. The point is that the Government continues to pay Petrotrin’s debt even though the refinery was shut down. Had the refinery remained opened as a growing concern, we could have repaid the debt while earning—

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 46(1), 46(1), none of that was mentioned in this debate in this place today nor does it form any part of the Supplementary Appropriation Bill nor could it.

Mr. Vice-President: Senators, Senators.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: I am on my legs, Sen. Lyder.

Sen. Lyder: Sorry, my apologies.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Gosine, keep it relevant please and focus on what has been discussed in the context.

Sen. Roberts: He is a short bully, he must not bully you.

Sen. C. Gosine: In any event, the Government is coming for an additional $2.3 billion to finance recurring expenditures, recurring expenditures. Where is the revenue generation going to come from, Mr. Vice-President? Where are the jobs going to come from?

Sen. Roberts: Exactly.
Sen. C. Gosine: This fiscal deficit keeps mounting all the time. We cannot face this difficulty and this economic challenge. I think our credit rating has gone down to BBB-.


Sen. C. Gosine: Junk bond status.

Sen. Roberts: Otherwise known as “douen”.

Sen. C. Gosine: We owe US $5.4 billion right now and $5.4 billion is our foreign exchange reserves. So if you offset that with that, what we have? Nothing, Mr. Vice-President, we are broke.

Sen. Roberts: Bankrupt.

Sen. C. Gosine: And the same thing we keep saying.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Sen. C. Gosine: There are no new revenue streams for our country. All we are seeing—

Sen. Roberts: Lollipop, sit down nah lollipop.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Standing Order 53(1)(b), all of this was said, the same phrasing.

Mr. Vice-President: Member, as we continue through the evening, we have to stay away from what has already been said. Standing Order upheld.

Sen. Roberts: They do not like to hear the truth.

Sen. C. Gosine: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. How are we going to bring in revenue streams into the country? Is it by taxation, taxation, taxation?

Sen. Roberts: That is what they do.

Sen. C. Gosine: They borrow and they spend. This is the Government’s philosophy. You have to diversify, you have to generate new revenue streams. So
we want to tax some more. What I wanted to say as well we did not really get the real reason for closing down Petrotrin and we have to ask the questions what was the alternative—

Mr. Imbert: Point of order.

Sen. Roberts: Stop bullying.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, 53(1)(b), 46(1).

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, tedious repetition upheld and it is being repeated on top of being repeated. Sen. Roberts, kindly be guided of silence and crosstalk during the debate.

Sen. Roberts: Thank you, Sir. I will go and suck a lollipop.

Sen. C. Gosine: The Minister of Energy confirmed in the Senate in November 28th, 2023 that the Government has burden the Treasury for forex reserves by spending US $3 billion to import fuel since the closure of Petrotrin. They spent approximately US $487 million in 2019.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, point of order. Mr. Vice-President, this reminds me of a one-trick pony, 46(1).

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Gosine.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Sen Lyder: Foreign exchange was discussed at length by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Mr. Vice-President: Allow me to speak please. Bring some new material to the Table or taper off your contribution for the evening, and the point has been belaboured on already and it does fall into tedious repetition.

Sen. C. Gosine: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. We know that the recurrent expenditure of fuel subsidies in Trinidad and Tobago can be challenging to
estimate accurately each year for several reasons. The volatility of the global oil prices.

**Sen. Roberts:** “He say that about six times.” Yes, six times he said it.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes, I remember that.

**Sen. Roberts:** So you could talk about that six times, go ahead.

**Sen. C. Gosine:** I could speak to that?

**Sen. Roberts:** Yes.

**Sen. Lyder:** You could talk about it six times.

**Sen. C. Gosine:** The global price of oil is highly volatile and can fluctuate significantly due to the geopolitical events.

Changes in supply and demand and other economic factors. Since the fuel subsidy is partly based on the difference between the global oil price and the fixed retail price at the pump, significant fluctuations in oil prices can lead to unpredictable subsidy cost. However, we want the Ministries to function more efficiently to ensure that they are not so much off the estimated fuel subsidy every year.

**Sen. Roberts:** Correct. The pain of the PNM.

**Sen. C. Gosine:** Okay with that, Mr. Vice-President?

**Sen. Roberts:** “Yuh going good, man, keep going.”

**Sen. C. Gosine:** The exchange rate fluctuations is a major issue. The exchange rate between Trinidad and Tobago and other major currencies, especially the US dollar, can affect the cost of importing petroleum products. This I believe always cause great problems for the Minister of Finance—

7.55 p.m.
Mr. President: Senator, Senator, please be reminded that this is not a budget debate. There are certain things you are going into that do not need to be gone into and explained.

Sen. C. Gosine: So, Mr. Vice-President, I am giving the reasons—it is challenging—

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Sen. Roberts: No, they are disturbing us.

Sen. C. Gosine—for each year, for several reasons the volatility of the global oil prices, the exchange rates, and the consumption of—

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, this is 53(1)(b) squared. Tedious, tedious, tedious repetition—

Hon. Senators: [Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Members, Members, Members, Members. Members I am on my legs, come on, come on. Sen. Gosine, you are just over your halfway mark. You are just over your halfway mark. It does not seem that you have much more to add because you are repeating yourself continuously. Are there any more points you can move on to?

Sen. Gosine: Yes.

Mr. Vice-President: Kindly move on to those points, please.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Sen. Roberts: “Dais why de Stadium fall down, Yuh put too little cement?”

Sen. C. Gosine: Poor budgeting constraints and fiscal policies. For the reoccurring expenses, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries cannot seem to project a conservative estimate for the budget to ensure fiscal discipline.
Mr. Imbert: Point of order, point of order, I have heard that point four times in the last 14 minutes. 53(1)(b).

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Gosine, you are still running up. Can you move on to another point? We have heard that already within your contribution.

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator? Sen. Mark.

Sen. C. Gosine: Mr. Vice President, would you allow me to speak about some of the recurring expenses? Some of the wastages?


Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, if you are willing to speak on the appropriations, feel free. This is what this is about.

Mr. Vice-President: Proceed.

Sen. C. Gosine: Okay, some of the wastages of the appropriation; $466 million, Atlantic Train 1.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, point of order 46(1). This is a Bill on the supplementation of the 2024 appropriation. That issue is totally irrelevant.

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Gosine, you could go into the figures as it pertains to this annum.

Hon. Senators: [Crosstalk and laughter]

Sen. C. Gosine: Mr. Vice-President, every year they come with a supplementation. Right—


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Sen. Lyder: Supligen?

Sen. C. Gosine: So, every year, they come to Parliament for approval of the shortfall.

Sen. Roberts: Correct.

Sen. C. Gosine: Legislative oversight is important to the Opposition.

Hon. Senator: Yeah, man.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. C. Gosine: And seeking parliamentary approval for additional funding ensures transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Roberts: “Dey like secrets.”

Sen. Lyder: “Dey doh want tuh tell us where de money for the lawyers going.”

Sen. C. Gosine: But not explaining the constant need to increase and add money to what was originally budgeted is concerning. This process allows the Opposition to get an explanation of the reasons, and also, the public, for the shortfall, and justifies the need for additional allocation. This is exactly what we want.

8.00 p.m.

Sen. Mark: “Where de money gone?”

Sen. C. Gosine: These constant unforeseen circumstances are worrisome. Given the inherent unpredictability in factors affecting the subsidy as mentioned above, it may be impossible to anticipate exact subsidy requirements in advance.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Vice-President, I have heard that 10 times, 53(1)(b).

Hon. Senators: [Laughter and interruption]

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Sen. Lyder: [Inaudible]
Mr. Vice-President: Senator—

Hon. Senators: [Continuous interruption]


Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Sen. Lyder: [Inaudible]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark and Sen. Lyder. Let us allow your colleague to make some relevant points while he wraps up his contribution, please. Sen. Gosine, please, stick to the Bill, please.

Sen. C. Gosine: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Why can the administration not manage arrears better? Payment of arrears to entities like National Petroleum Marketing Company, and Unipet—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Vice-President—

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Mr. Imbert:—46(1)—

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Mr. Imbert:—53(1)(b), I have heard this complaint about not paying arrears for a fuel subsidy three times already from this Senator.

Hon. Senators: [Continuous interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Let us not let this get out of hand, please. It is going too far off. Sen. Gosine, endless leeway has been given, you are repeating yourself, and I am asking you to bring fresh material that we have not heard, either from yourself or any other Members unless it is in direct response to the debate at hand. Sen. Gosine, procedure with caution, please.

Sen. Roberts: Tell them we want fresh fish but they have no regular gas because they took away the regular gas. That is a fresh point.
Sen. C. Gosine: A report cited by the Minister of Finance, which is the International Monetary Fund Article IV, released June—

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, point of order, I did not cite that report. That is not a relevant rebuttal.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Mr. Imbert: I did not cite it.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Vice-President, I, as Minister of Finance, in this debate did not cite any IMF report.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Sen. Mark: No, not this debate. That was in the public domain. It is a public issue.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Gosine, move on to the next point, please.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark. Senator, if it is you misquoted who said something correct yourself and proceed, please.

Sen. C. Gosine: Mr. Vice-President, I am sorry, it was the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Hon. Senators: Yes!

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Roberts: Otherwise known as small pin.

Sen. C. Gosine: Given the sharp economic contraction of 9.1 per cent in 2020, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Vice-President, 46(1), we are not in the year 2020.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]
Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Gosine, you need to raise your point more succinctly. Every single thing you are making, you are making a run-up, which is a repetition. Please bring up your points more succinctly.

Sen. C. Gosine: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. What I was going to say is that I was showing a comparison each year and then coming to 2024, where there was a reduction by 0.8 per cent in March of 2024.

Hon. Senators: Yes.

Sen. C. Gosine: If you had given me a chance, I would have reached there.

Sen. Roberts: Exactly.

Sen. C. Gosine: These are certainly not good signs that the economic health of this country has improved significantly, although the other side keeps saying that. Although the IMF expected growth to gain momentum in 2024, estimating our economic economy to expand by 2.4 per cent, led by the non-energy sector, is still not a good improvement, in my opinion, Sir.

In addressing these challenges, the country can pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable economic future, reducing its vulnerability to external shocks and ensuring a stable and prosperous environment for citizens. So going forward, it is imperative for Trinidad and Tobago to develop a robust energy policy that balances the need for fuel security with economic stability. Investments in renewable energy, and improved efficiency and strategic partnership for refined products, imports are essential components of this policy. Additionally, efforts to bolster our foreign exchange earnings through the diversification of the economy, particularly in sectors such as tourism, agriculture and manufacturing, will be crucial in mitigating the long-term impacts of what is coming with the supplementation of the $2.3 billion. There is a $9 billion deficit.
Mr. Vice-President, we did look at an Item for the Tobago House of Assembly, which was the overturning of the barge. And, Mr. Vice-President, the oil spill off the coast of Tobago where the $50 million is allocated for that heading, and where the Tobago House of Assembly said that the $50 million is not enough and they need more, it is a stark reminder of the vulnerability we face and the need for robust measures to protect the environment and the economy. While significant challenges remain, our commitment to resolve this issue and holding responsible parties accountable is unwavering, and we hope the Government will go after the parties accountable, as we ask the Government to continue to do this.

**Sen. Roberts:** Suppose “dem” involved?

**Sen. C. Gosine:** We must learn from this incident, strengthen our preventative measures and ensure that our response mechanisms are second to none. The future of our nation’s environmental health and economic stability depend on the actions we take today. Will we face more problems in dealing with the environmental impact of this whole situation with the pollution of the oil on the coastlines?

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. C. Gosine:** The Chief Secretary himself, Farley, has stated that he needs more money and he needs to re-sand beaches, and help—recovery for, especially the fisherfolk in Tobago. Also, we do not know the impact that that pollution will have on the marine life yet and if it will cause more problems in the future. We need to work together, and we do not know in the future if we would have to allocate more funds and then they will have another supplementary ask to deal—because $50 million is definitely not enough to help. Let us work together to turn the crisis into an opportunity to improve and to be more resilient.

I would like to close by saying that these recurring expenses—to pay for
recurring expenses, this $2.3 billion that the Minister has come to get and to apply to the expenditure of our budget, and allocating money every year to our budget, and suppressing the proper values is a real worrisome issue, and we want—

**Sen. Roberts:** Every year, it is the same thing.

**Sen. C. Gosine:** Every year, it is the same thing—and we want better budgeting in the future so that we do not have to always come and deal with this at this House and the next. I appreciate the time you have given me, and I hope we can all work together for the betterment of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much.

**Sen. Roberts:** Yes, man.

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

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator—

**Hon. Senators:** [Continuous desk thumping]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Dr. Paul Richards.

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

**Sen. Dr. Paul Richards:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to contribute on this, the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2024) Bill, 2024. Let me put a smile on everyone’s face, I will not be taking 40 minutes.

**Sen. Roberts:** You know we want to hear you.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** I know. A lot has been said already. Let me start by commenting on two contributions earlier on. The first one I will comment on is by the Minister of Works and Transport who indicated that—and I have no problem with—these supplementations I am seeing here are not egregious to me, you know. The reasons given are reasonable but the drilling down is where the issue is, in many cases. The Minister of Works and Transport indicated that some of the
supplementation will be going to traffic management systems, and he indicated that one of the signs that the economy is booming is that there are a lot of people going through City Gate, and that there is traffic on the road and gridlocks, and some of the new systems would help alleviate that. Well, I disagree with that. I think traffic on the road may be a sign, at some level, of economic activity, but it is more a sign of bad traffic management and poor public transport—

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:**—and in particular, a failed Public Transport Service Corporation system, because if people had confidence in that they would not have to be clogging the roads with their own cars. And there are other negative effects of having that many cars in the road, even if you put up more traffic management light systems, like the exhaust coming into the atmosphere and also, the loss in productive time stuck in traffic jams. So I just want to put that on the table for more intense focus at other times.

I want to also comment on the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, and I know Minister Roberts—sorry, Sen. Roberts—

**Sen. Roberts:** No, no, you are correct—[Inaudible]

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** [Laughter] Sen. Roberts.

**Hon. Senators:** [Interruption]

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter and desk thumping]

**Sen. Mark:** It is just a matter of time.

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter and interruption]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Let us not let a slip of tongue get us so rowdy, please. Sen. Richards.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I know Sen. Roberts
commented and said that the Carnival was a short Carnival, so that Minister Mitchell, the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, could not claim credit for a successful Carnival, but I disagree. I think we must give credit where credit is due.

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** It was a successful Carnival, it was managed well, although it was a shorter season, and it is—

**Sen. Roberts:** [Inaudible]

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Yeah, you did say that. You said he could not claim credit for that.

**Sen. Roberts:** [Inaudible]

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** I am not debating you, I am debating—

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Mr. Vice-President.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, it is either you ask to give way—

**Sen. Roberts:** Yes—[Inaudible]

**Mr. Vice-President:** It is either you ask to give way—

**Sen. Roberts:** [Inaudible]

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, it is either you—you know this, it is either you ask to give way. You have spoken already, he is responding to you.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. And it sets the tone for what can come in the future, because it was a good template as to how Carnival can and should be managed even when it gets bigger, and it should get bigger. My only concern is that a lot of the supplementation goes to arrears from the NCC, and
I think some consideration should be given to how the NCC can sustain Carnival entertainment, culture and artiste activities through the year. Pan Trinbago is one entity that I see is doing stuff through the year, through the Pan is Beautiful again series.

8.15 p.m.

Sen. Dr. P. Richards: But I think a lot of the investment in NCC and the cultural artisans and the stakeholders should go toward trying to move entertainment from local artistes that give them work through the year in Trinidad and Tobago and also facilitate their travel across the region and the world. So that is a note on that. And I hope our former colleague will fix all of that.

I am going to confine my contribution, because I have edited most of it—to one segment, because it is late. And that is Head 28: Ministry of Health. I am going to take a different route, because I think it is a very important opportunity to deal with some of the issues coming out of the Ministry of Health. And, of course, what we see in the Ministry of Health, Head 28 is Recurrent Expenditure, $495,286,000, focussing on—and I am editing here—the new Ministry of Health administrative building, in accordance with the rental agreement; drugs and other related materials and supplies; North West Regional Health Authority; Eastern Regional Health Authority; some allocation to the expectations coming out of the new Sangre Grande Hospital, the North Central Regional Health Authority and the South West Regional Health Authority.

All of those, in many cases, to facilitate trade payable, utilities, rent, janitorial, security services, food supplies, medical gases, medical supplies and other expenses; and, of course, the one I want to focus on a lot is the issue of drugs and related material and supplies, $202,583,300 to facilitate part payment for
outstanding invoices on hand, over 90 days at NIPDEC for pharmaceuticals, non-pharmaceuticals inclusive of CDAP monthly recurrent expenditure. And it all goes to providing health care for people in Trinidad and Tobago.

And why I think this is an important opportunity, because the Hon. Minister of Finance, in the other place, and it was reported in the newspaper, several newspapers focused on, he mentioned the word sustainability and how sustainable this sort of expenditure in the health care segment would be moving forward, because it is increasing all the time. I think the Minister said it moved to now 15 per cent of the budget, if I am not mistaken—

Mr. Imbert: Revenue.

Sen. Dr. P. Richards: Sorry?

Mr. Imbert: Revenue.

Sen. Dr. P. Richards:—of revenue—thanks for the correction—to now a total of $8 billion in 2024. And I know the Minister had to correct an interpretation or interpretations of that, which ended up in the newspapers or some media houses, which was interpreted to read that there may have been an intention of the Executive, the Government to, or at least consideration to reduce CDAP or investment in health care in Trinidad and Tobago, which is interesting to me. Because how I read that, and I understand how somebody or the public could read that interpretation into it because it, to me, was a clarion call that the continued increases in health care, if continuing at this trend, could be considered unsustainable. But to me, I read that as saying this country has a problem with health and we need to find other ways to deal with it. And that is how I looked at it.

I mean it spoke to—and if you look at the data, through you, Mr.
Vice-President, a continuing increase in health care allocation over the years, not necessarily because the health care system was not effective, and it is ineffective in some ways but, because the country is getting more and more unhealthy, and I will outline several of the reasons in parts of my discourse here today and we need to look at that. Is Trinidad and Tobago in a health crisis? Is our current approach each sustainable in terms of pouring more and more funds into the health care system? And I do believe the State has a responsibility to take care of those who have health challenges in the country. But are we also looking and focussing enough attention on preventative approaches and wellness in Trinidad and Tobago?

To me there is going to come a point where you cannot even afford, if it continues in this trend, to take care of your citizens who have health challenges unless you deal with it from a multipronged approach and start to encourage citizens to take care of their health, or provide systems where citizens can more easily take care of their health in many different ways.

In terms of the issues that have come, I have the honour, Mr. Vice-President, to chair the JSC on Social Services and Public Administration. And the committee embarked on a series of public consultations, four completed, a fifth one coming in Tobago this Thursday, which focussed on NCDs, non-communicable diseases. I would present some data to show how the trends are evolving in Trinidad and Tobago as far as the health of the country is concerned. And if that continues we would have a problem, because we have some really unfortunate startling statistics when it comes to NCDs, including childhood obesity. The stakeholder consultations, public consultations raised some very key issues in the public health care system.
The Minister of Works and Transport spoke about value for money with the investment in the health care system. And we have to ask the question also: Are we getting value for money? We are supplementing expenditure in this Bill here when the public is reporting long wait times at clinics and hospitals, the need for better treatment and services for persons with disabilities, medication shortages, misplacement of patient records, staff shortages at public health care institutions, very long appointment times for critical illnesses and a plethora of other issues that have come up in terms of the service provision of health care in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, it is not exclusive to Trinidad and Tobago. If you look and follow, through you, Mr. Vice President, the NHS in the UK has a similar problem. Public health care is overburdened, but that does not mean that we should not be looking to making the service more efficient, particularly when we are investing more and more into it.

So, to me the Minister of Finance's comment in the other place was in addition to identifying that the cost increases are significant, is that the country needs to look at itself and see how we can reverse the trends in illness, so that we need less support in that way. And so, it becomes more sustainable in the long term. And to me that is what we need to be looking at.

One of the identifications that the Minister made in the other place also is in fiscal 2024, some $555.9 million has been allocated to pharmaceuticals. The breakdown included 132 million, oncology drugs; 20.6 million, HIV drugs; 40.5 million, antibiotics; 60 million, NCD drugs; 48.7 million, psychiatry interventions; and 84.4 million, non-pharmaceuticals with 1.4 million for HPV vaccines.

The Minister sought to increase the expenditure of health care by 495
million to a total of $8 billion. When you look at the statistics related to non-communicable diseases, as outlined by the World Bank, and it is not exclusive to Trinidad and Tobago, but we had a significant problem. In an article titled 2000 to 2016 yearly World Bank Report Trinidad and Tobago, cause of death by non-communicable diseases percentage of total was reported to be 80.7 per cent in 2016. The record increase from the previous number to 80.5 for 2015.

Trinidad and Tobago, cause of death by non-communicable diseases, total data averaging with a lot of observations, in terms of the data set. So, we had a record low of 78.4 per cent in 2000 but has reached as much as 80.7 per cent through NCDs. We are also seeing that NCDs share risk factors that can be changed with modifiable lifestyle changes. We should be focusing on those issues more. We should have more public education programmes. We should have more dietary options. One of the points of data that we have to look at in Trinidad and Tobago, according to a national strategic plan for the prevention and control of NCDs in Trinidad and Tobago, heart disease accounts for approximately 25 per cent of deaths, followed by diabetes, 14 per cent; cancer, 13 per cent. Heart disease is also the leading cause of premature deaths in both men and women, with men actually paying a greater price in terms of their health care, because they are 24 per cent less likely to visit a medical health care professional than females.

So, I did some CSO data diving. This is going to be some interesting data points, and this is from the Central Statistical Office in a time frame between 2012 and 2018. In 2012, the CSO recorded 10,132 deaths; 56.7 per cent of those were male. That total raw number was 5,753. In 2013, the number of death 56.7, again male; 2014, 57; 2015, 56; and straight down to 2018, it hovered around 57 or 58 per cent of the reported deaths were male, which means men are, according to the data

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set, having more health challenges and succumbing to them more frequently for several different reasons, which means we have to focus on that also. Because what we could do is continue to raise the expenditure on health care exponentially, or we could be pre-emptive and look at wellness instead of having to deal down the road with the negative outcomes. Because there are also productivity issues related to that and human capital issues related to that, if those trends continue.

[M. R. P. in the Chair]

Mr. President, in an article by Shaliza Hassanali of the Trinidad Guardian, Sunday 9th June, just recently, the article identified 87,000 patients accessing CDAP this year so far, a total of 186,000 clients registered under the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP) in Trinidad and Tobago. However, just over of 87,000 patients had been accessing the programme so far. So, we have to look at the cost of that, because that is a significant subset of the population, the adult population in Trinidad and Tobago. It tells us about the general health for the nation. And if you look at that dataset, it speaks to the need for some sort of intervention in a different way, in a pre-emptive way, so that we have to look at some sort of—in addition to the State providing the health care intervention, we have to focus more on preventative approaches, diet, exercise. I know the Ministry of Health has a number of programmes and public awareness initiatives. But, given the current trends, they are clearly not successful. They are clearly unsuccessful, because they are not reversing the trend for several different reasons.

The article went on to say there are 49 drugs available through the CDAP programme that can be used for chronic diseases, and those numbers of drugs were increasing all the time. So, we really have to deal with that in a more holistic manner.
Another major issue that speaks down the road is the issue of childhood obesity in the context of the supplementations we are asking for today and how sustainable is it, if we are having increased incidences of childhood obesity in Trinidad and Tobago. Because it means that generation also is coming up and is going to need health care service interventions moving forward. How sustainable is that? So, the Department of Child Health Services, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Pediatric Society of Trinidad and Tobago did a scan and they put out an article where they said that their

“members have been noting with growing alarm the increased number of overweight and obese children presenting...”— at the nation's state—

“hospitals and private clinics. There has also been a significant increase in childhood type 2 diabetes and other co-morbidities traditionally associated with the adult population.

Obesity has been classified as a worldwide epidemic by the WHO in 2017, when the death of 4million persons worldwide...It was noted the vast majority of overweight and obese children living in developing countries”—like Trinidad and Tobago—“with more than 30 % higher incidence than their counterparts in developed states.

In 2020, Professor Teelucksingh”—and his colleagues—“found that Trinidad and Tobago ranked 5th in the Caribbean. The WHO recently published that we ranked 8th worldwide with an obesity rate of 14 % in those less than 5 years old.

That tells you what is coming. It tells you of the burden on the health care system that is coming. Those are five-year olds. It translates into a four-fold increase in childhood obesity rates over the last two decades.
8.30 p.m.

We have to deal with that now. That is a train coming at us. That is going to require more money in the healthcare sector and if the Minister sounded the alarm of sustainability last week, you could imagine five years from now or ten years from now, when those children start to mature, and the co-morbidities and the other issues start to arise due to these incidences.

In a *Newsday* article, “How to combat childhood obesity” by Jenelle De Souza, Sunday 28th May. This one says:

“T&T has the ninth highest percentage of overweight children under the age of five in the world, according to 2022 data from a World Health Organizational report.”

That tells you a lot also. We have to deal with that issue. There have been some initiatives that have been enacted by the Ministry of Health including the School Feeding Programme and also only water, 100 percent fruit juices, other milk, blended vegetables, and fruit drinks in the school system. But, we still have to look at, why in addition to those initiatives, the trends are continuing in the wrong direction. I can tell you why. This is just my theory. We have been talking a lot about our food import bill in Trinidad and Tobago and this is a parallel situation with the healthcare expenditure increasing.

So, our food import bill in 2019 was $5 billion. By 2022, it had ballooned to $7.3 billion. And I bet your bottom dollar, that if you go through that list, you will see the larger percentage of those imports to be extremely unhealthy options. Processed foods that have stayed on the shelf in other jurisdictions for a long while, and these—this $7.3 billion that we are paying for that every year, putting a drain in our economy, is contributing to our ill health.
Hon. Senator: $7.9 billion.

Sen. P. Richards: I apologize. So, it is worse than I thought. $7.9 billion. So, tell yourself how that makes sense, while local produce struggling to keep up with those subsidized imports. We have to deal with that because they are not adding to our healthy lifestyle choices in Trinidad and Tobago and that has to be acknowledged and dealt with. I know we are in a free market system where we cannot put blocks, but there are other ways to deal with it in terms of identifying more healthy choices.

Other jurisdictions have initiated caloric counts as mandatory in fast food retail outlets. They have legislatively mandated only a certain level of sugar in the foodstuff particularly consumed by children. But we seem unable or unwilling to go down those roads to protect our society, to protect in particular, our children. We pass laws to deal with smoking, drinking, and all sorts of stuff, and interestingly enough, eastern philosophies consider food either medicine or poison. And you know what? The statistics show that they are way healthier than the rest of the world. Because they understand what the country consumes has a direct strong coalition to how healthy the society is. So, again, all this is in the context of these supplementations that the Ministry of Health is asking for to support the provision of health care service in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another issue that we need to look at is the issue of—and I know our colleague Prof. Hutchinson would endorse this, the issue of NCDs and their direct link to mental health in Trinidad and Tobago. Because the healthcare sector also provides interventions for mental health challenges in the country. In an article from CARPHA entitled “Investing in Mental Health” dated the 10th of the 9th month, 2020, which focused on Trinidad and Tobago, it said:

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“…within the Caribbean and worldwide, mental health disorders are now recognised as the 5th major non-communicable disease and a major threat to health and economic development in this 21st century.”

Again, more strain on the public healthcare system. So, according to the WHO:

“One in four people globally will be affected by mental disorders or neurological disorders…”—in their lifetime. And “…450 million” are affected by these disorders including depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, dementia, substance alcohol abuse, and other drug dependencies.

“…mental health disorders…” are a “…leading cause of disability”—and a major contributor to the burden of non-communicable diseases and the cost of these interventions for these diseases in the Caribbean.

In Jamaica for example the burden of mental illness is predicted to cost US $2.76 billion in lost economic output from 2015-2030. What is it costing us? How are we quantifying that in the context of investing in our healthcare system in Trinidad and Tobago and the supplementations that we are seeking to approve today? Are we really dealing with this issue as a multipronged issue and understanding that we just cannot continue to only focus on the health interventions in the hospitals. We have to really come to terms with where we are in terms of the health in the country and deal with more comprehensive, holistic, prevention methods.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. P. Richards: A wellness approach to life, as opposed to waiting until you get sick and encouraging persons to go for their health check-ups, in particular, men, and getting ahead of it where the children in the country are concerned because we
cannot continue. It is very comparable to the crime situation. And just a little comparison I am making, Mr. President, because I know national security is not under consideration. It is like thinking that you can pour more and more money into national security, police presence, et cetera as opposed to, dealing with the root causes of crime. In the same way, you have to deal with the root causes of illness and minimize the potential for people getting ill and needing health intervention. So, again my take on the Minister’s comment was less about only reducing expenditure which the Minister has debunked, and looking at it from being a clarion call, to the country waking up about its health status.

**Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy:** And lifestyle diseases.

**Sen. P. Richards:** And lifestyle diseases.

Interestingly enough, there is a 6th Report from the JSC Social Services and Public Administration on An Inquiry into Mental Health and Wellness Services and Facilities in Trinidad and Tobago, Fourth Session (2018/2019), 11th Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

“Number of persons with mental illnesses.

According to a submission”

—and I quote:

“From” Ministry of Health dated May 15, 2017, the 2014 Mental Health Atlas WHO Publication indicated that for Trinidad and Tobago, the total number of treated cases of severe mental disorders for the year 2014 was 5,826…”

It also went on to state that:

“…it was indicated that during the period October 2015 - September 2016, the total number of patients admitted at St. Ann’s Hospital was 2,210 and the total number of patients attending its psychiatric outpatient clinics for the
same period was 22,668.”

Is not that an indication as to, in addition to the physical health, the mental health of the country? Add the COVID-19 pandemic to that and its exacerbating effect on physical and mental health care and the strain that it is now putting, because it is a well-known fact that there is a strong coalition between one’s mental health and physiological well-being and one’s physical health, and the exponential growth in demand in health care services and the cost of that to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. So, the hon. Minister of Finance identified in his contribution that we are supplementing here for the state health care service. Add the private healthcare service to that conversation, and how much people are paying in the private healthcare sector, and add that to what the State is investing in healthcare and I guarantee you, you will come up with about 1/3 of a $60 billion budget in Trinidad and Tobago conservatively.

Can we continue as a country to spend $25 to $30 billion in health intervention forever? Is that sustainable? No. There are programmes we can administrate, I identified some earlier on. We have to get young children more involved in sport on a wider level. Get them out of the house into the football field, the cricket fields, into the swimming pools. We have to encourage that in a continued sustained manner. We have to have public education programmes on healthy dietary choices, and I know the Ministry of Health will say, “Well we do that”, but guess what, the trends are showing that it is failing. Something is not clicking. Something is not connecting and we cannot continue to go down the road we are because we will run into a block.

8.40 p.m.

So, in conclusion, it comes down to, yes, citizens taking personal
responsibility, families taking responsibility, but not all families have the same resources or the same information. It comes down to people understanding lifestyle choices related to health, choosing to eat healthy and exercise, but they have to have healthier choices, at prices they can afford, to do it consistently. When your salary is $2,500, and you are working and coming home, and you are a single mother, you are going to grab a box of fast food. You are going to grab the most convenient thing, which may not always be the most healthy thing. So we have to look at it from that perspective and provide social interventions in a different kind of way to support the better choices. We have to find ways for people to seek interventions earlier.

One of the issues that arose during the public consultations is the issue that people generally do not know the difference in what a district health care unit is for as opposed to the major hospitals. That is a big issue. So what people do, a lot of the stuff that could be remediated at the district level, people go to the hospitals and clog up the system, and it becomes overburdened. That rests in the hands of the Ministry of Health to tell people, in a comprehensive public awareness programme, what you should be going to the district health care centres for, and if you need to be referenced or you have an emergency for the general hospitals, you go to that. The public generally does not have a clue of that.

And yes, the Ministry has many campaigns, programmes and initiatives, like Moves, Know Your Numbers, but the overwhelming evidence of NCD occurrences in Trinidad and Tobago clearly shows we are losing the battle. Initiatives are either ineffective, inconsistent, or a combination of both. Either way, it is costing us a lot of lives and a lot of money. That is unsustainable. Other jurisdictions have enacted laws to mandate calorie counts on retail foodstuff,
restrictions of sugar levels on many products and, as I said before, particularly those that target children.

We have to find a way to tackle the issue of health care in Trinidad and Tobago in a more holistic, and more consistent, and a more sustainable manner, because what we are doing is impacting our human capital, our human capital development, the health of the country, which impacts the productivity of the country—

**Sen. Teemal:** Future generation.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:**—and also, the impact of the future generations, how healthy they are and how much they will be able to contribute to moving Trinidad and Tobago forward to developed country status. Mr. President, with those few words, I thank you.

**Sen. Teemal:** Yes.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Hislop.

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

**Sen. Laurence Hislop:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. Coming so low down in the batting line-up late in the evening, I do not expect to take 40 minutes. I certainly would not be like Sen. Paul Richards, to say he is going to have a short intervention and almost made his 40 minutes.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. L. Hislop:** But, Mr. President, I want to thank you for the opportunity to join this debate to the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2024) Bill, 2024. And I just want to—I just have a few interventions with regard to the discussion today. I want to just correct or just touch on a couple things that were

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raised by our colleagues opposite. And I understand their dilemma, that my colleagues, especially on the Opposition Bench, are literally in a fight for their lives because depending on what happens come this weekend, there may be some significant change taking place on the Opposition Bench.

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

**Sen. Roberts:** “I eh laugh so good in ah long time”.

**Sen. L. Hislop:** But one thing I could say, Mr. President, I heard Sen. Gosine attempt to bowl a ball, but one thing I could say about our leader and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago is that his academic qualifications are true and genuine. His doctorate is true—

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

**Sen. L. Hislop:**—and all other academic qualifications that he would have received are genuine and authentic.

I do not know what is Sen. Lyder’s challenge with Tobago, Mr. President. I want to find out. He keeps referring to the 1.2 billion, or the 1-point how much billion-plus airport project that is taking place in Tobago as a “wing”. I do not know when last Sen. Lyder visited Tobago to see—

**Sen. Lyder:** Every year.

**Sen. L. Hislop:** “Nah, nah, nah”—the magnitude of work that is taking place—

**Sen. Lyder:** [Inaudible]

**Sen. L. Hislop:**—in Crown Point, that was part of a holistic build-out for Tobago’s economy. And we could talk about, you know—we want to touch on the two hotels “dat eh making sense and all ah dat kinda ting”, but the reality, Mr. President, is that when that airport project was conceptualized, it was conceptualized as part of an entire tourism diversification project for Tobago. And
now we are in a situation where your contemporaries in Tobago, after they made all the noise about that project, you have a visiting Prime Minister to Trinidad and Tobago literally laughing at us—because they got the project, seeing the benefits of the project in a Caribbean island, and they literally laughing at us and saying, “Well, this project should have been in Tobago, but we have it now,” and they are benefiting from it. And it is very unfortunate that you have now another project to seek to diversify the economy—

**Hon. Senators:** [Interuption]

**Sen. L. Hislop:** Mr. President, could you—I seek your protection.

**Mr. President:** Senators.

**Sen. Roberts:** [Inaudible]

**Sen. L. Hislop:** Thank you, Mr. President. And there is another project that seeks to diversify, not only Tobago’s—to enhance Tobago’s economy, but to assist in the diversification of the national economy, and you have, again, voices rising to the fore about the Marriott project that can add value to Trinidad and Tobago, and Tobago, Mr. President.

There is no need for us to—Sen. Gosine kept reiterating, going down the road of Petrotrin. I think the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries dealt with that in relation to it being a foreign currency earner. So there is no need for us to go down that road.

But, Mr. President, I just want to touch quickly on Head 15, which is the $50 million that was allocated to the Tobago House of Assembly, and it is classified as an extraordinary expenditure, and it is to meet the clean-up and remediation cost associated with the oil spill, which occurred on the 7th of February. You know, I hear the concerns that the $50 million is not enough and that may be true, to one
extent. And I want to take it from this standpoint that we felt the impact of the oil spill in Tobago. We understood what it did to that part of the island, and I had my own personal experience going down to the clean-up site with a group of other colleagues. We assisted in cleanup on that day and we saw the devastation. We even assisted in refreshments—just donating refreshments to the volunteers and the workers on the site. And it was truly heart-rending to see a place that you would go to just hang out, just—you cannot even stand up in the wind because of the stench of the hydrocarbon.

From day one, Mr. President, the central government made a commitment to the people of Tobago, because the questions were asked, who is going to pay for this? And as the Prime Minister gave a commitment, he said that this is not something the Tobago House of Assembly could have budgeted for. It is not even something that central government could have budgeted for, but the reality is we had to find the money because you could not leave the island, or that part of the island in the state that it was in.

And even, Mr. President, Sen. Lyder made this comment that the oil spill decimated the tourism economy in Tobago, and that was far from the truth, because the area of the island that was impacted by that, was not one of those areas that was widely visited.

Sen. Lyder: Nobody lives there.

Hon. Senator: Oh, would you be quiet?

Sen. L. Hislop: Yeah, it is not one of those places that are—but there are still persons, Mr. President, who were impacted by it. You had your fisherfolk, you had even your kite boarders who would go on that side of the island because it is the windward side, the Magdalena Hotel was affected significantly by it as well.
But when you talk about the tourism sector, the beaches that you are accustomed visiting when you come to Tobago were not affected by it.

But what was significant, Mr. President, is that the central government did not just say, “Well, this is happening in Tobago, we going to leave it. Let Tobago see about it.” From day one, there was significant involvement by all agencies and Ministries of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. And that is one of the things sometimes I think we fail to make the connection on, that even though this thing happened in Tobago, it happened to Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, along with the Tobago House of Assembly, still has responsibility. I think Sen. Dillon-Remy spoke to the level of collaboration that took place between the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly with regard to this clean up. And we saw the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries sending out press releases from the day right after.

The Minister of Works and Transports came to Tobago with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, and then by a couple days after, you saw the Prime Minister himself make a visit, do a tour, held a press conference, and it is in that press conference he gave the commitment that the assistance will be given, or the payments, or the cost that was incurred for the clean up, that the central government, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has to step up to the plate and make sure that was done. And if I quote him, he says:

Some not so insignificant cost is being incurred just to respond to something that we did not cater for.

And he gave the commitment at that press conference that we were going to take care of the cost.

I know this is not—you cannot compare, in terms of size, but when you look
at what transpired in Louisiana with the oil spill in Louisiana, with the BP’s Deepwater Horizon—and *Washington Post, Reuters*, all of them shared that it was six years after, BP was still paying out compensation for that oil spill.

And so $50 million being allocated to assist—and according to the Minister of Finance in the adoption of the Standing Finance Committee Report, and if I quote from the *Hansard*, Mr. President, he said that:

> “The Chief Administrator submitted a letter dated April 17\(^{th}\) providing some explanation and that formed the basis for the recommendation, and it is based on actual invoices being processed for the months of February and March and a small contingency for the future.”

And so the figure of $50 million was not just pulled out of a hat by the Minister of Finance—and he made that very clear in the Standing Finance Committee. It was not him that made that decision. It was an interrogation of documents that were sent, and the technocrats at the Ministry, along with the technocrats at the Tobago House of Assembly, came to this $50 million based on invoices. To me, Mr. President—that made sense to me. If you have invoices for $40 million, you get the allocation of $40 million, and there is a contingency because there are things that keep—because it is ongoing work. There is actually work still taking place.

8.55 p.m.

And I think members of the public also forget that when it comes to the cost that is incurred by the oil spill, if you want to disaggregate it or you want to separate it, the central government—and you see, I do not want that situation where we are separating the cost because it was a national incident. But if you want to look at it from that standpoint, the Tobago House of Assembly was responsible for the onshore clean-up or the shoreline clean-up, shoreline and on
land. And that is the responsibility the THA had and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries had the responsibility to treat with the vessel itself.

But when you look at the cost, I am sure when the final costs are tallied with regard to the oil spill Mr. President, that the central government's portion of the Bill would be significantly higher. Because I see the works still going on, I see a vessel parked up in the Port of Scarborough, just sitting there waiting to receive the tankers that come from the spill site to put the oil in that vessel, for that vessel to then move out of Tobago. Somebody is paying for that vessel to just be parked up there waiting for the oil. Somebody is paying for it and I am almost sure that it is the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries that will be accepting that liability.

And so when we haggle over whether it is THA’s money or central government's money, it is the money of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the taxpayers' dollars that are being spent to revitalize a place that we love, an area that we love. And I empathize with the fisher folks, Mr. President. I have seen it first-hand. I am not a fisherman, never claim to be a fisherman. I came from a village that has no sea. Not a fisherman, but I empathize with the fishermen and I understand the challenge that they face with their livelihood being affected. But I am positive that I am part of an organization, part of a Government, part of an institution, that will make the necessary provisions. All of the provisions Mr. President, cannot be made at one time, but I am almost certain that the provisions will be made in the time to come.

As I wrap up Mr. President, I am looking at the breakdown of the $50 million, and you see we have this challenge that we have one sector stating that they did not get any money from the $50 million allocation. But when you look at the breakdown of that $50 million, Mr. President, this redounds to small businesses
in Tobago. This redounds to companies that are run by families. Companies that are small, micro and medium are going to benefit from this.

Because when we talk about lease and rental of infrastructure, that is tents and your portable toilet facilities that were provided for the clean-up process by small companies in Tobago. You talking about materials and supplies. That is hardwares. Organizations went to these hardwares, took equipment to work on the clean-up site. That ran up a bill for the THA. Hardwares, you have the marine support services and security.

I sat with the owner of a security company and he was one of the persons who provided a service for the clean-up and I am sure he is happy to be able to finally have sight, that he is going to be paid for the service that he provided for the clean-up. You have $33.8million, the cost of clean-up; and remediation, $327,000 for catering. This again, small caterers who would have put out in order to supply the meals for volunteers and for the workers.

9.00 p.m.

And so, when we look at the 50 million and we say that the 50 million, we behave as if it is nothing. Tell the person who has an invoice in for $40,000 or $50,000. Tell a security company who has an invoice in for maybe $80,000. It means something to them, you see, and sometimes we always look at the macro picture and not understand that it means something to the person who fulfills the service. And it means that they are getting paid, they can pay their bills, they could pay their loans in the bank, and so their business can continue. And so we cannot just sweep it under the carpet that 50 million is not enough and we making noise. That to me, does not make sense.
The work continues, Mr. President, and continues to restore Tobago or to restore that part of Tobago to what we know it to be and as I said in closing, in true Tobago harvest style, Mr. President, there was a coming together of everybody in Tobago. It may not have affected every single individual. They were not in the area of the oil but they understood that if this part of Tobago is affected I am affected. And so they came together, we came together, we assisted in the cleanup, we helped where we could and we—I would say from the standpoint of a Tobagonian, from the standpoint of a businessman who will benefit from the 50 million, a caterer, a hardware store, a security company, I am sure that they are grateful that the allocation is made towards that. We look forward to in the future to more allocations be made with regards to that and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has been doing a fantastic job in sourcing international assistance.

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

**Sen. L. Hislop:** Because the reality, Mr. President, is that we know our challenge is revenue, we know our challenges as a country. And so when we are faced with a situation where we have to find maybe US 40 million, US 30 million, or how much ever of it would eventually cost—

**Mr. Young:** We went and persuade the IAPC to *[Inaudible]*

**Sen. L. Hislop:** We are in a position that there is an entity that can assist in covering our financial costs as it relates to the oil spill. Mr. President, I thank you.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Nakhid.

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

**Sen. David Nakhid:** In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful.
Mr. President, I will not be long, I hope, but I have to respond primarily to the Minister of Finance. You know, it seems that he felt that less would be more today, when his less, even if you cube it, was nothing. He came and read he out what was on his paper, not much detail, certainly not much hope, not realizing that numbers mean something. Numbers tell a story, especially whether it be a budget, a mid-year review, they tell a story. They are supposed to at least give us an account of what we did with the money. Give us a vision perhaps going forward. But the numbers tell a story. You cannot come, Mr. President, and hope to limit the scope of debate—

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes.

**Sen. D. Nakhid:**—so that nobody on the Opposition gets a chance to forensically audit what you have done.

**Sen. Roberts:** Yes.

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

**Sen. D. Nakhid:** It certainly does not serve our democracy well. And I was surprised that the level of disorder in raising Standing Orders. I mean, we are Parliament, parley and all that, we all know, we hear that all the time. But it is our duty to account to the people Trinidad and Tobago, and it is something that this desperate Government, completely now, at “C” with the economy, with the social equity, with our young people, with our healthcare system, with our education system, this Government has failed completely.

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

**Sen. D. Nakhid:** So their only hope is for their PNM “B” team led by Rushton Paray, or to try and distract us from our reality at hand. And here they come always, always, paradoxically in a contradictory manner, saying something outside
to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, saying something differently inside the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and when they go in front of a court where they have to tell the truth we hear something completely different. So their utopian narrative trying to cover over a dystopian reality will always be found out by an Opposition that is on the ball. We on the ball—

Sen. Lyder: Yes.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Nakhid: —we on the ball. So I looked at one of the statements made by the Minister of Finance about how we have free healthcare. I think Sen. Richard is part of that Committee as well, I am a member of that Committee as well. Well, this has to be the costliest, most expensive free healthcare in the world. And when they talk about free, this PNM Government always talk about—like they are giving us something.

Sen. Mark: Is their money.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Is their money, they are doing us a favour, free healthcare—when is our taxpayers’ money paying for that. So, when they have mismanaged the economy, mismanaged healthcare, where people cannot find beds, where people cannot find equipment. We have 113, Mr. President, healthcare centres or support centres, 113, most of them under equipment, some of them understaffed and they come and put a big building centralized in Port of Spain, where they just come and lump everybody administratively. That tells you what a visionless Government this is.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Why did they not decentralize that. But this Government is not about that, about efficiency brought by decentralization, especially in the
healthcare. This Government is about big things, big events, not human resource. Big buildings, big car parks, remodel and refurbish Skinner Park and make it useless to everybody, except party and fete.

Sen. Lyder: Big Balisier House.

Sen. D. Nakhid: I would not even talk about Balisier House. I would not even talk about that because that will make me very sad because it is unexplainable. But what I will talk about is how the Minister of Finance gave us a lecture about the appropriation process. But when he got a lecture about the auditing process by the Auditor General he threw a tantrum.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: Point of order. There is nothing in this supplementation Bill that speaks about the Auditor General, there was nothing in my presentation that spoke about the Auditor General, it is absolutely irrelevant. 46(1).

Mr. President: One, Sen. Nakhid, the talk about the Auditor General has been floating around all day long so at this point it is a little bit tedious so I would just ask you to keep going and do not repeat anything that has been said before.

Sen. D. Nakhid: The point, Mr. President, was not so much about the Auditor General, it was more about how this Minister of Finance lectures us about processes, when he himself does not follow processes that are determined by statues.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order.

Sen. D. Nakhid: But I move on, Mr. President.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Point of order.
Mr. Imbert: Mr. President, 46(6), imputing improper motives that is entirely untrue.

Sen. Roberts: “Yuh go ketch cramp yuh know.”

Mr. President: Okay, no, no, no. We are a few hours in well, just let the process run as smoothly as possible. Sen. Nakhid continue, but like I said, move off that point.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Guided, guided, guided Mr. President. The Minister of Finance also spoke about how the UNC also had supplemental appropriations and all of that. He did not say where and when, but he said that, okay. But we had tangible benefits for the people when we had supplemental appropriations. They are yet to tell us what supplemental appropriations benefit the people in a tangible manner. Not one thing was said about that.

Mr. President: You are pretty low down in the speaking order. And as I have indicated, we have heard that. We have heard quite a number of comments in relation to certain aspects of the supplementation that we are dealing with right now. What I expect to hear at the position that you are in, is something that I have not heard for the day as yet. So I have heard about what you just stated with the supplementation not having benefits from several Senators on this side and it has been responded to, to Senators on my right. So again, new, something new.

Sen. D. Nakhid: I will make you happy, Mr. President. We did not hear too much about education and I want to tie it in with what Sen. Richards said, as far as health was concerned. Because he gave us a very long and very interesting detail analysis of our health, the state of our health—talk about NCDs, and all of this. And that is
where this Government fails continuously. They do not seem to know how to have any synergy between their portfolios.

So we can talk about education and all about health work not realizing that when we look at the supplemental appropriation for education, which was 144 million–plus, and when you look at the breakdown, it is all about the Recurrent Expenditure, Security Services, 12 million; Gratuities, 20 million; School Supplies and book grants. Now, I will just segue on that, because it talks about our needy students and all of that. But what was interesting to me, because I also heard about it, when I watched the debate in the other place, the 47 million for National Schools Dietary Services and it says here:

“To enable the payment of salaries to the staff of the National Schools Dietary Services Ltd. as well as to provide meals to students for the period, June 2024 to September 2024.”

I think the Minister of Finance in the other place was asked about that, do we have school at that time? And we heard a story about how that was pay for the previous month. That makes no sense to me. I want an explanation more detailed than that is for previous months.

“…to provide meals to students for the period June 2024 to September 2024”—when students are not in school at that time.

I want an explanation as to how that is possible. I think he said in the other place, which was very unsatisfactory, that that was for the months previous. But it does not say that or he does not go into detail.

“To provide needs to students for the period June 2024 to September 2024.”
Are we going to have students coming in on that programme? They tried. That was so poorly attended when they tried to bring students in to catch up among the 50 per cent of students who failed in our education system. Is that related to that?

9.25 p.m.

I am just asking the question, Mr. President. I do not think we heard that before in the debate. I hope I have satisfied you, as far as I am concerned. I move on.

Sen. Dr. Richards talks about childhood obesity. Here again, we have a Government who does not know how to approach education and health, making sure that we have preventative care. They have done nothing—when you look at the Ministry of Education, I see nothing here where they will address the health problems that occurred later on at primary school level. We are still a very much school-based society, very much a faith-based society, where things revolve around the schools and the churches, and the mosques, and the mandirs. They have done nothing to address that. They have given no special identification officers—talent identification, school monitors and nutritionists in primary schools; nothing.

And I went to several schools, including my alma mater, Rosary Boys, I went to that school, they have nothing there. They had to employ their own. What they do, they put on events. They come with sport events and invite people, and make a big pappy show about it. But policy directives, programmes that are sustainable to ensure that we have a healthy population that does not burden or overwhelm the health care system later on, they have no answer to that. They have no idea how to address it, this Government. So what we are faced with is exactly what Sen. Dr. Richards said, an overburdened health care system, because of their lack of vision, their lack of policies in going to the root of the problem, which is in
the primary school system, which is in the school system, secondary school system.

So I ask myself, why this Government, after nine years—not four or five, Mr. President, after nine years, they come now running with all these events, wellness and walk and move—TT Moves? It is all, for them, about elections. That is all this Government is concerned with, how they can stay in power—

**Hon. Senator:** Exactly.

**Sen. D. Nakhid:**—how they can continue to just keep mismanaging the affairs of this country to their own benefit. There is not one portfolio that I can say has been successful in nine years; not one. They can say with confidence, they can say it with a lot of flowery rhetoric, they can come and talk about what we will see in 2027, they will talk about what the UNC did, most of what they say is totally disconnected from the reality of what is going on. So it is no surprise to me—and this was reflective of what I am saying about this Government, how disconnected they are with the reality of what they have done to this country. They have truly and measurably destroyed our country, Mr. President.

I think they themselves know that. I think they have not proffered anything to counter what I am saying, and I will say it until proven otherwise. I mean, I listen to the Minister of—the hon. Rohan Sinanan, the Minister of Works and Transport, yes. I mean, Mr. President, look at where they have reached. He is trying to tell us that the economy is vibrant because people are going about their daily lives, struggling to find some means of existence in a country riddled with crime. Nobody knows when they are going to get shot by the bus stop, by the taxi stand, by the parlour, by the bar, and he just—for him, that is a sign of progress, of economic activity.
But let me tell you something. In a country fighting up with a minimum wage that is virtually unlivable; a 4 per cent increase that is untenable; a health care system, unfathomable; an education system, unintelligible; and a party that is severely dishonourable—because they never talked about anything that makes sense. And the Minister of Finance talked about foolishness, and foolishness, and what the Opposition’s political leader had to say was just foolishness, and he came here and basically did not shed a light on anything that made sense. That was foolishness cubed.

So, Mr. President, the question that I have to ask to this Government, why would a government, after nine years, with not anything demonstrable for us as achievement, 20 years in Tobago—as my colleague leaves—20 years, uninterrupted, in Tobago, basically admit it in this presentation that $50 million was not enough? He admitted that, about his own Government. Everything that they have put here, whether in Tobago, whether in Trinidad and Tobago, whether in health care, education, has to do with recurrent expenditure—and people have spoken about that—nothing to do with development.

This paucity of stratagems, this paucity of ideas, this intellectual deficiency, Mr. President, how much more can we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, take? And I mean that most sincerely. I believe the Minister of Finance in his winding up—in his wind-up should come clear with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us know what is the true state of affairs in our economy. Let us know what we need to do. As he said three years, we have to brace ourselves. Well, people are all saying, that three years we have to brace ourselves is because that nine years you had, you wasted, you mismanaged. You did everything that a government should not do, and yet you come and ask us to bear another three years of hardship.
The people cannot take it, Mr. President. The people, really and truly, are at a bursting point. We talked about David Rudder’s “Haiti I am Sorry”, just now Rudder has to come and sing a new song, Trinidad I am Sorry. That is where we have reached.

So, in closing, Mr. President, I would like to ask that the people on that side who has brought us to this past—as philosophers like to opine, that in every tragedy, we can find some comedy, but the tragedy of the PNM, no one is laughing; no one is laughing, four, five, three, every other day, being murdered, killed.

Mr. President: Nakhid, so we are not talking about crime or national security. It does not form part of the number of Ministries that have received supplementation.

Sen. D. Nakhid: And what a shame is that, Mr. President. What a shame is that. Thank you for making my point. What a shame is that, when we know the number one issue is exactly what you said.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

9.25 p.m.

Sen. D. Nakhid: So I end as I began. The Minister of Finance, his contribution epitomizes less is not more and he has left us all wondering when we are going to see something substantive from this Government to give us a little hope that we can move forward as a nation in security and safety, as the UNC no doubt will provide. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Sen. Maharaj.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Sunity Maharaj: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I will not be long
because a lot of what needs to be said, has already been said. Having reviewed this supplementary Appropriation Bill however, I think what is the most significant thing that emerges from it for me is public trust in the budgeting process, because when you look at the requests, so much of it is expenditure that was known and should have been known when the budget was originally compiled.

There are repeated references to arrears, which we know is money owed that should have been paid, and so we come to the question of what happened at that point. Supplementary appropriations ought to be exactly what the Minister says here, “urgent and critical”. Now, I am sure this is all urgent now because you owe and you have to pay, you have employees, all over the place it would seem, and it is critical because people have to be paid, contractors have to be paid, and so on, but those were costs that should have been calculated in the budget last October. I have to ask, why were they not included? Was it an oversight? Was it a miscalculation? Was it a lack of information coming to the Minister from various Ministries or what? Is there a strategy here? Is there a plan for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the budget—because that is not what a supplementary Appropriation Bill is about, ought to be about. Also, help me to understand something that I have been trying to grapple with, which is why are the figures so rosy and the population so depressed about the economy, and I do not think this is a simple case of naysayers. I think people, in the same way you have a trickle-down economy where you could trickle down money, and, you know, that is an argumentative position, you can trickle down pain.

Where the pain is being felt, if you look through these appropriations, they are being felt among people who at the lower end of the employment ladder. They are temporary people. Invigilators, those were people—there were exams. We
knew in January, minimum wage, some people, they had not gotten the increase. You calculated that—it should have been calculated in the budget. So the pain is being felt at the very base of the low income population which is why it is spreading, because at that point your income base is like that, you know, you have a small number at the top and a wider number at the bottom.

So when you hear people, they say, as a matter of cost, “Things hard”. They just say it. The language of the population, no matter what you hear, no matter what the figures are saying, they say, “Things hard”; the economy is this, that and the other, and that is because—that may be a smaller number because at the very top you have the large hundreds of millions, but at the bottom it makes a difference to people that they have been working for a while and they have not gotten their little pay.

I heard the Minister of Education being asked about substitute teachers and they were not included. They had not been paid since April and they were not included in this figure, so I guess they would be paid a few months from now, maybe in the next budget. It is so important that those people are paid and they needed to have been calculated into the budget from the beginning. So that we have to—I understand that the management of the economy is the management of difficult choices, but which choice and the impact of those choices, it is not just arithmetic.

We ought to be able to calculate the social impact of some of these choices because you would be led into thinking that it is just naysayers. You would not believe that it is real pain that so many people are feeling. So I will not go over and over about the point about arrears because I cannot tell now much of these figures, what percentage is arrears, what percentage is some new capital work. I
would understand, for example, if there was an increase in capital, like some expenditure for the Ministry of Works and Transport, because I really do believe we have to seriously strengthen our infrastructure in this kind of weather, in this climate change conditions. I am already seeing brand new roads paved that are being gouged out by one day’s rain. It is just being gouged out, you know.

So there are a few other areas I would like to touch. The issue has been raised of the payment of legal fees, and we know that legal fees were already exempted, I think, from the procurement legislation, and now we are being told that the public does not have a right to know this, who is paid how much. I think the Government is walking a dangerous path here in that we are giving lawyers the right to make decisions about lawyers. It is a conflict of interest. Anybody is entitled to ask, why are lawyers being exempted? Why are they being given anonymity? Why not me? Why not you? Why not whoever? We have to be clear, what is the philosophical basis? We all need that explained to us. Explain why lawyers have a greater right to anonymity when they receive public funds than anybody else in the society, because if lawyers can have it, everybody else should.

Then the other point about the massive legal bill that the Ministry of the Attorney General carries as though the solution to that is that people should go to the court less. That is the constitutional right of every single person to go to petition the court to protect their rights and we should stop talking about it as though it is a burden on the Treasury. It is a burden on the Treasury if the State breaches the law and does not learn its lesson and keep doing the same thing, over and over. Look at all these policemen who are taken to court and they have breached people’s rights to—you know, being beaten and roughed up wrongfully, and so on, and there is no evidence that any of them pay any price and that any
learning goes on to say a precedent was created and this must not happen again.

Are we asking ourselves, every time that the State—the State also, if it loses a case, it loses at one level, it loses at the appeal and it goes to the Privy Council. Everybody has that right. The State has the right. I am not saying they should not have the right, but they do have to think whether it is a smart move or whether they are likely to—whether it is a good use of taxpayers’ money. Everybody has a right. The only reason—in fact, if it did not cost so must to go to court, they will have to deal with a lot more people going to court to secure their rights. The poorest in the country are those least protected. Their rights are least protected because they do not have the money and so they just take it.

So I think we need to stop this thing about talking about the citizens right to go to court as though it is some kind of theft on the Treasury. I heard reference to—and I have no figures to make sense of this, about the lending to—the commercial banks lending to the private sector as an indicator, a positive indicator, and it is a positive indicator, but I would like us to interrogate that, because the number of people, of Trinidadian businessmen, I am seeing rushing to Guyana to invest, I am wondering whether people are—whether the commercial banks in Trinidad are supporting investment in Guyana, because I am not seeing that rush, but I am going only with anecdotal evidence in Trinidad. I am just saying it is something—

**Mr. Imbert:** Standing Order 46(1).

**Mr. President:** Okay. Senator, so—

**Hon. Senators:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. President:** Members. Members. Members. So, Senator, just, again, we have a list of Ministries that have received supplementation, if you are responding to
something that was said before by Members, all well and good, but just keep it tight at this late stage of the debate.

**Sen. S. Maharaj:** Thank you, Mr. President. That is the only point I was—I was making it in response to, I think, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and I am not disputing the point. I am saying, I will not accept it as carte blanche as that, but I rest that.

In the same way, for example, in responding to Sen. Mitchell’s report on the Carnival, I think we will do the economy some good if we also interrogate some of those figures, because we should want to know the import content of Carnival and the foreign exchange demand that Carnival makes. Because Carnival is one of these things we want to promote absolutely as an economic stimulus for local content and for local creative industries and so we should be very interested in finding out the extent to which Carnival is a drainer of foreign exchange.

So the only other point I will make in—this is in relation to the contribution of Sen. Paul Richards when he talked about health, is the point about smart spending. We have to spend early enough and little so that we prevent the possibility of having to spend a lot more because we did not intervene early enough, and I raise that in relation to the information that I was given today by the Minister of Health regarding vaping. This is the time. A year ago he said that he had thrown to the Attorney General the need for the regulations, to come up with the regulations; that is a year. We need to deal now with children and vaping because we are going to deal with the problems that will come out of that very quickly.

Two companies are about to set out vaping manufacturing enterprises in this country, we cannot allow an industry that is far and away superior to almost
anything, perhaps even more so than the fossil fuel industry in terms of marketing, and they have really outdone themselves in designing a product that is so deceptive. It is pretty and it smells good. Parents do not even know what their children have in their hand is a vaping product. It looks like a sweet.

So I just want to put those things on the—and that is my contribution. Like I said, public trust in the budgeting process is what is at stake here and therefore we look forward to the budget 2025, 2024/2025, where we hope that some of the things that made an appearance in this supplementary Appropriation Bill would be taken into account at the right time, so we get a more accurate view of the budget. Just to quote the Minister when he was wrapping up at his budget presentation, he had told us and we verily believed:

“I am confident that the estimates under this budget framework would materialize…”—and so on.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Attorney General.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you very much, Mr. President. It is late, Mr. President, so I will truncate much of what I would have wanted to say on this debate, but there are a couple of points that I consider important to address. Thank you for inviting me to speak on the Bill which is before this House, this Chamber this evening, a Bill to fund urgent and critical Recurrent and Capital Expenditure to September 30, 2024, in areas where insufficient or no allocation was provided.

Mr. President, on Head 23, which falls under my remit, there are four Heads
of Expenditure which fall to be addressed, Anti-Money Laundering/Combatting the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Compliance Unit, $360,000; Other Contracted Services, $1 million to pay money owed to a company called Axiell for the maintenance of software of the Companies Registry; three, with respect to the Police Complaints Authority the sum of $2,940,000 to enable the Authority to meet its operational costs, and, lastly, recurrent expenditure on legal fees of $120 million, which the hon. Independent Senator has just spoken to in some critical measure.

9.40 p.m.

Let me address that last point first, Mr. President, and then I will return to the other Heads of Expenditure, that I would like your leave to deal with, albeit, briefly. I understand the Independent Senator to have made two points under the Head of the Supplementation for $120 million for legal fees, or with respect to that larger supplementation. The point that she made was that it is not right for lawyers to remain anonymous, and secondly, we should stop talking about people going to court. That is wrong; it is their right. I understand those two points to have been made in the context of the responses that I have already made in the other place with respect to legal expenditure.

First of all, that it is not right for lawyers to be anonymous. The point is that I have given the material before the other place and I am not going to repeat myself. We have asked for $120 million to September 2024. At June 6th 2024, the total amount of outstanding legal fees came up to $70,828,722.38 and there is still legal work, which the Solicitor General’s Department, the Chief State Solicitor, and the Attorney General Secretariat have engaged attorneys for, who have not yet billed my Office, and these hopefully will be paid with the supplementation to take
us up to the $120 million.

In giving those figures, I have declined to name the names of the attorneys, other than those who have given consent, and those names are now in the public domain. They have been published elsewhere in the context of my having given them in the other place. But the short point is, it is not that lawyers are being held out as being anonymous. The point is this, that the taxpayers’ funds that are being expended on lawyers’ fees are legitimate expenses and the sums have been given. I have accounted for it in the other place. I have called the figure here today, and to the extent that there were some lawyers who agreed for their names to be given, I have given that figure. That figure is in respect of those lawyers who have agreed to give their names; I have given those figures. Those lawyers who have not agreed to give their names, or who did not respond to my request for their consent, I have not given their names but I have given the gross sums that have been paid out. That comes to the $72 million that I have referred to this evening.

What I am not prepared to do is to name attorneys, to have their names, as I have said in the other place, pilloried in this place or elsewhere. Because what we engage in, and I say this respectfully, I say it regrettably, what we engage in, in this Chamber and in the other place, from the Opposition, is mauvais langue and pillorying of people’s names. And, insofar as there is a responsibility on the part of the Office of the Attorney General to disclose the sums of taxpayers’ money that is paid out pursuant to an obligation to pay legal fees, I have put that figure out into the public domain as a gross sum, and at the end of the day, I justify it on the basis of legitimate fees that are being paid out for legitimate work. This is not, with respect, the same as other instances of fees that have been paid out under other administrations, not this administration, and in respect of which, as we speak, there

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are current legal matters in which we are seeking to recover those fees which have
gone into bank accounts.

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

9.45 p.m.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** The fees—and I stand here and challenge anyone
to challenge me on this. The fees, which I have authorized to pay out to lawyers,
are being paid to legitimate bona fide lawyers—

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

**Mr. Imbert:** Not for corruption.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:**—who are skilled, competent and have integrity.

**Mr. Imbert:** Not for corrupt practices.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** And none of those fees are going to be paid back
to me—

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:**—not a single cent. And I would challenge anyone
of the Members on the other Bench, anyone on the other Bench to suggest that any
of those fees are being paid back to me. And the reason why I am not going to put
the attorneys’ names in this gayelle is because it is all mauvaise langue and bad
talking people who are prepared to do work for an honest day’s pay.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** I say it with respect to other—and let me say this,
Mr. President, on the criticism of the sum of money for foreign legal fees. A
significant part of the foreign legal fees are being paid in English sterling, to
attorneys that I have had to retain from the United Kingdom, to prosecute some of
those cases that are currently in this court, in which we are tracing them back to
bank accounts, and that comes at an expense.

**Hon. Senators:** “Ohhh”.

On the criticism of the Independent Senator, that we should stop talking about people going to court as if it is wrong, I have said in the other place, and I say it again, that the Opposition—and I do not suggest that the Independent Senator is part of that—have been obstructionists for the last several years, and they have found—because regrettably, our court system is slow—that it is convenient for them to conduct their political mischief in the courts of law.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** So that an example of the obstructionism—and we are not going the roll over and play dead. An example of the obstructionism is the extent to which during the COVID period, we had 51 legal cases brought against the Government, challenging this Government’s fight to protect the health of this population. Those 51 cases, Mr. President, cost the taxpayers $14,620,340—

**Hon. Senator:** Wow.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:**—paid to attorneys representing—UNC attorneys representing those persons. At the end of the day, it is not that we are saying that people are being told that they should not go to court. It is that they are forcing the Government to pay out legal fees in cases which, at the end of the day, they all failed colossally, but we could not roll over and not defend them. So we had to pay out $14,620,340 to retain attorneys.

And that series of 15 cases ended in the case of the Dominic Suraj decision, which is now one of the constitutional law cases that stands as a high watermark in our constitutional law that has demonstrated two things in particular. One is that it
is the right of a government, under the system of Constitution that we adhere to, to pass legislation by a simple majority decision in the Parliament, and not every piece of legislation has to go to a super majority. That has freed us, as a Government, over the last couple of years, as a result of this Dominic Suraj decision, to be able to pass legislation in the interest of the people of this country, but it cost us $14 million to get there because of the litigation that was brought by United National Congress lawyers to prevent this Government from protecting the health of the public. Because the Dominic Suraj decision ruled secondly—apart from the high watermark of the constitutional ethos that it has developed—that the Government was correct in every step that it took over the COVID pandemic to protect the health of the population.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** And, in fact, that decision was remarkable for the Privy Council going out of its way in the body of its judgment to pay tribute to our Minister of Health, Dr. the Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh, and to our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Roshan Parasram.

**Sen. Gopee-Scoon:** You gave Terrence a title, “doctor”.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** “Ahh”.

**Sen. Lyder:** He is a doctor? Terrence is a doctor?

**Sen. Roberts:** In Miami.

**Sen. Mark:** He is a fake doctor.

**Hon. Senators:** [ Interruption]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** And they choose every opportunity to interrupt—

**Mr. President:** Okay, okay, okay. Members. Members.

**Hon. Senators:** [ Interruption]
Sen. Mark: Terrence Deyalsingh is not a doctor. He is a fake doctor.

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

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you very much, Mr. President. If I had the opportunity to, I would confer him with an honorary doctorate.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: And the Privy Council went out of its way, unusually—because the Privy Council is always very careful to stick close to the bone of the wicket so as not to get involved in hyperbole. But in this judgment—they spent three paragraphs of a judgment, into two full pages, praising the efforts of the hon. Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh, Minister of Health, and Dr. Roshan Parasram, the Chief Medical Officer, for the Herculean efforts they made—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:—to save the country of Trinidad and Tobago and its people, who—the United National Congress tried to stop the Government from providing health care at the cost of $14 million. And if that litigation had not been engaged in, can we imagine the quality of further service that would have gone to the health services, with the $14 million being spent in health services?

Sen. Lyder: [Inaudible]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: So those are the remarks that I will make, without belabouring the point that I have already made, Mr. President, with respect to the legal fees issue. And I make no apologies for having authorized the payment of that sum that I have already called, and asking the Minister of Finance to come to this House for a supplementation for the balance, up to the tune of $120 million because those fees are going to be paid to bona fide lawyers, for bona fide work, and work this country needs them to do to continue to protect the
Constitution, the rule of law and the citizens of this country.

The other points that I want to make, Mr. President—and I will be as brief as I can be—is with respect to the area of recurrent expenditure under Head 23 of $124.3 million. We are dealing with anti-money laundering and others. Anti-money laundering—I want to make, very briefly, the remarks about the CFATF Secretariat. CFATF is the acronym for the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. That is the organization, Mr. President, which is helping this country work very seriously at keeping us free from white-collar crime, anti-money laundering, countering terrorism and related serious crime, to keep the generation of our citizenry and the generation of children of this proud county in trust for whom we manage this country.

Literally, yesterday, Mr. President, I gave opening remarks at a very important anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism national risk assessment workshop that is taking place at the Hyatt hotel. And this is what I said yesterday in my opening remarks—and this has to do with the existence of the CFATF Secretariat, that the Government is asking this Parliament to authorize us an additional $360,000 to pay their rent. I said this:

The challenges posed by money laundering and the financing of terrorism are not merely theoretical concerns. They represent real threats to our national security, economic and financial stability, and maintaining the rule of law. As guardians of justice and stewards of public trust, it is incumbent upon us to combat these threats with unwavering resolve and collective action to protect the financial system and the broader economy from the threats of illicit finance.

Illicit finance fuels serious crime; corruption; bribery; fraud and forgery;
drug trafficking; human trafficking; tax evasion; and cybercrime, including online child sex exploitation, terrorism and gang-related activity. It erodes the integrity of our international financial system and hinders serious economic growth and social development.

And the national risk assessment workshop, which is ongoing at the moment, is being co-sponsored by the World Bank Group, along with the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, supported by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force for whose office we are asking this House to supplement by $360,000 so that we can continue to pay their rent. They employ in excess of 90 nationals of this country and they provide invaluable service to the citizens of this country, and keeping us in train with our international obligations.

The other area, Mr. President, that I want to speak to, very briefly, has to do with the Registrar General’s Department. We have the Vote for Axel. We are asking for a Vote to continue the software development of Axel, which is assisting the Registrar General’s Department. And one of the very important areas in which the efforts of the Registrar General is engaged, is in developing the legislative framework for the beneficial ownership framework that allows us to go behind the corporate veil of companies, behind which so many people have, for so many years, continued to engage in white-collar crime, money laundering, countering terrorism and related serious crimes. We can now, through the legislative provisions that we have introduced, go after persons because they have to tell us—under the legislative scheme that the Registrar General is introducing through the digitalized software apparatus that Axel brings to that Ministry, to our Ministry, they now have to reveal who they are. They can no longer hide behind the corporate veil.
The other area, Mr. President, that I have asked for a supplementation of funds for is the Police Complaints Authority, and I want to say just a little bit about the Police Complaints Authority in that respect. Among the many things that the Police Complaints Authority is asking us to engage in—and the supplementation is to the tune of $2,940,000—is significantly a pilot project that they are introducing—and I consider this to be very important—so as to be able to allow them to use portable cameras, body-worn cameras, that would permit them to be able to monitor, on an ongoing basis, what is being done as they go out into the field. This is a very important project, it is a small part of the $2 million. I could speak in detail to all of the other things that they want to do, but I will not trouble this House with all of those details. And I entirely support the efforts of the Police Complaints Authority to go into the field of body-worn cameras to monitor the extensive fieldwork that they are doing.

And lastly, Mr. President—the last area that I just want to touch on, to emphasize, in terms of the work that we are asking this House to approve, is the AML/CFT compliance of 360, which I have already spoken to, to enhance our capacity to go after white-collar crime. With those few words, Mr. President, I thank you.

10.00 p.m.

Mr. President: Sen. Francis.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Helon Francis: Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. At this point in the debate it is quite easy to be bordering on tedious repetition, but I will try to make it quick.

My first point that seemed to stand out to me was recurrent expenditure.
When breaking it down, it seemed quite obvious that over 99 per cent of the supplementary appropriation is recurrent expenditure, and in some cases those increases are as high as a third of the original recurrent expenditure in our national budget or even over 70 per cent as in the case of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

While some of these may be anomalies due to actions taken post-budget as it relates to negotiations with unions, back payment, salaries, gratuities, increase in the minimum wage, et cetera, as the Minister alluded to, apart from those that accounted for the majority of the increases there are a couple of these I would like to highlight, what might have been overlooked in my opinion.

Moving on to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. The supplementary appropriation provides for a whopping 71 per cent increase in the recurrent expenditure for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. Energy industries from the original provision of approximately $801 million all of which is to settle a part of the outstanding areas for the sale of petroleum products owning to NP and Unipet. This subsidy is not a new mechanism so it left me a bit inquisitive, but I would like to thank the honourable energy Minister for making it clear that the appropriation was purposefully left out of the original budget. But is this regularly done or was this created mainly for this situation based on the information at that time? While this has been stated as part payment of the arrears, can the Minister inform us, what is the full amount of the arrears to be settled for that period of 2022 and 2023? What, if any part, of the payment has been paid prior to this in the supplementary appropriation?

Moving on to the Ministry of Public Utilities. The supplementary appropriation for this Ministry is half a billion dollars, all of which is allocated
towards recurrent expenditure and represents a 20 per cent increase on the original allocation in October 2023, approximately $358 million of this is related to staff costs, salaries, wage, payrolls, et cetera, and the other $164 million is attributed to the USD RBL loan. Regarding the USD RBL loan, was it already in effect in October last year? If so, under what circumstances was the repayment of the principal and interest for sum stated in the supplementary appropriation? In a similar vein regarding the $358 million in staff-related cost, can the Minister give us some insight as to what contributed to this increase? Why it was not able to be anticipated given that it is part of the recurrent expenditure?—therefore an expense that WASA should be able to anticipate based on similar commitments in previous years?

Moving on to projected increase in the deficit. In October 2023, the budgeted deficit was less than 3 per cent of GDP based on the Minister’s presentation. Now we are learning that it is actually closer to 5.4 per cent of this fiscal. My main concern is, what is our plan? Where do we anticipate opportunities to mitigate the impact of the deficit before it evaporates any benefits of the growth that has been reported in the past year? The Minister projected an increase in the deficit to around $9 billion, twice of what was originally projected.

The Minister referred to a combination of prudent management combined with a turnaround in the energy prices to eventually reverse the deficit, but in my opinion, now correct me if I am wrong, the Government as the biggest spender in the nation, cutting spending by what would have to be billions, I would say, can lead to significant contraction in economic activity. While I hope that the Minister’s projections for energy prices improve as stated, and do I believe that the Minister is well-equipped to make such projections, surely this cannot be all we are
hoping on and all we are hanging our hats on especially for years to come. You see, I have not seen any allocation towards creating new income or diversity, so this is why I state, this is why I say that.

Now do not misunderstand me, I still believe that there are many families who have not bounced back from the economic hit of COVID-19, and I am referring to those who are at the bottom of the barrel, living under the breadline. Our people are quite resilient so we manage very well. It might be hard to tell when we are under pressure, but I ask on their behalf that you do not take their resilience for granted, because I understand that the Bill must be fit, but please pay attention to which sector of the society is going to pay this and how you do it. So, thank you.

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

**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, for recognizing me and for the opportunity to join this debate which is well worn. We have had a series of contributions, but, Mr. President, maybe I really should begin where the last speaker ended, and I want very clearly to commend the contribution just made by the Sen. Helon Francis.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** I thought it was quite thought-provoking. He is not one to speak very frequently in this Chamber, but this particular contribution was less irrelevant than many others that have graced the Hansard today.

[Laughter] I say that with all respect to his colleagues on the Independent Bench.
Mr. President, I am not going to be very lengthy, but I do want to make the observation that on the Lower Bench, the members of the United National Congress, I found their submissions today in this budget to be particularly unpersuasive, and this is against the backdrop of their normal modus operandi particularly unpersuasive today and we could account, we can blame many factors for this, and I would not want to speculate too far, but it is my view that there is a fundamental and surprising in some cases because there are experienced Members there, a fundamental misreading and misunderstanding of what we are dealing with in this debate. Fundamental, and I will touch on that a little bit further, but I singled out Sen. Francis, I believe, Sen. Richards and Sen. Patasar as well have given some food for thought, as well as other Independent Senators. I certainly want to commend the Minister of Finance and all other contributions of the Government Bench—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:—which really added substance to the debate and the population’s understanding of what the Government is doing and proposes to do with these supplemental allocations, and some insight into the work being undertaken in the sectors across Trinidad and Tobago.

But one of the things we tend to listen out for in debates like this is areas of dispute, Mr. President. I was listening keenly especially when Members of the Lower Bench were speaking to be able to identify Heads of allocation with which there was some dispute. I was listening for Sen. Mark or what was his name?—Sen. Gosine or any of them to say, “ah ha, this is an area that the Minister of Finance is seeking approval for a supplemental allocation and we disagree with that. We fundamentally disagree. Do not approve that sum of money.” I could
not identify any across this debate. What was surprising to me was that there were several areas that arose in which Members of the Lower Bench wanted supplemental allocations in an increased amount to what the Minister of Finance was submitting. So if I am to follow the logic of those submissions, Mr. President, it is very likely that the Members of that Bench will be supporting this Bill today. So I am just presenting it as logically.

So, I can give a few examples, 47/011/02, National Schools Dietary Services Limited. They did not say do not approve a supplemental allocation on that line Item. What they said is that they want more to be approved. Fine. 02/04/39, Drugs and Related Supplies, they did not say, do not give the Ministry of Health a supplemental allocation. They wanted more to go into that aspect. Fuel subsidy, well that was an interesting contribution. 04/007/01, they wanted more allocation for the fuel subsidy in Trinidad and Tobago. Well, I think the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries really put some keen perspective on that warped approach by the United National Congress, and there were several other examples. I could not identify a single allocation, supplemental allocation as proposed by the Minister of Finance where there was any disagreement. So, there you have it, Mr. President.

I want to get to what I feel and unfortunately it goes beyond the Lower Bench and there were one or two Members of the Upper Bench, the Independent Bench, when I listened carefully I thought they misread the field of play completely, and there seemed to be a mentality that this is a mini budget debate.

Mr. Imbert: A full.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Well, some thought it was a full one, a mini budget debate or a budget debate of sorts. One should be able to take this
two-paged Bill and take this brief opportunity by a Minister of Finance to pilot these allocations and somehow extrapolate a development plan and budgetary vision and forecast for economic growth and trajectory, et cetera. Mr. President, I do not know what is the shortest budget debate we have had in this country, but it certainly was not 40 minutes I would think. Normally it is hours and hours.

Then these supplemental allocations, Mr. President, I want to make it very clear, it was not the Minister of Finance waking up one day and saying in and of himself, let me come to the Parliament, let me come to the Senate and reshape the allocations for 2024. No. It was government Ministries in implementing their work programmes for this year, identifying specific and particular areas in which the initial allocation was deemed to be insufficient and approaching the Minister of Finance, who then with his public servants would have had a process of analysis elimination, swatting away as he rightly may do from time to time refining which results in this very frugal, very focused, highly accountable list of specific Heads of expenditure which would be increased.

10.15 p.m.

So to expect that—to be a Minister and sort of trying to blame the Minister of Finance of not painting a development picture with this, it is really an upside down. It is an absurdity, Mr. President, because this is the opposite approach. This is not the Minister of Finance coming to the Government with some change of vision. This is the sectors, the Ministries, requesting of the Minister very particular areas of increase. So, I really thought the bar that was set in some of those contributions may be relevant in a budget debate, maybe later in the year, but were misplaced completely in today’s debate and I want to free the Minister of Finance of that illogical and unnecessary and somewhat misleading burden, that was
attempted to be placed his shoulders. It really is irrelevant to today’s debate.

A very quick comment, Mr. President. As I said earlier, I listened closely to Sen. Patasar, another one who does not speak every day and does not speak very loudly, but there were some themes there that resonated. I heard a theme of self-governance, which is important, not just directed at any Government or political party but I think it is important for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a theme that the Prime Minister and others have been carrying as well, the need for individuals in Trinidad and Tobago to be better governors of their own behaviour, their own attitudes, and that applies at all levels, including at the level of the leadership.

Another point that she made that I thought that had great value is that we have built international confidence, which I thought was a compliment to the work being done by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. But, she had a little twist to that, maybe it is time to put some more effort in building national confidence, speaking to mobilizing the population, et cetera. We listened to those types of submissions. But, Mr. President, that call, that ask, is really tough when you have an Opposition such as this one, sitting day after day in deliberate concerted effort to mislead the population of Trinidad and Tobago, where there is consistent and concerted effort to misconstrue every single programme, every single intervention, every single activity to a negative. There is this toxic spray that is being placed across the population, and unfortunately, there appears to be some elements of the media, not all, some elements of the media that have been part and parcel of a very negative campaign, really detached from the actual reality. So, it is an important call, but it is very difficult in the current and national landscape, Mr. President.

Then to add the icing on that bitter cake, you have Senators, one who is
smiling right now with his eyes closed, he is probably dreaming of somewhere or something else. My friend Sen. Wade Mark, in one of the most irresponsible contributions I have ever heard in this Red House in its history, standing here calling for unrest and civil disturbance, and national disorder, et cetera, et cetera, on a very simple two page supplementary Appropriation Bill, finding room for all of those odious calls to the national population, Mr. President. I really wonder how is one to build national confidence with that kind of approach from the Bench opposite to us. It was very, very disappointing, even for Sen. Mark, even given his record on the *Hansard*, to have come here in this debate and make those kinds of calls, Mr. President. I want to condemn that approach. I want to advise citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that as far as we on this Bench are concerned, a higher standard is incumbent on this Senate than that.

Mr. President, Sen. Mark went a little further and he tried to use this debate to further what seems to be—well he has many conspiracy theories that he harbours, and feeds, and nurture, and trots out from time to time. But he tried to use this debate to further one of his newer fresher conspiracy theory, something about generic drugs, something about generic drugs. This was not the first time he has come. He thought he found a convenient avenue to slip that in here and I heard something about—was it prostate drugs? *[Laughter]* Not he, I do not want to be facetious, people are not able to get the generics, they are only getting the brand name.

It was very unclear, but what was clear is that the Senator was able to present, or chose to present not one shred of evidence to support the conspiracy theories that he was sprouting. Not one piece of evidence of anything being done untoward at NIPDEC or any other agency of the Ministry of Health. Then he took
it further, and I commend the Attorney General for treating with this to some extent. The Senator took it further into a smear attack against the Chief Medical Officer of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Roshan Parasram. I want to say that, without fear of contradiction, there is not a single Member on that Bench or who has ever sat on a UNC Bench, who is worth 1,000th of the professionalism of our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Parasram.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Ever in their history. He is an exemplar, a non-political exemplar in front of the children of Trinidad and Tobago and in front of every citizen. Not self-absorbed and everything is me, me, me. His interest is in the Ministry of Health and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to tell Sen. Mark we need more like him, not less like him. So let us not discourage those who serve Trinidad and Tobago selflessly. Worse yet, he is not here to defend himself, so let us be far more judicious with our approach.

Sen. Roberts, not worth spending much time on, but he made a comment which I though was very curious, seeking a foray against the tourism and the culture sector. He said something along these lines, I do not want to misquote him. “Carnival has been around a long time, diversification means new revenue streams.” Carnival has been around a long time so— In other words talking about Carnival, is not talking about diversification because Carnival has been here for generations, so diversification along the lines of that twisted logic is something brand new. Mr. President, I think at some point we are going to have to confront the UNC’s unproductive thinking and philosophy around this word “diversification” and they confused some columnists, they have certainly confused their activists, and some people in the national community. So it is really a cloud
and we cannot be using these terms without being a lot more particular and specific. So diversification means new revenue streams and a new revenue stream, by his definition, has nothing to do with Carnival. Mr. President, I want to say to the contrary, Trinidad and Tobago is a small developing country, we are not a super power but we have super powers.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: No, no, listen, listen. It is your turn to listen Sen Mark. One of those—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:—one of those powers. Mr. President, I am not going to let him interrupt me.

10.25 p.m.

One of those powers is the power of creativity, and we will not allow any negative commentary or philosophy from that unfortunate Bench to affect the enthusiasm of the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:—and the stakeholders in our creative sector from doing exactly what this Government is seeking to fertilize and nourish, which is a flourishing of the Carnival sector and creativity.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: That is diversification. You do not have to create something new. Carnival is there, use it, expand it, strengthen it, encourage other participants in the economic bounty that is unfolding from effective implementation of the Minister’s programmes. That is diversification.
Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: No, he is not. Mr. President, I am going to curtail. Then I heard the grand opus, the final point of Sen. Roberts, who is, of course, not in the Chamber, “The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs should have asked for supplementary funding to put pans in our missions overseas.”


Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: And then he ran out of the Chamber. The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs should have asked—approached this Minister of Finance and asked for supplemental funding to put pans in our missions overseas. Well, I tell you. Mr. President, just to correct the record, in case any unfortunate soul would seek to believe anything Sen. Roberts would say—

Hon. Senator: [ Interruption]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:—we have 20 overseas missions. We have pans in the overseas missions of Trinidad and Tobago, the continents across the globe.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, our staff members are patriots of Trinidad and Tobago. Pan is featured in our programming, in our Independence Day events at the missions when they are hosting other stakeholders. We have pans on display, we have pan art on the wall, we play pan music in the missions when there are events. Pannists in the diaspora come out and plan pan, et cetera. It is all around, because it is the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are proud of it.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: So we do not need any fly-by-night commentary about putting pans in the missions. We do not need the Minister of Finance to, in his difficult task of frugal management of our country’s revenues, to be putting some supplemental appropriation to put pans in missions, because pans are already there and are being effectively used in our diplomatic efforts to brand Trinidad and Tobago positively.

I will go further, Mr. President—and I thought the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts would have mentioned it, but in his modesty he may have avoided it. This year, we will be celebrating, on August the 11th, World Steelpan Day.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: This is not something simple, Mr. President, this is something very profound, and I heard in the public space a lot of—there were commentators saying, “Well, look the UN recognized the pan, what about Trinidad and Tobago?” Minister, you have heard that? “Look the UN recognized the pan, what about Trinidad?” Mr. President, this was not the UN waking up one day and recognizing the pan, this was a Trinidad and Tobago resolution, nourished, nurtured, crafted, campaigned, effected by our people, our staff, patriots of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: And I want to go further just in capping out this point of pan in the missions, and how patriotic our staff is in advancing these programmes, and all contributing to diversification. I want to credit one of the architects of that resolution—the Minister knows who she is—a young Hindu practitioner, a young lady, a dedicated foreign service officer at one of our
missions overseas who crafted that resolution and who was really one of the authors of the campaign working with other countries, working with other regions to ensure that the support around the globe was almost unanimous. It is one of the empathic resolutions that has now matured to a place on the global calendar, August the 11th, Trinidad and Tobago, with our flag, World Steelpan Day. So do not come here and tell me about pans in the missions, it is there.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** And the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts went up to New York, did you not?

**Sen. Mitchell:** Yes.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** And heralded this triumph on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And this year, Sen. Roberts, if he is around, will be a witness to profound celebrations in capitals all around the world, including the capital of this Republic, Port of Spain, on World Steelpan Day. Okay, Mr. President, I have made a lot out of that, but it was very important to put some of these things on the record. And again, it speaks to—and sometimes when we attack our public servants and foreign service officers, it is not PNM that you are treating with, it is patriotic, hard-working citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, who are doing their best for our culture, who are doing their best for our economy, who are doing their best for diplomacy of Trinidad and Tobago, which is paying dividends for this nation, Mr. President. Okay. And just as a reminder, there is a Bill that is now in the Parliament—

**Sen. Mitchell:** Yes.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:**—so all of those nay-sayers—and I do not want to
criticize them, some of them are best meaning and passionate souls, but they just want that proclamation, they want that Bill. Mr. President, the Government, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet has listened, and that is in effect and happening. Stay tuned, you are going to hear from the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts very soon.

Very quickly, Mr. President, Sen. Nakhid took to his legs and he spent a lot of time on his legs but it appeared, to me, it was all couched to deliver a one-liner. All of that you heard, and shouting, and ranting, and raving was all a facade around a one-liner, an opportunity to deliver a one-liner, and you know, Mr. President, it was so disappointing. That one-liner was not directed at the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It was not directed at the Minister of Finance. It was not directed at this Bench opposite to him. You know who it was directed at, Mr. President? It is on the *Hansard* record. It was a partisan attack directed against their own Member of Parliament for Mayaro—

**Hon. Senator:** Tragic.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Tragic, Mr. President—in a serious debate, a glib one-liner directed against a UNC elected MP talking about PNM B team; PNM B team.

**Hon. Senator:** Wow!

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, I want to say this Senate is not for that. That is not why we are here. The Senate is not for that. This Bill is not for that kind of conduct. And my advice to Sen. Mark and his colleagues, treat your Members better than that, treat them with some respect, treat them with some dignity and care.

**Sen. Mark:** Tell that to Rowley.
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, may I be heard in silence?

Sen. Lyder: Tell that to Rowley.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: Members. Member. Members, all right. Okay. Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: No, Sen. Mark. Continue.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Disrespectful. Thank you, Mr. President. And again, just like with the Chief Medical Officer, you know what, Mr. President? The MP for Mayaro is not here to defend himself, and that is characteristic of a cowardly political—

Hon. Senator: Cowardice.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:—cowardice in the politics, where you are picking on people who are not even present to defend themselves and crafting an agenda. “Ohhh”.

Mr. President, I am not going to dwell on Sen. Maharaj, except to observe, Mr. President, with all respect, that to my ear, there were several very political comments within her contribution. It was brief.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, there were several—

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, there were several—it is my Observation, there were several—and I will give one example.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: I would give one example, Mr. President. The comment that I heard:

I see…

—and I am quoting as best as I could:

I see roads being paved now and in one day, rain falls and the pitch is gone.

Mr. Imbert: Gouged down.

Sen. Mark: It is true. It is true.

Mr. Imbert: Nonsense. Nonsense.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, when is this observation made—I am asking very specifically—and which road was that, and was this observation shared with the Minister of Works and Transport?

Sen. Sinanan: [Inaudible]

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Hon. Senators: [ Interruption]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: I tell you. Anyway, Mr. President, I have made my—

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: Right—

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: What kind of conduct is this?

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Again, we are almost at the end and these outbursts are only adding time.

Sen. Mark: You know why?

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Continue.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, every Member who stands in any
debate in this Chamber must know that assertions made are subject to challenge, and no Member is immune from that. And it is a classic act of UNC political hypocrisy to talk about anyone attacking an Independent Senator, when we passed a Motion in this Senate defending Independent Senators from the most deplorable attacks, political attacks, right here in the Red House, so do not come to tell us about that.

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

**Sen. Mark:** [Inaudible] You should apologize.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark, I am on my legs, one. Two, I do not know who you are shouting at.

[Sen. Mark points finger]

**Mr. President:** No, do not point.

**Sen. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Disrespectful.

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

**Sen. Mark:** [Inaudible]

**Mr. President:** It does not matter, do not do it. Continue.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Thank you, Mr. President. The nation was witness to it. We were not even talking about a debate, it was a vote of the Electoral College, and even as each Independent Senator would have voted, there was the most deplorable conduct taking place, personal direct attacks, in violation, not just of the Standing Orders, of oaths of office, and any—what is it?—any code of decency, and the basic respect that we should afford each other, Minister, basic respect. Anyway, Mr. President, I am not going to make heavy weather of it, but Sen. Mark asked for that response in his foolish crosstalk.

**Sen. Mark:** [Inaudible]
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, as other colleagues have done, I want to spend the next two minutes treating with the $9.182 million that has been prudently identified by the Minister of Finance as appropriate by way of supplementary allocation for the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs. Very quickly, there are four areas covered, one, severance benefits to locally recruited staff of one of our High Commissions, which is in London, England. Again, Sen. Mark could not help himself, without a thread of evidence—with no evidence whatsoever, threw up a spurious assertion that there is undercounting—again, another area where he thought there should be more allocation because it is under-calculation—something like that.

I mean, really, really beneath the standard of any Senate on earth. But I want to say that these severance—the calculation of these severance benefits is not made by Minister Browne, with a calculator, sitting down somewhere. These computations are done by the missions themselves, so the London Mission would have done the calculations, which is provided to headquarters via official worksheet, which are certified against pay record cards and contract terms and conditions of employment. These figures are checked, double-checked and verified at headquarters, and then audited, and then approved for payment by the Permanent Secretary, the distinguished Permanent Secretary and head of the foreign service once funds are available. And if funds are not available against such a request, which can arise from time to time, an approach is made to the Ministry of Finance for same. So unless Sen. Mark, in his mailbox or whatever elements of apparatus he has, is able to present any evidence that anyone is being under-accounted for, I will have to dismiss his comments as just empty politics and rhetoric. So one area was severance benefits.
10.40 p.m.

Another area, Mr. President, very quickly, was repairs and maintenance of buildings at headquarters and overseas. And again, Sen. Mark could not help himself, this time he asked a question at least. It was not a—maybe there was an inference, but it was not as bad as the other comment. He asked a question too, challenging an explanation as to which of these projects are facilities that are owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and which of them are on lease properties. Sen. Mark is that an accurate reflection of your query?

Well, Mr. President, I am to say that there are 10 properties for which this supplementary allocation is destined. Let me give it to you very, very, directly. The official residence of the permanent representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago: Number one, the official residence in Brussels, Belgium, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; number two, the official residences in Washington DC, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, number three; number four, the residence of the Head of Chancery Washington DC, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; the Chancery in Washington DC, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; the Chancery in Ottawa, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; the Chancery in Jamaica, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; the staff residence in New York for financial attaché, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; the official residents of the High Commissioner to London, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; the staff residents in Pretoria, South Africa, owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is nine, Mr. President, and number 10, is at the Chancery in Abuja, but that is not infrastructure work to the building. That is a
lease property and it is simply for the purchase of a generator.

It is simply for the purchase of a generator given the electrical—who has been to that country?—some of the electrical fluctuations in the capital and the need for support for our staff. So there is no wastage, there is no spending money on buildings owned by anybody else or whatever the—

**Mr. President:** Minister you have five more minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:**—whatever the elusion was, these are properties that are in the main and almost in totality owned by the Government. And the benefits of the infrastructure were being funded by the Ministry of Health and its allocation will redound to the benefit of the current holders of office at those missions and future holders of office, whoever they might be.

Mr. President, and then the other area to benefit from this supplemental allocation is the IT infrastructure of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs. And I will offer for the purposes of the public record what we would be spending that money on. It is very, very, I would say, frugal and efficient application of these supplemental funds with the kind assistance and expertise of the Ministry of Digital Transformation. We have ensured that all the IT expenditure and upgrades will be done according to the best possible specification. So, for the sums being provided we will be getting 85 desktop computers, 65 at headquarters and 20 at an overseas mission; 35 laptops, 25 at headquarters, 10 at overseas missions; four servers; 40 other items for networking; one firewall; 41 communication devices and these will be utilized both in Port of Spain and at our 20 overseas missions, Mr. President.

So I have given an account as is the norm and expected in these contributions of the prudent allocation that we are seeking to have approved, Mr.
Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne (cont’d)

President. I really want to end by once again commending the Minister of Finance for his very strategic piloting of this Bill and I look forward to the emphatic endorsement by this Senate, of this 2024 supplementary appropriation Bill and for us as Senators to move on to other business in the good service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: I thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. President. At 10.45 p.m. there are a number of matters that I need to deal with because we on this side certainly cannot depend on the editorial committees in the media to publish the facts and to publish the correct interpretation of matters, we certainly cannot. And you see, Mr. President, one of the things that I learnt when I was first elected in 1991, I received a honeymoon of about 48 hours and I wondered why. And after a lot of investigations and discussions it was because the PNM had been in office for 30 uninterrupted years, 30 uninterrupted years. So that we in the PNM are not given the honeymoon that other people are given.

In addition, the fact that the People’s National Movement was able to win elections consistently, from 1956 right up to 1981, gives the sense that the PNM is literally unbeatable, is extremely powerful, can recover from any defeat, and you saw that in 1991 where the PNM was reduced to three seats and bounced back to win 21 seats out of 36. Many people thought that was impossible. So that because we are being so successful as a political party and a government, and because the Opposition is so weak, has no intellectual capacity, is fragmented, is always
dissolving, breaking up, mashing up—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—they cannot last, they cannot last, they may win an election when they all come together and then they disintegrate and then the PNM comes back in again. And there are people in this country looking on at this phenomenon, where Opposition parties, they “cyah” last more than one term.

This particular Government is on its second term, well into its second term, and we are looking forward to a third one as well. And I have heard all the “ole” talk here in 2015 and in 2020, I heard them, time to call election now! If we call it, we will win. And this is one of the problems that we have.

So, I have observed from my—I have been in public life now, I have been elected since December of 1991. I am going on 35 years in politics and I have looked at the media very carefully. And the media in my opinion has come to the conclusion that the Opposition is so weak that they must present themselves as the official Opposition. So that I know, I know—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—that whatever we say here is not going to be presented properly and therefore it is my duty on live television to explain to those who are watching exactly what is really going on.

**Hon. Senators:** [Crosstalk and laughter]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Now, I observed a build-up—

**Hon. Senators:** They are so weak.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes, I know how it is, the Opposition is so weak that the reporters figure they have to protect you and build you up and lift you up, because you cannot win on your own, you need help. And I have looked on for the last
couple months and I have seen this build-up to the supplementary appropriation Bill.

In the budget debate the Minister of Finance is allowed unlimited time, and I usually speak for about three and a half hours, and I delivered a speech as it is about 140 pages long. And even in that three and a half hour presentation, with that 140 pages speech, people complained that I did not talk about this and I did not talk about that, three and a half hours, eh, but “ah” did not talk about their particular interest. How on earth can a typical budget presentation, which takes three and a half hours, and then a budget debate that goes for 21 days, with a five-day examination of Heads of Expenditure, 21 days from the time it is read to the time it comes to the Senate for the third day for the wrap up, three weeks, and the budget itself, the budget presentation is three and a half hours.

How on earth, can one compress 21 days and a three and a half hour budget presentation, in addition to the fact that every budget that I have presented I have laid 10 budget documents on the table of the Parliament. Hundreds of pages, Public Sector Investment Programme, medium term economic framework, Tobago Public Sector Investment Programme, Estimates of Revenue, Estimates of Expenditure, Estimates of Statutory Authorities, 10 budget documents, hundreds of pages are laid on—they want me to do all that in 40 minutes?

So I am looking at how the media is building up this thing, the mid-year review. The Minister must talk about value added tax, he must talk about refunds, he must talk about the development programme, he must talk about new sources of revenue. I do all of that in 40 minutes? It is ridiculous. But I see the build-up and then they go and they ask economist from the university, what should the Minister talk about? And then now you get a whole shopping list of what the Minister is

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supposed to talk about in 40 minutes. It is impossible, because it would be an insult to the other place and this place if I did not explain the supplementations of appropriation. That is what we are doing here today.

We are seeking supplementation of a number of Heads of Expenditure. Am I supposed to take this Bill and throw it away and do not speak about the supplementation to the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health? “Doh” talk about that, do not talk about the matter that is to be debated and talk instead about, let us talk about a macro view, some kind of intellectual forum about what is happening in Trinidad. It is impossible, it is totally impossible. This is not what this is all about.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: But the media creates this myth, the Minister must talk about this and he must talk about that and he must give an account of everything. How on earth am I doing that in 40 minutes? It is just impossible.

So, I know it would happen next year too, you know. Same thing, the media knowing fully well that the Minister of Finance only has 40 minutes to talk, he does not have three and a half hours to talk, he is does not have 10 budget documents to lay, he does not have 21 days of debate to participate in and five days of a Standing Finance Committee, where we go for 10 hours a day, every day, examine every single Head of Expenditure, explain every single one. It is impossible.

So I just want to let people who are watching know, because what they do as well, they go to all the chambers which are run by UNC activist and do not, Mr. President, I know them, you know, they have UNC chambers run by UNC politicians. I have seen these so called chambers of commerce where literally you
have a councillor from a UNC corporation is the President of the chamber. You are calling that an independent neutral organization? So they go to all these little Chambers that have sprung up all over the place, that are populated by UNC activists and what should the Minister say, and after the Minister, “oh”, he did not talk about this and he did not talk about that. I see the whole set-up coming. I see it a mile away, a mile away, a set up.

So, with my 40 minutes let me just deal with some issues, because the other thing that astonishes me, Trinidad is a unique place, you know. Only in Trinidad and Tobago, can an individual who has presided over a $400 million rape of the treasury, where people were murdered, where people had to flee the country, could be giving me “ole” talk in the Senate today. Only in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Wow.

Hon. C. Imbert: This is a country—I do not know. I wonder about our values. The Prime Minister spoke about things that do not occur in this Government. One of the things that does not occur in this Government is fake papers, fake, fake degrees from fake universities. We do not do that on this side. We do not do that on this side and we do not take taxpayers’ money and give it to criminals. We do not do it on this side. And it is amazing that people can come into the public domain with this kind of baggage and they are embraced by certain sectors of the community. It is shocking, but let me just deal with some issues now.

10.55 p.m.

I heard today, the continuous refrain, complete untruth, that Petrotrin refinery was a net earner of foreign exchange. Nonsense! Absolute nonsense. If you go and you read the financial statements of the refinery, the refinery was losing between US $3 and US $8 on every single barrel of oil that it processed.
Losing $3 to $8 on every single barrel of oil it processed and it had to import 100,000 barrels. So if you lose an average of US $4 on every one of them, 100,000 barrels, that you process and the local crude as well, another 30,000/40,000 barrels. So you are losing US $4 on 140,000 barrels of oil every single day, work out how much foreign exchange you have lost. You have lost over US $100 million in foreign exchange. That was what was happening with the refinery. It was a net loser of foreign exchange. It was inefficient. It lost money on every barrel of oil it converted into gasoline and diesel.

Where Petrotrin was earning foreign exchange is oil production and we separated the company. We took the money loser and we shut it down, and we kept the money earner. So you now have Heritage which is earning over a billion dollars a year in profits—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert:—paying its taxes, paying royalties. That was not happening before because the refinery was losing so much money that the money earner had to subsidize the money loser. This is a myth that is continuously perpetuated its nonsense, utter nonsense.

Petrotrin had to import 100,000 barrels of oil a day and they did not buy that with TT dollars. And as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has pointed out, when they pay all those US dollars for that imported oil that they lose money on every barrel, they then had to sell it in TT dollars. So you are losing US dollars every time you process a barrel of oil and you are only getting TT dollars for the refined product. How on earth could the refinery be a net earner of foreign exchange? It is absurd, but we have to listen to this rubbish.

Then there was something else that the UNC is just so good at that I had to
go to my sources, and, Mr. President, if I am out of line I will just change the narrative. In Nazi Germany there was something and the German word for it is *große Lüge*. That translates into the big lie.

**Sen. Dr. Browne:** That is the UNC self.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** And the big lie in Nazi Germany was:

> “…a gross distortion or misrepresentation of the truth primarily used as a political propaganda technique.”

It was first used by Adolf Hitler in his book *Mein Kampf* to describe how people would be induced to believe so colossal a lie because they would not believe that somebody would have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. That is them. That is the UNC. That is them.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** That is them. They are masters of the big untruths.

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*]—lie right through, the PNM.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Mr. President?

**Mr. President:** So again—

**Sen. Mark:** He cannot—

**Mr. President:** No, no, no, no. Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark! Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]—example of it in the 21st Century. The term has been applied to the attempt to overthrow the result of the 2020 US presidential election, where Donald Trump urged his supporters to storm the Capitol because according to him he won the election. It is a classic example of the political propaganda technique, the big untruth or the big lie it is called. Yes, they are masters at that. And that is why every time I come in this Senate I have to listen to all of the hon. Senators on the Lower Bench spewing untruth, after untruth, after
untruth, and they just say it as if it means nothing to them.

**Sen. Mark:** But you are a master of that.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Let me give you an example. Sen. Roberts shouted out when he was screaming that they left the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund with US $7.6 billion and we have reduced it down to just about $5 billion. That is the big untruth. The truth is the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund had US $5.6 billion on September the 11th, 2015 when this PNM Cabinet was sworn in, and it currently has a US $5.8 billion in it. So it has more now that it had then.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Sen. Roberts also told us about school feeding, about how they were providing 76,000 meals and we are only providing 54,000 meals. When in truth and in fact, go on the National Schools Dietary website right now, go into the accounts of the PA(E)C—which I understand is chaired by Sen. Mark—and you will see that the school feeding programme has reported to them in the Opposition that it provides 79,000 lunches every single day. But you see that is just the untruth or the big lie as you call it. A Nazi propaganda technique.

You just tell untruths that are so colossal that nobody would think well that cannot be lying. That had to be true. That is the technique that Adolf Hitler used, and that is how Adolf Hitler convinced Germans to kill Jews and started the holocaust because he made them believe a colossal untruth, a colossal lie.

**Hon. Senator:** Joseph Goebbels.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes, Joseph Goebbels. That is right. And I go now to the current big untruth.

The Leader of the Opposition has been waving a document for the last couple days, and Sen. Mark at the end of his shouting and screaming referred to it
and repeated the untruths uttered by the Leader of the Opposition, that the PNM Government has made a decision and intends to proceed to increase a whole myriad of taxes. Total untruth, figment of their imagination, fabrication, and you see they cannot produce the Cabinet decision to that effect. They cannot produce a recommendation to that effect because it does not exist.

For the last 50 years in the Ministry of Finance the public servants will routinely do calculations for the Minister of Finance for the last 50 years, and I have a document in front of me. What this document does, it does a calculation about how much revenue the Government will lose if it reduces a particular tax by 1 per cent, and how much revenue the Government will earn if it increases a particular tax by 1 per cent. In this document, it says that if you reduce the rate of VAT by 1 per cent the loss of revenue to the Government is $560 million per year, but if you increase the rate of VAT by 1 per cent the gain to the Government is $560 million a year.

So throughout this document it says, if there is a decrease by this, this is how much money you lose; if you increase by that, that is how much money you earn. That is what the document says, and I am proud to be part of a Government that reduced Value Added Tax from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am using this same document that the Leader of the Opposition has been waving all over the place, aiding and abetted by Sen. Mark the screamer. We have given up $1.4 billion in tax revenue every year since we have been elected for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** That is the effect of reducing VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per
cent. We have given up $1.4 billion.

Sen. Mark: We expose “yuh”.

Hon. C. Imbert: And you see there they go again, the big untruth. I challenge the Opposition, produce the Cabinet Minute, produce the Cabinet decision, produce the recommendation from the Minister of Finance to increase any taxes in Trinidad and Tobago because it does not exist. You cannot. You are full of hot air. So anyway, Mr. President, let me move on.

Hon. Senator: Adolf Eichmann.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, it is just part of their political propaganda technique. I remember last year, just before the budget, I had to open a newspaper to see that we are going to introduce a millionaire tax. It is the same stupidity. Because every year the public servants will make proposals and this Government, and I as Minister of Finance, will reject 99 per cent of those proposals. Because what we have done instead—and this big untruth that they keep pushing about tax, tax, tax—

Sen. Mark: “Eh Imbert, we ketch you boy.”

Hon. C. Imbert:—let me tell you what the facts are. “You ketch yuh self.” Let me tell you what the facts are—

Sen. Mark: “We ketch you with yuh pants down.”

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President. Mr. President—

Mr. President: All right. So the Minister has just over 20-plus minutes again. Let us get to the end of this procedure. Continue, Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: And it is the level of delusion that I cannot understand. I think—Prof. Hutchinson, is he here? He needs to evaluate the Lower Bench; they are delusional. We in this Government have increased the personnel allowance
from $60,000 a year to $90,000 a year. That is what we have done in the last eight years.

What that has done, it means that when we came in persons who were earning $5,000 a month or less were exempt from income tax, and we increased that from $5,000, to $6,000, to $7,000, to now $7,500. So we have exempted 300,000 taxpayers who earn $7,500 a month or less from income tax. That is what we have done. We have reduced the level of tax for 300,000 ordinary taxpayers in this country. But because they are proponents of the big untruth they take a reduction in tax and they make it an increase in tax.

**Hon. Senator:** Imagine this thing.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** That is what they do and that is what we have to deal with.

**Sen. Mark:** You do not have a Cabinet Note to that effect, man. You do not have a Cabinet Note to that effect?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Nonsense! Produce it.

**Sen. Mark:** Look it here.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Produce it. Show me. Produce it. Where is the Minute? Where is the recommendation? Produce it.

**Mr. President:** So Sen. Mark, it is okay. Minister of Finance, do not—

**Sen. Mark:** [Inaudible]

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark, please do not brandish the paper. You are well—

**Sen. Mark:** [Inaudible]

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark! Sen. Mark—Minister of Finance—put down the piece of paper. Minister of Finance, do not encourage him please.

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter]

**Mr. President:** Continue.
Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, on a point of order, Standing Order 52(2). It has been repeatedly violated.

Mr. President: Okay. I think given the hour, you know, that particular Standing Order which really speaks to Members taking a seat when the Chair is on their legs. Like I said, given the hour everybody is tired so we will just follow the Standing Orders as we normally do. Minister of Finance, continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President, it is also childish. If you have a document bring it. Now the other big untruth that they perpetuate is that when the UNC was in Government they never had a supplementary appropriation Bill. I went and checked the records while they were talking their nonsense and, in 2010, they bought a supplementary appropriation Bill to add $1.75 billion to the original budget; in 2011, they had a supplementary appropriation Bill adding $2.7 billion to the original budget; in 2012, they add $1.5 billion in a supplementary appropriation; in 2013, $2.9 billion in a supplementary appropriation; in 2014, $3.8 billion in a supplementary appropriation. Let me tell you something, Mr. President. That is when oil was over $100 you know—over $100. Every single year that they were in Government, they presented a supplementary appropriation Bill. And I must compliment Sen. Helon Francis. That was an excellent, excellent contribution.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: Excellent. I must compliment Sen. Dr. Paul Richards who has a real PhD. That was an excellent contribution. Excellent. From a real university—

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert:—supervised by real people.

11.10 p.m.
Sen. Dr. Browne: You are disagreeing?

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President, this is the gayelle. “If yuh do not want powder, doh play mas”.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]—we are playing the mas with you. We are throwing powder—[Inaudible]

Hon. C. Imbert: So I really must congratulate Sen. Helon Francis, and again, some of the questions asked, it is because of the misreporting of statements made in debates by Members of the Government.

With respect to WASA, we have tried for years to transform WASA, but just like Revenue Authority, I have—I cannot remember how many times I have had to defeat the UNC in court over the Revenue Authority. It must be about seven times. It had interlocutory matters going all the way to the Privy Council, High Court, Court of Appeal. I do not know how many times. Since July 2022, I have been fighting against the UNC in court over the Revenue Authority. That is what they do. And I heard an Independent Senator talking about, “You must not complain because people are going to court.” I must complain. Look the Attorney General spoke about 60—how many lawsuits it was?


Hon. C. Imbert: Fifty-one.


Hon. C. Imbert: And you know, some of these things, you cannot recover cost from them, you know. The PNM won all the election petitions in 2015. The UNC owes the PNM $20 million; $20 million in legal fees. They would not pay a cent; them, the UNC. They lost every one of them. They incurred a bill of $20 million and they would not pay one cent. Eight years now we are trying to get a
proper assessments of cost in those election petitions, but we must not talk about that? I will talk about that every day, these frivolous lawsuits where people do not want to pay legal costs.

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

**Sen. Mark:** We will defend ourselves every time.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** “Yuh loss”.

**Hon. Senator:** And we will take you to court every time.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** “Yuh loss”. Mr. President, I want to remind Sen. Mark that the UNC lost every single one of the election petitions—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—and it went to the highest level in our court system, and you cannot go any further, and you owe us $20million in legal costs, and we are coming for it.

**Sen. Mark:** We owe you nothing.

**Sen. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Pay up.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** And we are coming for it.

**Sen. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Pay up.

**Sen. Lyder:** Not a dime.

**Sen. Mark:** We do not owe you a dime.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Go ahead. The only problem is that they do not have a building that we could seize.

**Hon. Senators:** [Laughter and interruption]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** “Dey renting from some rum shop somewhere”.

**Hon. Senator:** [Laughter and crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** But they do not own anything, so we cannot seize anything.
That is the only problem. That is the only problem.

**Sen. Lyder:** We are going to turn the Balisier House into a homeless shelter—

*[Inaudible]*

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So the whole point about it, one of the points with WASA, it has not been an easy thing. It has not been a smooth sailing to do the necessary transformation, to bring the necessary efficiency into WASA. So we have to continue appropriating $2 billion-plus for the subsidy for the Water and Sewerage Authority, and that is why we are live in hope, we live in expectation that the transformation will take place. It is taking a little longer than anticipated.

Same thing with the Revenue Authority. In that same affidavit that I put in court that they are bleating about, I made the point that if we had been allowed to go ahead with the Revenue Authority, the revenue to the country could be as much as an additional $5 billion to $10 billion a year. But we will persevere. We have won in the High Court, we have won in the Appeal Court. We will persevere. We will keep going at it.

**Hon. Senator:** Persevere.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes, we will persevere.

But the whole point is, this is not a debate about philosophical principles with respect to the structure of the Trinidad and Tobago economy. That takes place in the budget debate. If you go into the budget speech, you will see all sorts of plans and programmes with respect to diversification, with respect to manufacturing, with respect to the creative sector. It is all there in the budget debate. This debate is simply to supplement appropriations that we have already scrutinized in the Parliament for three weeks. This simply to add additional appropriations to Heads of Expenditure that have already been dealt with, that have
already been explained, where all of the fiscal measures, all of the plans and programmes, all of the vision have already been explained in the budget debate. Therefore, to come and ask, “How come you did not talk about this, and how come you did not talk about that?”, that is because of the methodology that is perpetuated by the media.

And I see that Sen. Maharaj is not here, but I understand, I understand. Sen. Mark sees nothing wrong with trying to excoriate Sen. Vieira. Nothing is wrong with that. When Sen. Vieira comes to the defence of the President of the Republic, Sen Mark and his cohorts see nothing wrong with trying to devastate Sen. Vieira. But when we, on this side, make a comment about statements made about an Independent Senator, that is wrong. Well, we have freedom of speech in this place. All that is required is respect.

Hon. Senators: [Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Okay.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Hon. C. Imbert: All that is required is respect.

Sen. Mark: We will remember that. We will remember that.

Hon. Senator: We will remember that.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President—

Sen. Mark: We will remember that. We will remember that.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President—

Mr. President: Okay. All right.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: All right. Good.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]
Mr. President: Okay, okay.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]—on an Independent Senator?

Mr. President: Okay, I know. Yes, good. Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Sir, I expect you to rise in defence.

Mr. President: Temper. I am on my legs.

Sen. Mark: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: You see, Sen. Mark pretends that he was not a presiding officer in another place, and he pretends that he does not understand Standing Order 52, which means that when the presiding officer is standing up and talking, you have to keep quiet, because that is what you required in the other place when you were the presiding officer.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Hon. C. Imbert: But you see, this is all about—

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]—a slave master.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President—

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]—slave master. “Ketch yuhself”.

Mr. President: We are almost done. We are literally almost done. The Minister of Finance.

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Sen Mark. Take a walk, please. Talk a walk. Take a walk. Take—

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. President: I do not want to hear anything. I do not want to hear anything just—

UNREVISED
Sen. Mark: I have to bow to you, Sir. I have to bow to you.

Mr. President: Bow and leave.

Sen. Mark: But I am telling you that—[Inaudible]

Mr. President: Bow and leave. Bow—just leave. You could return after the Minister of Finance has wrapped up

[Senator exits the Chamber]

Mr. President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. President, I know what Sen. Mark’s problem is, you know. When you are a three-time election loser—

Hon. Senators: [Laughter]

Hon. C. Imbert:—and then you make a mistake and you did not run for election when your party was going to win, I could understand the depression. That is why he screams at me like that because I have won to nine elections in a row.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: And then you have the next one, never contested an election in his life.

Hon. Senators: [Laughter]

Hon. C. Imbert: We have no time for amateurs here. This is not comedy hour.

Hon. Senators: [Laughter]

Sen. Lyder: [Inaudible]

Hon. C. Imbert: This is not comedy hour. So the point I am a making, hon. Senators on the Independent Benches, it is not possible, in 40 minutes, to give the kind of philosophical discourse and wide-ranging debate on the economy and plans and programmes. It is not possible to do that in 40 minutes. That is what a budget debate of three and a half hours is designed for. I am sorry, I just cannot do it. Sen
Thompson-Ahye asked me whether I was talking about this and that. I am sorry, I only have 40 minutes, Sen. Thompson-Ahye, okay? Only 40 minutes.

So the whole point is, this Bill is simply to add to appropriations that have already been discussed at length, have already been debated, have already been scrutinized. It is to add—as the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs has pointed out, this is what the Ministries have requested, and you see, the fundamental error made by Sen. Marahaj—I am sorry she not here—is that the budget is simply estimate. It is not an exact science. It is called an estimate, and there is a reason—

**Sen. Roberts**: The estimate was terrible.

**Hon. C. Imbert**: Mr. President, could you stop Sen. Roberts from screaming at me?

**Sen. Roberts**: It was terrible.

**Mr. President**: Again, the procedure is we do not—

**Hon. Senator**: [Interruption]

**Mr. President**: No. You know I do not condone that when a Member, regardless of what side that they are on, is making their contribution, that we are shouting across the floor at the Member. The Member must be allowed to make their contribution, so that I can hear and so that other Senators can hear. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert**: Thank you, Mr. President. Could you just tell me how much more time I have?

**Mr. President**: You finish at 11.25. You have five more minutes.

11.20 p.m.

**Hon. C. Imbert**: Nice. So when one looks at the budget documents that are
presented in this place and the other place, it says they are Estimates and one expects Permanent Secretaries and other accounting officers during the budget cycle or during the fiscal year, not the budget cycle, they are given an overall sum. One expects the heads of department to prioritize spending. You have plans at the beginning of the year. The new procurement legislation, for example, has slowed things down a lot. So you would have some projects that you plan to implement in a fiscal year. For one reason or another, there may be a challenge. We have had—we now are beginning to have challenge proceedings in the OPR. I think they have had two so far and I am sure there will be more. So your procurement can get slowed down.

But the Permanent Secretary has the flexibility to then seek a transfer of funds out from a particular project to another area. So when you do your Estimates at the beginning of the year and this is to deal with the point that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was making. We are doing a supplementary appropriation but there will have been years and the more experienced Senators will know, where we do a variation of appropriation, where you increase certain Heads of Expenditure and you reduce other Heads of Expenditure.

So at the beginning of the year when we did not provide the full amount of the fuel subsidy, it was anticipated that at some point during the year, you could do a variation of appropriation, reduce some Heads and supplement the appropriation for the Ministry of Energy and therefore you solve the problem of underfunding of the fuel subsidy. Unfortunately, that has not happened.

The backpay for example is something that has created an expense of an extra billion dollars and the salary increases, people—I heard certain Members talking about it but they do not understand. That 4 per cent results in $500 million
per annum in additional expenditure. “We not talking about chick feed here yuh know”, we are talking about $500 million a year, additional.

**Sen. Roberts:** [Interruption]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So that the budget is an Estimate and the Permanent Secretaries are expected to manage their allocation in a way that we do not have to come and ask for a supplementary appropriation.

But I have not found a single year, I have gone back 30 years and I have not found a single year where there has not been a Supplementary Appropriation Bill, not once. Not under NAR, not under PNM, not under UNC, not under Panday, not under Bissessar. Every single year, there has been a Supplementary Appropriation Bill because it is not an exact science, it is not. And if there was proper reporting of what I said in the other place, it would have been reported that what I said is that for the first six months of the year on March 31st, we expected to have a deficit of the order of $4 billion. We had front-loaded expenditure and so on and so that we expected by the end of March, the fiscal deficit would be of the order of four and a half billion dollars actually out of the total five. We actually incurred a fiscal deficit of $1 billion.

So if we keep going and we add 2.3 that we are doing now and you spend the whole amount, we will actually end up with a fiscal deficit of this year of $3.3 billion, we may or may not. But I am certain that at the end of the year, the budget deficit will come in exactly where we had estimated or maybe even lower because we are managing cash flow at this point in time.

So if it had been properly reported that the deficit at the end of March was only $1 billion when we had projected it to be four, then all of this carrying on that I see in the newspapers would not or should not have occurred.
So that, as I said, we must appropriate but we have managed so well over the last—

**Sen. Roberts:** [Interruption]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Mr. President, Mr. Roberts is just a disturbance.

**Sen. Roberts:** Not talking to you.

**Mr. President:** No, no. A few seconds, Minister of Finance, so just the magic words.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I understand.

**Sen. Roberts:** [Interruption]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I understand.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Roberts, please.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** As I said, this is a strange country when a murder could take place in a sports programme and I have to see this person in front of me. A strange country.

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

**Sen. Roberts:** Go outside and say it.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yeah, I will say it outside too. As it is, Mr. President, we do not expect to realize a fiscal deficit of $9 million, we expect we can manage prudently. We can expect we can come within international norms and that we can continue growing and driving the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. With those words, I beg to move.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Mr. President:** Minister of Finance.
Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much. Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 57(2), I beg to move that a Bill entitled an Act to supplement the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2024) Act, 2023 not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Question put and agreed to:* That the Bill be read a third time.

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

ADJOURNMENT

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

*Question put.*

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, please, please—[Inaudible]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, it is well after 11 o’clock as you well know, once we cross a certain hour, those matters will be pushed to the next sitting and that is exactly what is occurring here today. The question has been put.

*Agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 11.28 p.m.*