

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, October 09, 2024*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2025) BILL, 2024**

[Fifth Day]

*Order for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 04, 2024]:*

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Those who have already contributed to this debate are: Hon. Colm Imbert, MP; hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP; hon. Stuart Young SC, MP; Mr. David Lee, MP; hon. Keith Scotland SC, MP; Mr. Dinesh Rambally, MP; Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox; Ms. Vandana Mohit, MP; hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy, MP; Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon; Mr. Rushton Paray, MP; hon. Brian Manning, MP; Mr. Davendranath Tancoo, MP; hon. Marvin Gonzales, MP; Mr. Barry Padarath, MP; hon. Shamfa Cudjoe-Lewis, MP; Mr. Arnold Ram, MP; hon. Lisa Morris-Julian, MP; Dr. Rishad Seecheran, MP; Mr. Kennedy Richards, MP; Ms. Michelle Benjamin, MP; hon. Faris Al-Rawi SC, MP; Ms. Khadijah Ameen, MP; Ms. Penelope Beckles, MP; Mr. Rodney Charles, MP; Mr. Adrian Leonce, MP; Dr. Roodal Moonilal, MP; hon. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP; Mr. Saddam Hosein, MP; Sen The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne; Dr. Rai Ragbir, MP; Sen. The Hon. Hassel Bacchus. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

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

**The Minister of Youth Development and National Service (Hon. Foster Cummings):** Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to contribute in this debate. And I want to start off by complimenting the team at the Ministry of Finance, led by the Minister of Finance who delivered a budget in circumstances where we have been experiencing some challenges, but done in a way that would allow us, as a government, to continue to provide the services required for the development of this country. I do not think at all, Madam Speaker, that the shadow of the Minister of Finance, who presents himself on the other side, could fit in the shoes of the current Minister of Finance.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And after listening to his contribution, I am even more certain, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I entered the other place as a temporary Senator in 2007, and spent some time in that status, until in 2015, I was appointed a full-time Government Senator. In 2020, the people of La Horquetta/Talparo agreed with the PNM that I presented an opportunity to represent them much better than the person proposed by the UNC. And so, from 2020 to now, I have had the pleasure of representing the very decent citizens of La Horquetta/Talparo.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** We have offered to La Horquetta/Talparo hope, but more than hope, we have offered them true representation, so that today, in La Horquetta/Talparo, the citizens and residents of that community are very comfortable under the representation that they receive and under a People's

National Movement Government.

Madam Speaker, during the course of this debate, we have heard representatives from the other side speak about the performance of the Government, and it is important for me, in speaking in this debate, to put on the public record, some of the accomplishments of this Government, led by the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, Prime Minister, and some of the projects that would have been completed, notwithstanding the very competent handling of our economic affairs.

Madam Speaker, we have completed the Arima General Hospital, the Point Fortin Hospital, the Diego Martin Health Centre, the Sangre Grande Hospital Campus, and currently—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—we are well on the way with the Port of Spain Central Block. We have completed the Penal Fire Station, the Carenage Police Station, the St. Clair Police Station, and the Point Fortin Fire Station.

The Government has also completed works at the Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park, the custom and excise building in San Fernando, the Ministry of Health headquarters in Port of Spain, the Red House Restoration Project, the Mille Fleurs restoration project, Hayes Court, Dr. Eric Williams Memorial Library, Carenage Fish Fry. That is a government working for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** The Moruga Multi-Purpose Sport and Youth Facility, the Morvant Community Swimming Pool, the Maloney Community Swimming Pool, the Mahaica Sports Complex, Skinner Park, Desperadoes

Pan Theatre, D'Abadie/Malabar Community Swimming Pool.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Madam Speaker, that is a government working for the people of this country and providing the required infrastructure for the development of this country. Old fort hospital, Roxborough Administrative Complex, Roxborough Fire Station, Dwight Yorke Stadium Refurbishment

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Moriah Health Centre, Roxborough Hospital, Calder Hall Administrative Complex, Madam Speaker, and the list goes on. A suite of community centres throughout this country; Arima, Bagatelle, Bon Air, Diego Martin, Indian Trail, Quarry Road, Tarodale, Techier—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—Lisas Gardens, Maraval and Diego Martin. Madam Speaker, it is a government firmly at work for the development of the people of this country.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And I hear from time to time—and that is not an exhaustive list, Madam Speaker, but I have to speak about the work that we are doing in the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. It will take me at least 10 minutes to complete this list, so I will cut it short for now. But the Government, led by Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, continues to work and spend the money wisely for the development of this country.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** But just to name a few, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services headquarters is currently under

construction, so too is the National Lotteries Control Board office. The Chaguaramas youth development centre, which was formerly the Chaguaramas Convention Centre, is currently being repurposed as a youth development facility for the development of the young people of west Trinidad.

In La Horquetta, the new and modern public library is nearing completion. In Point Fortin, we will work on the heritage administrative complex. We have already launched work on the San Fernando waterfront and, Madam Speaker, the sporting complex at Diego Martin, phase 2, will continue in a short while.

Not to name—not to leave out at all, this UNC Government continues to speak about the 100 schools that they built sometime during their tenure in office. I know the Minister of Education will speak about it, but we have looked high and low throughout Trinidad and Tobago and we cannot locate those 100 schools, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And notwithstanding our pleadings to them, where do these schools exist, these 100 completed schools, it is only a figment of their imagination, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central, during his contribution—because you see, they have said before that the PNM Government introduced strangers to agriculture in this country. They never gave us what they meant by that. I have strong suspicions of what they were trying to say.

**10.10 a.m.**

But what we have been doing is opening up the agricultural sector to involvement by young people, no matter what creed or race, in this country.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Some people on the other side seem to be a little uncomfortable about that. But all we are concerned about as a Government, is making sure that we can feed ourselves and that our young people are exposed to a career in agriculture. We launched, the Prime Minister cut the ribbon to do so, a very successful project at Tucker Valley in the west. It is the Shade House Project, and it came about, Madam Speaker, as a result of a visit by the hon. Prime Minister and a team from Trinidad to Guyana and the Guyanese Government, they put forward a very successful project in Shade House, protecting agriculture.

The Prime Minister felt that that was something he wanted to introduce in Trinidad for the benefit of the young people, and detailed me and another team to do a follow up visit to Guyana, which we did. And very shortly upon our return and our discussions with the Guyanese Government and the representation coming from the Prime Minister, the Guyanese Government decided to donate 12 shade houses to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and we thank the Government of Guyana for that contribution.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** As a result of that, the Cabinet decided that those shade houses received from the Government of Guyana will be distributed in the following manner:

- Five to the Tobago House of Assembly for the benefit of Tobago.
- Two to the University of the West Indies, who are our partners in the Shade House production programme. They provide training for the students.
- Two to our lone agricultural school in this country, ECIAF/UTT. Two of those shade houses, go to them; and
- The remaining three will be set up at our Beach Camp youth complex facility in deep south Trinidad, for the benefit of the young people in that area.

If the Member for Caroni Central is looking for the shade houses from Guyana, I have just detailed to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, what is the Cabinet's decision.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** He went on further to critique and criticize the programme because they cannot associate with success. They feel for them to benefit and get back in the corridors of power in Trinidad and Tobago, which we will prevent them from doing in the democratic way, that they must bad talk and ill speak every programme of the Government. They will not lend support to even things that benefit their own communities, because we represent for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** So the Member for Caroni Central, who himself has—the Member for Caroni Central, Madam Speaker, not to offend the Standing Orders, but I did see a TSTT truck driving up Abercromby Street this

morning, and I wondered whether the Member for Caroni Central was familiar with anything pertaining to trucks and TSTT.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** He went on to attack the programme and speak about the shade houses. Let me tell you today, Madam Speaker, and Trinidad and Tobago what we have put down as the pilot programme in Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas, a programme that currently, the young people who have been trained by UWI are using, and using quite successfully. The Member came here and tried to talk about shade and shady, et cetera, but we did not “buy no truck” without a bucket to service TSTT poles.

These shade houses put down at Tucker Valley are 100 feet by 30 feet in the bench. Shade house—high quality shade house netting, UV stabilized netting that provides shade to meet the requirements of high value short-term crops, protecting plants from direct sunlight, heat and harmful UV rays.

Greenhouse plastic roof, Madam Speaker, steel frame; drip irrigation and mist system; pest control; the use of mesh to prevent pests and insects of entering the shade house; ground covering; rainwater-harvesting system and the Member told us that the shade houses were constructed without any ventilation. Where he got that misinformation, he alone will be able to tell us. But ventilation, each shade house is equipped with two extractor fans to assist with air circulation and ventilation, Madam Speaker. Total contradiction to what was put to this House by the Member for Caroni Central.



Grow bags, grow racks and benches, these features enhance productivity, reduce water usage and protect crops from environmental stresses, making Shade House an excellent choice for modern agriculture.

Madam Speaker, this programme is one of the most successful interventions in the agricultural sector, and we have trained so far, 200 young persons certified by the University of the West Indies.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In September last month, another 100—a cohort of 100 was enrolled in that programme.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister in his wisdom for making room and putting on the agenda as a priority item the advancement of the young people of this country. In doing so, the Government has allocated significant resources and invested those resources in the development of our young people, because our young people, in fact, are the future of Trinidad and Tobago. We have to contribute to their development and so instead of problem after problem being identified by the other side without solution, we as a government have adopted an all-of-government approach to solving some of the issues in relation to the development of our young people.

Madam Speaker, we are resolute that we will continue to ensure that the young people of this country can fully contribute to the development of our country. Since the establishment of this Ministry, we have been at work talking to our various stakeholders. We have been talking to the Ministry of Education and collaborating with them. We have been talking to the Ministry of Public Utilities and collaborating with the Ministry of Labour,

the Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs, Planning and Development, National Security, Agriculture, Energy and with a focus that wherever there exists opportunity for our young people, we will do what is necessary to capitalize on that.

We have made sure to plan programmes and to utilize the mechanisms that the young people would use to communicate with them. We know that young people are constantly on their cellphones, so you would not find us trying to communicate with them elsewhere. We start with that. We start with social media, because one of the problems that we face is if people do not know about the work of the Government and how they can access these programmes then they are at a disadvantage.

So what work have we done in addition to that, Madam Speaker? We have established a roving caravan, and I want to speak about it because the Member for Chaguanas East, which is a constituency that the caravan visited very early in the day, had it to say that the caravan comes in the community, just to say that a caravan came. I did not see the Member present at the caravan, although I was there in Enterprise. There is no invitation; it is open to all members of the public.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** It is open to all Members of the public, and no invitation is required. MP, mayor, everybody, “tout moun, tout bagai” can attend the caravan wherever it appears.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** But what they do is sabotage—

**Mr. Gonzales:** That is right.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** —and say, do not take part in the programmes. What they do is discourage the young people who should be steered towards productive activities.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** The Minister of National Security had to tell us yesterday that somewhere under the rising sun, somebody engaging in illegal behaviour, tried to recruit somebody to engage in murder in this country.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** But under the PNM and under this Government, we are about progress, and we are disciplined, and the PNM is very strong on discipline, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** So, we understand that Enterprise is a challenging community. So we invited all the stakeholders, YTEPP, MIC, NESC. We invited CARIRI, Ministry of National Security, and we rolled into Enterprise, and we set up shop and we sent a big truck around to talk to the young people and say, listen, the Government is working for you, come and sign up for MiLAT, MYPART, CCC, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** They listened and they did. Coming out of that caravan, several 100 young person showed up, and several 100 registered for programmes that the MYDNS and the Government of Trinidad Tobago is rolling out for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, and if the Member for Caroni East does not like it, the results will tell in the Chaguanas election, whenever it is held.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** We have a young man out there called Richie Sookhai, and he will show the Member for Chaguanas East, where barley grows.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**10.20 a.m.**

Madam Speaker, I want to say to you, that what we have done is rolled into every community from—

**Hon. Members:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** “How she sensitive so?”

**Madam Speaker:** Change to—Chaguanas East and Laventille West, I will invite you all to take it outside.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Madam Speaker, as with natural death, when some faced political death, they start to groan and moan. They are just travelling, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** They are just travelling out of political office. I want to say to the Member for Chaguanas East, your days are numbered as MP for that constituency.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And, so we moved from Point Fortin, we went to Charlotteville—not Charlotteville sorry, I just like Tobago so much. We have moved from Point Fortin, to Sangre Grande, to Arouca, to Chaguanas,

to Couva, everywhere. We rolled out 27 caravans, not because we like “big truck”, but because we want to go into every nook and cranny in this country and say to our young people, “Your government has your back”.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And I “doh” expect to get one day of praise from the UNC for that. I “doh” expect them to thank the hon. Prime Minister for that, but I am sure that the Member for Siparia cannot even contemplate or imagine doing any such thing for the development of young people in this country. Their answer for young people was a state of emergency, Madam Speaker—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Five thousand people.

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—that arrested young people, left, right and centre. I want the young people of Trinidad and Tobago—the 13,000 young people who the Government has impacted with these programmes over the years, to bear in mind that any return of a UNC Government, will put end to all of these initiatives. I want them to remember that.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And I want the 5000 that “dey lock up without cause”, put on their backs and—they probably would have put their knees on their necks as well.

**Hon. Members:** That is right.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Those who they advantaged in this country, and arrested without cause.

**Hon. Member:** You call them ripe fig.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** I want them to remember that any return of a UNC Government will see the same kind—because they have no answer other than state of emergency and lock you up left, right and centre. We are saying, no state of emergency, that is not a solution. We are going to develop; we are going to hold your hands; we are going to equip you for work, off of business; and that is the answer we have for the young people of this country, Madam Speaker.

I went into Basilor Street some time ago, along with the Member of Parliament for that area, the hon. Scotland, and the councillor who represents that community as well, because—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, we address by constituency or portfolio. Yes.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you for your guidance, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Port of Spain South, Keith Scotland, SC, MP.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Madam Speaker:** [*Inaudible*] perfect if you stopped at the hon. Member for Port of Spain South. Alright.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you for your guidance, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Port of Spain South accompanied me to Basilor Street, where we are constructing a youth development centre for the young people of that community. When I went on that visit I saw the young men from the community actually as the workers for the contractor on the facility. They asked to speak to me, and I obliged. They said they wanted to say thank you to the Government for bringing this project into their community, that they now have access to do some construction work. But moreso, they are

looking forward to the completion of the facility so that they can have access to some of the programmes.

We have a situation in Port of Spain East, we are not very proud about. It has evolved over time, where some persons from one community are unable to travel to other communities. Some border issues with this board, and they are happy to have that youth centre constructed there, because they will have access to training opportunities and CVQ qualifications in plumbing, electrical, carpentry, masonry, barbering. You name it. A suite of training programmes where they will be certified, and they can then find gainful employment. They said to the Minister, “We just want to work. People may look at us and can say all sorts of things about us, but we just want to work.” And I say to the young men of Basilor Street, who spoke to me two weeks ago, and I say to the young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago, this Government it going to make sure that there is opportunities for your training and development and for you to work.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Madam Speaker, according to the Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, one of five young people are not in employment, or education, or training. They categorize them as “neet”, N-E-E-T. We have decided—not that our whole approach is designed for that category. Because when we talk about youth development, we had a youth award ceremony at Hyatt recently in which the President and the Prime Minister attended and noticed and awarded some very successful young people in this country. We have some very talented young people in this country, Madam Speaker. It is not that we will focus on that category only, but we understand that some of

the social issues that confront us today require us to put some extra effort into that category referred to as NEET.

Some of our young people are leaving secondary school without the required five O'Levels or a full certificate as we refer to it. And in recognizing that problem, we have been in constant conversation with the Ministry of Education. The Government, through the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, has partnered with Cipriani College of Labour and Co-Operative Studies to develop a Community-based Action for Resilience, Empowerment and Success. And this programme will include a camp for students to prepare to resit the CSEC and to expose them to offerings at Cipriani to matriculate into other areas of training.

And so, Madam Speaker, we recently launched this programme in September. I can tell you that after the programme was advertised for one week we had over 1,500 applications. We did have to close it off at that point, because we decided the pilot would accommodate 1,000 students, but we currently have as we speak 1,000 of those persons who may not have done so well in their CSEC currently enrolled in that programme, to work towards a second chance at sitting the examination in June of 2025. That is your Government at work for the young people of this country.

And so guided by our *Vision 2030* document, our National Youth Policy (2020—2025), the recommendations from the community recovery report, the Ministry continues to use these guiding documents as we shape and develop programmes for the benefit of the young people of this country.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you that the staff—I want to recognize the staff at the MYDNS, who have been working long hours, even beyond the



call of duty. You know people have so much to say about public servants, but I want to select and recognize those public servants at the Minister of Youth Development and National Service, and even all public servants for the role that they continue to play in the execution of the policies and programmes of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** The Ministry as directed—you know when I was assigned this responsibility, the hon. Prime Minister did say to me, that I want you to make every effort to make sure that there are opportunities for the young people who are interested in opportunities for self-development, and go full steam ahead. I think I have listened to that very attentively, and we doing that work, Madam Speaker.

In addition to expanding the existing programmes to reach additional youths, the Ministry has expanded the suite of offerings available. The young people of Point Fortin, the young people of La Brea, in south Trinidad, can testify that we have taken on board their suggestions. The Member for Point Fortin would have mentioned the numerous programmes that we have rolled in the south Trinidad for their benefit.

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

**10.30 a.m.**

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In this regard, Madam Speaker, we have placed focus on five key strategic areas. One, skills for work: Under skills for work, the intention is to look at the various areas within the country where there are opportunities for employment, liaise with our stakeholders in those areas, the construction, the chamber. There is the construction association—the

Contractors Association—sorry—T&TEC, WASA, in the energy sector. As we talk to them and they identify to us where there might be shortages in terms of supply of labour, we design programmes, or we collaborate with existing programmes to expand the reach to the young people and to make sure we can train persons to enter those areas.

Then there is the Youth and Women in Agriculture, and I will speak to that later on. We have a suite of agricultural programmes that we have been training significant young people in. Then we have a strong focus on entrepreneurship because we know that we will never be able to provide jobs for everyone who wants a job. That is a dream. We would love to do that but we may never be able to achieve that. So we want to direct as many persons as possible into small and micro business, and therefore they themselves will become job creators as opposed to jobseekers.

They themselves will be able to, not only employ themselves, but to provide a job for their peers, their friends, or their family. We have placed significant attention as well on the issue of national service. We launched the National Service Programme some time ago and already we have been receiving so much outreach and so much attention, and interest from citizens who have excelled in one way or the other, Madam Speaker, and they would like to share their expertise with the young people under our charge.

We have under our charge some 550,000 young persons in this country and we aim to collaborate with our colleagues to reach each and every one of them in some way or the other. To wrap all of that up, we have the area of community engagement and empowerment where we go into the communities and we seek out young persons who would like to develop

themselves in one way or the other. One of the programmes we rolled out in the last couple of months is the youth talent search. It is called, Youth on Stage.

Madam Speaker, it almost got me very emotional the night when I attended that final at NAPA and I saw the level of talent that we have in this country. I am sure, Madam Speaker, that the citizens looking at that production probably felt that they were looking at an international production somewhere outside of Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, it was young people from across this country who had participated in this programme, preliminary, semifinals, and the finals. We are certainly on the right track in identifying talent within the young population.

Madam Speaker, I will now share with the national community some of the initiatives that we have rolled out at the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. I want to say, because I know that often my friends on the other side would make the claim that these programmes do not include their constituencies. I want to say to them that when we campaign, we campaign very hard. The PNM is by far the unbeatable political machine in this country. In January, we will celebrate 69 years as a political party. I do not think the UNC could come anywhere close to that.

No matter how much you bad talk our party headquarters, you have none. You have been moving from rum shop to rum shop, all over. I understand the newest place is next to a funeral home. That says something. That is signifies—that is speaking to you about your political future. You are not going to return to government in this country again because—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—it is very simple for citizens to make that decision.

You look at the man from Mason Hall, a very accomplished senior politician in this country. He has served this country well. He has distinguished himself as Prime Minister. He is now serving his second term, heading towards a third. And then you look at what you have offered to Trinidad and Tobago during your term, 2010 to 2015, and most citizens I speak to, and I speak to many of them on a daily basis, throughout Trinidad and Tobago, say, “Never again, never again, never again”.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to say to my friends on the other side, especially my friend from Pointe-a-Pierre, that the programmes of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service and the programmes of this Government are open to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. No amount of spin put on that is going to change that. Those who are closer to me on this side, who have now distanced themselves from you, they understand that these programmes are for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** So we have looked at the youth-led organizations in the country and we have determined that we are going to provide some training opportunities for them, because one of the mistakes made, Madam Speaker, is that the complainers in this country—and we have a lot of professional complainers in this country, eh. A lot of them residing on the other side. They complain, they complain, they complain without offering one iota of proper suggestion or solution.

When we say, “Okay, come, let us sit and discuss and collaborate and put things in place to ensure that the vast majority of citizens in this country who

are law-abiding, decent, hard-working people who are being interfered with, who are being harassed by a very small minority of criminals in this country”—and when we say to the Opposition, “Let us sit and talk about how we could fix that problem”, they run and they duck and they hide, Madam Speaker. But I heard, and we all heard a Member on the “wise men bench” saying to us as a Government—that is the Member for Chaguanas West—“If you have laws that you want support with”—

**Mr. Gonzales:** And Naparima and Mayaro.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Naparima said the same thing, Mayaro said the same thing, Cumuto/Manzanilla said the same thing, and I am sure Tabaquite will go with them.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** “Yuh cyah buss style” on us anyone.

When we bring legislation to this Parliament to make sure that the criminals who want to hijack us in this country are dealt with by the law enforcement, we have some people close by on the other side there who said they will support the Government with those legislation, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. Member:** We have a constitutional majority.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And that will present us a majority to change laws and fix this place, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** I see the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla saying, “Yes”. He likes that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, so we looked at the youth-led organizations and we put a

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programme in place, a National Leadership Training Programme. We collaborated with the UWI, St. Augustine Campus, and we started this programme in 2023, Madam Speaker, and I am pleased to say—because last year I spoke to you about the programmes we are doing, this year I am adding into my contribution some of the numbers of the lives that we have touched. I am pleased to say that we have been able to train, through support from the University of the West Indies, in leadership and development, 151 young persons, Madam Speaker, at St. Augustine, UWI. In addition, we rolled out a programme because we are duly informed that there are opportunities available in terms of HVAC maintenance, automotive electrical and repairs, domestic refrigeration, and air conditioning and refrigeration. Madam Speaker, we collaborated with NESC in a programme called CRISP, where we have been able to train, Madam Speaker, 126 young persons so far and we will soon be able to enroll another cohort. So those of you looking for skilled persons in those areas, you now have an expansion of skilled and trained personnel.

NESC, Madam Speaker, I must say to you, under the Ministry of Education, that that organization is doing an excellent job at what they have been doing, and we have a lot of programmes that we have rolled out. I want to congratulate the NESC.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** With the same NESC, we have also rolled out a programme called, Project Drive, developing our youth resource through the introduction of technical/vocational endeavours in auto mechanics. Madam Speaker, you would know that we have a lot of hybrid vehicles in the

country right now. We have a lot of electrical vehicles coming in right now and we have to also make sure that we have the technicians who are able to service those vehicles, because it makes no sense that we have these vehicles coming in. The Government is giving a lot of tax concessions in relation to our electrical vehicles and we, as well, need to upskill our technicians to be able to service those vehicles adequately.

**10.40 a.m.**

We started this programme, Madam Speaker, in April of 2023, and we have been able, to date, between 2023 and 2024, to train 210 young persons, who have completed this programme successfully. I look forward to them entering the workforce and providing services to you, as well as to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, in terms of soft skills—because as we go into the communities a lot of persons are practising in different areas, barbering, nail tech, et cetera. We collaborated with YTEPP and we have been able to offer training in various areas, including culinary arts, bread, cakes and pastries. We utilized the centre at Woodford Lodge in makeup artistry. At the Beetham Gardens Community Centre, at Sangre Grande, at Princes Town and at La Horquetta, we also offer those services there.

In terms of barbering, we have set up shop at California Youth Facility in central Trinidad. The Member for Couva South should be pleased to hear that. In Beetham Gardens, we also set up shop, in terms of offering barbering there, also at the Barataria Community Centre, because what we are doing is, we are utilizing existing facilities as well. Yes, we are putting some facilities in place that are safe spaces particularly designed only for

young people, and to attract young people to that space, but where there are existing facilities, like community centres in areas that are being underutilized, we are as well collaborating with the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, led by the hon. Member for Tobago West, and we are rolling out programmes in those areas as well.

In terms of hair braiding and weaving, we have rolled that out at the Los Bajos Youth Facility and at the Williamsville Community Centre. We are also treating with nail technology at the Barataria Community Centre; hair braiding and weaving at the Government Vocational Centre at Clifton Hill, Point Fortin.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In those short courses that I just mentioned throughout Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, between 2023 and 2024, we have been able to train 868 young persons.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** I spent some time speaking to the national community about the Alternative Learning and Life Skills Enhancement Programme. That is the programme involving heavy machinery operation, Madam Speaker. It covers modules inclusive of identification of heavy equipment, operation of skid-steers, loaders, dump trucks, bulldozers, financial management and others, and this programme operates out of the Woodford Lodge Campus in Chaguanas. The Member for Chaguanas East would be well advised to send some of her constituents from Enterprise and surrounding areas right there. They can walk from Enterprise to Woodford Lodge and do something productive that would assist them in their



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development.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In that programme, Madam Speaker, you would be pleased to know that between 2022 and 2024, we have been able to train in heavy equipment operation, 293 young persons to operate—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—bulldozers, skid-steers, backhoes, dump trucks, et cetera. And those young persons, many of them—because we run tracer studies as well—coming from all over Trinidad and Tobago, have been able to benefit from that programme. I will tell you something else about that programme. All that they have to say about the Member of Parliament for Laventille West, when I took up this office, the first thing I saw on my desk was a prepared brief and policy on the execution of this programme, and we ran with it—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—and we ran with it, and we ran with it.

Madam Speaker, STEP TT, Skills for A Technological and Diversified Economy, you heard the Minister of Digital Transformation speak yesterday and, Madam Speaker, we understand that we need to upskill our persons in this area. We have launched a programme that, Madam Speaker, is constantly oversubscribed. This programme deals with the introduction to mobile application development, web design and coding. The programme targets youths between the ages of 16 to 35, and we have executed several cohorts from 2021 to date. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform the national community that we have trained, in those areas I have

just announced, 991 young persons in various areas, including coding and mobile app development.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** You would be pleased to note, Madam Speaker, that many of those persons came from the constituency of Couva South and they are very happy to hear about the training. I think maybe the Member for Couva South advised them and sent them across to receive this training.

**Mr. Gonzales:** He needs training to.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** All right? And he is—well, no, he is over the age. It stops at 35.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Madam Speaker, we understand that in this day of technology, that every young person wanting to go into business will not set up a block and mortar shop. Many of our young persons on social media operate businesses in that area but we want to make sure that we give them the training, so that they can be successful at what they are doing.

In fiscal 2024, this programme benefited small business owners and budding entrepreneurs, equipping them with social media management training that will enable them to effectively market and manage their business on social media platforms. Participants of this programme will now be able to differentiate between the different types of social media platforms, and the associated level of subscription, and user traffic, user demographics and what they are best suited for. We have been able to train persons, to equip them to operate businesses on social media. Madam Speaker, 783 young persons have benefited from this Project Trending

Programme, Madam Speaker. And we move on.

Madam Speaker, you would be pleased to know that a music production and life skill training programme, which we have been operating since 2022—it is called AMPLIFY—is another programme that was designed in the early days of this Ministry under Minister Hinds and we have been able to properly and successfully—

**Hon. Members:** The Member for Laventille West.

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—execute training for the benefit of—oh, the Member of Parliament for Laventille West, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, 464 young persons have benefited from this programme in AMPLIFY. This programme, Madam Speaker, will continue into 2025—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—as we have received the support from the Minister of Finance to continue this programme. What does the programme treat with? The programme treats with digital photography, introduction to videography, graphic design, voice training, stage presentation, voice presentation and life skills. Madam Speaker, we continue to work along.

Bringing you closer to some of the work that we have been doing in relation to the young people of this country, Madam Speaker, we launched a programme that—the Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant accompanied me to Penal, and I think that might be in the constituency of the Member of Parliament for Siparia.

**Mr. Gonzales:** She was there? Was she there?

**Hon. F. Cummings:** I did not see the Member of Parliament and the persons there told me they had not seen her for very long time.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Oh, yes. Morne Diabolo too.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** But notwithstanding that, we went into Penal. This is in support of the point I made earlier, that we represent all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** We launched, with the Trinidad tower crane company, a programme called HOIST in tower crane operations. The tower crane operation programme provided an understanding of tower cranes—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you just have 20 seconds left of ordinary speaking time, you are entitled to 10 additional minutes to wind up your contribution.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will make use of it. I was hoping you could give me another hour.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In light of that, I will try to condense what I am saying very quickly—boom truck operations, rigging and banksman training, and all of that rolled out, where? In Penal, Madam Speaker, in the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition. That is a PNM Government that cares for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—no matter where they are. Madam Speaker, we were able to train 50 youths in that particular programme and we will roll that programme in 2025, again, because of its success. Madam Speaker, then we went into Ste. Madeleine. I think that is in the constituency of the MP for Princes Town.

**Mr. Gonzales:** He was there?

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Right? It is the other end of Ste. Madeleine, it falls into Princes Town. That is a government that cares for all the citizens and we rolled out a programme.

**10.50 a.m.**

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries visited that cohort of students because he understands that we all work as a Government collectively, not like the way the other side who are always battling and bantering among themselves. We work collectively—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—as a government to bring resources for the young people of this country. And we were able to train 78 young people in the Diploma Drilling Rig Operations. I saw many constituents from the constituencies controlled by the Opposition taking advantage of it, ignoring their MPs and taking advantage of the programmes that the Government has offered.

In conjunction with Public Utilities, we have rolled out a programme called PIPE. Not the kind of pipe that the Leader of the Opposition speaks about, Madam Speaker, not that pipe.

**Hon. Members:** Not that pipe.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** This is plumbing skills. It is an apprenticeship programme that we rolled out with WASA and, Madam Speaker, we currently have enrolled in that programme 100 young persons and when they come out of that programme they get an opportunity, they get certification in

CVQ Level 1, 2 and 3.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** So this is not the kind “ol’ talk” from the other side, this is serious business, Madam Speaker. And with T&TEC we rolled out another apprenticeship programme called FUSE to train them in overhead line maintenance and installation of overhead lines and, Madam Speaker, we have successfully been able to recruit 50 young persons into that programme.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** But one of the programmes I must speak about, because we have rolled and these programmes in Trinidad and I have spent a lot of time in Tobago—I spent about 15 years of my life in Tobago and the only thing I love more than sweet bread, is Tobago.

Madam Speaker, we rolled out the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition programme. What is that programme about? It is a programme designed for those persons who over years have practiced and honed their skills but they do not have the required level certification. So we spoke to the Minister of Education and the Ministry of Education, saying, how can we come up with something where we can assess these persons, give them whatever remedial training they require and then certify them so they can matriculate into higher learning? They can move up the islands, in the CARICOM, with freedom of movement and empower and develop themselves. We have been able to enrol in Trinidad 200 persons in that programme. And last week I was in Tobago where we rolled out the programme for the benefit of 100 Tobagonians, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And I must take a few minutes to speak about our grant, our Micro and Small Business Grant because we distributed in Tobago as well, 39. Right? And I would tell you, Madam Speaker, that that grant programme which we have already given out over 200, it is run by NEDCO. What is that programme about? So we are training a lot of people and some people are asking, well after you train them, where do they go? Some of them will find employment. I can tell you that our information tells us that over 25 per cent of the persons we have trained have already found gainful employment as a result of the training and certification offered to them by the Government. And a vast majority of them, we are still conducting that survey, have gone into business. But to equip them to do that, we have provided

NEDCO with the ability to give a small business grant of up to \$20,000 to all those persons who have a budding idea. They are certified and trained, they are ready to go, they have an idea and they do not have the capital, the Government will provide them with a three-week training programme by NEDCO and a grant of up to \$20,000.

What does that mean? If we are training you in tailoring for instance, and you do not have the wherewithal to purchase a serger or a sewing machine, NEDCO will take you in, and give you a three-week training on how to develop a business plan, how to approach the bank for financing, and how to keep your statutory records, how to keep your accounts. Coming out of that programme we assess you, we help you “do up” have your business plan and then you get the grant. It is not refundable. It is not a loan. We are starting

you off with a grant so that you can get into productive business. All of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are available and open to this grant and it includes our citizens from Tobago as well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I must tell you and the citizens of this country that as well, we are committed to our plan to reopen all youth camps in this country. Work is well underway at El Dorado girls' facility. I have also visited the one at Chatham and the one at Persto Praesto and work is underway and we look forward to reopening those residential facilities. I must tell you as well, we have completed so far, Laventille youth development centre, Malick youth development centre, we are doing work on Basilon youth development centre, we completed the work at California youth development centre and we completed work at St. James Facility. And now all of these facilities have given us more capacity to roll out training and development programmes for the young people of this country—

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—all those young persons who are interested. And, Madam Speaker, our agricultural initiatives. The Homestead Programme in Chatham we were able to distribute 159 two-acre plots to young persons who will get a homestead and a grant of \$20, 000 to go into agriculture in a serious way having been trained by UTT ECIAF that is a significant development and achievement of this Government, Madam Speaker. And we look forward to those persons providing food for the nation, reliable and healthy foods through their homestead. We have trained so far, Madam Speaker, in excess of 800 young persons and we provide land for all of them to get on with their farming in Trinidad and Tobago. We have as well, as I



said earlier trained 300 persons in shade housing and 200 in aquaculture and, Madam Speaker, we intend to stand firm to our policy position and promise to introduce to the agricultural sector 1,500 youthful farmers by 2025 our contribution to the CARICOM25 by 2025 Initiative.

Madam Speaker, it is no secret that the Government will continue to invest in these programmes and therefore, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that when we attended the MiLAT graduation earlier on, the Member for Laventille West was present, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, the Member for Laventille East, the Member for Port of Spain South and they all came because they are interested in our young people. We were so happy, Madam Speaker, to see these young men, many of them came into that programme with zero O' Levels and behavioural issues. And when we saw them in their uniform, well disciplined, marching and showing their best to this country, showing other young men who might be recruited by gang leaders and criminal elements in this country what a difference this intervention can make in their life. Madam Speaker, there is one particular gentleman who entered that programme with zero O' Levels and literacy problems, he exited with six O' Levels, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And that is the commitment of this Government in the development of our young people. We are saying to them steer away and stay away from a life of crime, the Government has your back and will make sure we put programmes and policies in place for your development. Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to have contributed to this debate.

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

**Madam Speaker:** No one is joining the debate? Member for St. Joseph.

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

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to join this debate. Madam Speaker, we are here to, hopefully, pass at the end of this process, the following Bill:

“An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2025.”

Madam Speaker, there could be no doubt that economic stability and economic prosperity is closely linked to political stability and everything that goes with that. It is, therefore, incumbent upon me to start my debate giving the population of Trinidad and Tobago a glimpse into the past and a glimpse into the future of what lies ahead if as we say in the PNM, “People put God out of their thoughts and elect the UNC to office.”

**11.00 a.m.**

Madam Speaker, permit me, 1986 to 1991 the NAR, in the commission of enquiry into the attempted coup, then Minister of Finance Winston Dookeran said:

Conflicting approaches to governance espoused by the two men were a case of the constitutionality of the Office of the Prime Minister versus populism.

Madam Speaker, I want the country to pay attention to that word “populism”, because when Minister Young responded to the Leader of the Opposition—sorry. When the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries

responded to the Member for Siparia, he introduced that term. The breakup of NAR gave rise to Club 88 and then the UNC, instability that affects economic prosperity.

In 2001, Trevor Sudama, Ralph Maraj and Lawrence Maharaj left the UNC. Basdeo Panday then lost a vote at the hands of his own Members on a very innocuous unimportant Bill on extending the hours of paying stamp duty. Imagine that. A whole government collapsed because of that. But, it represented, Madam Speaker, a breaking point for men of conscience within the UNC.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** A breaking point. Madam Speaker, 16 June, 2019 former MP Ganga Singh broke ranks with the UNC and voted with the PNM on the Miscellaneous Provision (Tax Amnesty, Pensions FOIA, National Insurance, Central Bank, Companies, and Non-Profit Organisations) Bill, 2019. By that time he had had enough. A man of conscience.

**Mr. Lee:** Standing Order 48(1), Madam Speaker. I am trying to understand what this has to do with the budget debate.

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

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member, I will give you some leeway to develop your argument.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** It has to do with economic prosperity following political stability.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** That is what we are here about. Then every single amalgamation of the UNC has collapsed until today we have disparagingly

called the “UNC B team”. Well, the UNC B team has more conscience than the UNC A team. Let me say that, more conscience.

Madam Speaker, the Member was speaking for 99 per cent of the population, but the Member cannot manage 19 people. Five people have broken ranks; cannot manage 19 people—

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, 48(1). I am still trying to understand. Help me.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Joseph, please continue.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** So what is the common factor in all of this? Madam Speaker, because I am coming so late in the debate I need to respond to something that the Member for Siparia said in her budget contribution. You want me to speak about the economy, here it comes. Here it comes.

**Ms. Ameen:** The children who died.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Populism is a form of politics where you try to appeal to masses by fooling them to think, “Elect me and your future is bright.” What was the specific recommendation put forward?—a \$25 minimum wage. Madam Speaker, I had a grocery do a quick calculation on what a \$25 minimum wage will do to them. They said, a \$25 hour minimum wage would represent a 22 per cent increase to the monthly wage bill and would redound to nearly half a million added annual wages if staff retention remains the same. That is important. If staff retention remains the same. Madam Speaker, there are over three to 4,000 groceries in Trinidad and

Tobago. There are over 20,000 SMEs employing over 200,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago. What the Member for Siparia is saying is, on paper you will work for \$25 an hour, but the same business you were working at \$20.50 an hour you would not have a job. Or the businesses will say, "I will absorb that cost", and what happens? I take up the price of groceries. I take up the price of food stuff. I take up the price pharmaceuticals. I take up the price of hardware supplies. Vote for me and you will get \$25 an hour.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago to reject that because it will not happen. Why? Because there is precedent in 2010 when over 100,000 persons over the age 60 were told, "Vote for me and I will give you a \$3,000 pension. Vote for me, old people, and you will get \$3,000 in your pocket." Well, it did not happen because they reneged. I quote an article because this is important. Populism. An article of 12, September, 2010:

"It was so nice to see Ernie Ross being trotted out and paraded in public with sackcloth and ashes begging for forgiveness in a great charade of pension paradox mea culpa..."

Blame Ernie Ross, but he rode on the backs of 100,000 elderly, the same way you are going to ride on the backs of 200,000 persons working for minimum wage. It "aint" go happen. It is not going to happen.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** I warn the country today that these promises made in hon. Member for Siparia in her budget contribution, the Member will need a budget of about \$200 billion because everything is, "We will do this, we will do that", but not one, not one mention of where the money is to come from.

Where is that other \$150 billion to do all these wonderful things to mislead people to become popular, where is it to come from?.

Madam Speaker, it was disgraceful to hear Oropouche West introduce into the Parliament a slang, an obscene slang used in social media, “W-T-F. He used the analogy, we know what it means in social media, but he used it here to say “where the funds”. That is your Minister of Finance in waiting Trinidad and Tobago. So, I am going to tell the population where the money gone in Health, because the mantra of the UNC is it goes into people’s pockets of friends, financiers. Let me tell the public now where the money gone.

So the Ministry of Health would have received \$7.5 billion. If you back out from that the PSIP, you are left with \$6.4 billion in recurrent expenditure. I had the finance division run these figures with me. Of that \$6.4 billion, Madam Speaker, the RHAs get 67.1 per cent of that. So the RHAs get \$4.2 billion. Of that \$4.2 billion salaries and wages account for 86 per cent of that. So that is \$3.7 billion in salaries and wages for 21,943 workers across the health system. Sorry, 21,777. That is the total employment figure of people working in the RHAs and the Ministry of Health. Of that \$3.7 billion that goes to the RHAs that does not include the Ministry of Health and its vertical services, so add another \$270 million to that. Our total wage bill out of our recurrent of \$6.4 billion is \$3.9 billion or 61 per cent. The money goes into the pockets of 21,777 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

**11.10 a.m.**

That is where the money goes—

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:**—into the pockets of those people.

**Mr. Young SC:** Via salary, eh.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** So they could pay their rent, their mortgage, their car loan, their grocery bill, their T&TEC bill, their WASA bill, send their children to school, buy food, take a vacation, buy clothes. So when Oropouche West asked “where de money gone”, that is where “the money gone”, \$3.9 billion. However, “where de money gone” again? Pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals.

North Central RHA, \$233 million, that is where “de money gone”. North West RHA, \$145 million; Eastern RHA, \$60 million; South-West RHA, \$165 million. And Tobago RHA because Tobago gets the allocation from us, that does not come out of the allocation they get, \$41 million, and that is not including CDAP. In Tobago alone CDAP is \$2.7 million. So if the UNC wants to know “where de money gone”, that is where “de money gone”.

Madam Speaker, I now want to rebut some matters raised by Caroni East talking about drugs. Madam Speaker, there is something in the UNC and it is unfortunate, that when professionals, especially medical professionals enter politics they forget their medical training, and that is so sad, and they forget the ethics of their profession, whether it is medicine, or dentistry.

Madam Speaker, there is always this hue and cry about pharmaceuticals. There is always this hue and cry about what we are doing and I am going to come to it, but I am going to come to it by conceptualizing what we are doing to make the process in health better, whether it is

oncology, lab information, imaging or e-prescription. So we are focusing on people process and product. We are going to start to infuse our processes and our people with technology and I want to recommend and recognize two people. One, Ms Reshma Maheepat, President of the Society of Radiographers of Trinidad & Tobago. She said in her President's address:

“This year, our conference theme is Improving Patient Care. In a time dominated by technology, it is essential not to lose the human touch...”

And I could not agree more, with Ms. Reshma Maheepat.

Madam Speaker, I was so proud when I attended the Republic Day Awards at President's House, and saw all those fine citizens receive the awards. But as Minister of Health you always pay attention to the doctors who get awards, and I congratulate them all. There was one person, who for me stood out, not a doctor. That person's name is Ms. Nadira Maharaj. She got the Medal of Merit Gold for health care in the field of medical laboratory services spanning a 40-year career. I want to congratulate her and mention her name here. Because in this process of modernizing we cannot do it without people like Ms. Reshma Maheepat and Ms. Nadira Maharaj.

What we are doing especially at St. James, is starting to use technology, especially that of AI artificial intelligence. We recently launched a 1.5 Tesla MRI unit at St. James. And I want to thank and not attack, I want to thank PPGPL Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited and Mr. Dominic Rampersad for donating between \$10 - \$12million.

**Mr. Al-Rawi SC:** US.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** US, of equipment to the health centre sector. And the



goodly gentlemen has promised to help us introduce AI because all those machines are AI capable. And I quote from a WHO report:

“...Artificial Intelligence as one of the key principles to reflect the imperatives of the Digital Transformation of the Health Sector.”

**Mr. Young SC:** And to give SIA.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** PAHO specifies that “global cooperation on artificial intelligence (AI) implies understanding the individual and social dimensions of a globalized and interconnected reality of the human condition.”

Madam Speaker, that is where we are moving. The Minister of Finance and let me thank the hon. Minister of Finance for a sterling, sterling, excellent well-thought-out budget.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Steadfast and Resolute. It means we are not wavering from the path that we have chosen however difficult the path is, because of geopolitical conditions. I want to recognize our hon. Prime Minister for his sterling leadership and guidance to all of us on this side, his Ministers and his MPs. And the Minister of Finance spoke about our digitization and digitalization endeavours to come to fruition by the end of 2025.

But I want to signpost where we are now in October 2024. We are trying to move from paper heavy, to paper light, to paperless. We have gotten opinion from the hon. Attorney General that e-prescriptions are legal under the current Laws of Trinidad and Tobago and we have started “e-prescription writing” at many of our facilities. It is at Arima General Hospital, Mount Hope Women’s Hospital, it is at San Fernando General

Hospital, it is at St. James Medical Complex—it is under South-West, they pioneered it. There are five A&E's are doing e-prescriptions. It is at Arima and ERHA to begin.

What that means is that a physician seeing a patient, simply types a prescription on a tablet or on a device and it automatically goes to the dispensary, you do not have to walk with paper. The younger doctors and some of the older ones love it the call it “the bomb”.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** They want to use technology. They call it “the bomb”. Patients love it because it decreases their waiting times. Madam Speaker, I mentioned Ms. Nadira just now for lab information system. What we are doing is networking all our labs, and networking our PACS system. PACS simply means “picture archiving and communication system” to the lay person it is that film you get with your X-ray, your CT scan, your MRI. That goes into this PACS system. You do blood work it goes into your laboratory information system.

But what happens in Trinidad and Tobago, if you are from Diego Martin and your blood work and your X-rays are in Port of Spain and you go to San Fernando and you fall ill there, they will have to redo everything, because they do not have access to your files. We are now linking all of these things. It has already begun. So between San Fernando General Hospital and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, they could see your X-ray images, they could see your MRIs, they could see your CT scans, they could see your mammograms. What are the benefits?

1. We do not have to undergo a second dose of radiation for a patient.

So it is safer.

2. If the physician can see your past scans he can see disease progression. That is important.

So, a proper prognosis and diagnosis could be made. And hopefully by the end of this year, calendar year, all of our institutions will be so linked.

**11.20 a.m.**

Similarly, with the lab information system, you do a blood test in one facility, you go to another facility tomorrow, we do not have to redo your blood test, or if we have to redo it again, we could see what your results were last week, we could see what your results were today; disease progression. That is crucial in the adoption of technology, and I want to recommend and thank all those who have been working with us on that.

Madam Speaker, on the issue of AI, we should be so excited in Trinidad and Tobago to be pioneering the use of AI at St. James. You are going to get superior care coordination, you are going to get data that we never had before. You could do research into all of these things. So that is what we are doing, Madam Speaker. The National Cancer Institute says:

“AI presents an unprecedented opportunity to advance our understanding of cancer and improve care for people with cancer.”

AI in oncology has proven to be extremely beneficial, precision diagnosis, as images can be better evaluated than humans. AI in scanning mammograms is being proven to be more accurate than humans. This will be a boon for the multidisciplinary team and members that treat cancers. And at this point in time, I want to start to recognize some of the doctors who have gone before. So in oncology: Dr. Hess Benjamin, a gentleman—a towering gentleman of

the highest order, and following in his footsteps is Dr. Kellie Alleyne-Mike at St. James.

But when the new Port of Spain Central Block comes on stream, the vision for that, and working with the Faculty of Medical Sciences, is to turn Port of Spain and north-west into the premier teaching facility in this part of the world, building on the works of people like Prof. Courtenay Bartholomew, Dr. McShine in surgery, Dr. Winston Ince in cardiology, Dr. Neville Byam in endocrinology and metabolic medicine; and not to leave out our nurses, nurse Joycelyn Hackshaw and nurse Diana Miller who have done their part. These are the greats of yesterday, on whose shoulders the greats of today are making their mark. So with teaching, it is not only limited to medicine and nursing, it will be expanded to pharmacy, radiology, laboratory services and all alike health services. So, Madam Speaker, the future is exciting.

I want to turn to oncology and I recognize that there is a delay in some chemotherapy issues at St. James. This is mainly due to industrial action at the ports and we are work assiduously to overcome that. So, where has the money gone in oncology? Where has the money gone? In St. James, over the past 10 years, we have done approximately 20,000 blood tumour marker tests annually—so 10 years, 200,000, with no cost; over 7,300 chemotherapy infusions annually—so over 10 years, 73,000; over 700 CT stimulations per year—over 10 years, 7,000; over 500 external beam radiation therapy, multiply that by 10; over 400 HDR brachy treatments annually, multiply it by 10; over 75 laparoscopic surgeries per year; and we recently launched—as I said, as a gift from PPGPL—our new MRI, and we have done, to date,

500 MRI scans, reported in the first six months.

Madam Speaker, I am told by Dr. Kellie Alleyne-Mike that this is the first of many achievements of their kind at North West RHA, over the past 10, years in the public sector and even in the country. So that is where the money is going. That is where the money is going. And in addition to that, recognizing that oncology is a major global concern, the Cabinet approved, a couple of months ago, a scholarship programme for eight doctors to start their DM in oncology at the University of the West Indies, their postgraduate training in oncology.

Madam Speaker, the vision for oncology is not only St. James. We have already stated to take in patients at Augustus Long, short-stay patients in oncology in the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre. We have already started, with the full opening for Augustus Long carded for November 2024. Sangre Grande Hospital, the new hospital, has a dedicated oncology ward; dedicated. That is what we are doing. That is what we are doing.

Madam Speaker, the future of our digital footprint, which we are taking tentative steps now, will become something that Trinidad and Tobago will be leading in, in the future. But cancer treatment is not only limited to St. James. That is a centre of excellence for certain types of cancer. But the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, we have a centre of excellence, not known to many, for lung cancer under the distinguished leadership of Dr. Mark West, a great of today, following on the greats of yesterday, and I quote:

Over the past decade, the North-Central Regional Health Authority, through the Lung Cancer/Thoracic Malignancy Unit, has been

dedicated to the prevention, early detection and management of lung cancer in Trinidad and Tobago.

Early detection, reduced waiting times, improve survival rates and better utilization of resources, that is where the money is going. That is where the money is going. The number of patients referred to the lung cancer unit has steadily increased from 10 in 2013—10, just 10—to 367 in 2018. That is what we are doing for lung cancer, from 10 to 367, indicating a significant rise in awareness and diagnostic activity during this period. That is what we are doing. That, Oropouche West, is where the money gone. Where has the money gone? What have we been doing?

Thoracic surgeons within the unit perform essential diagnostic procedure, such as bronchoscopy, endobronchial ultrasound, media tenoscopy, video-assisted thoracoscopy and wedge resections. That is where the money is going, into providing treatment for people who cannot afford to do it on their own. And that is why it is so disheartening when I hear people talk about health, because they speak from a place of lack of information and they just make it up as they go along.

Madam Speaker, another issue that I need to address is something raised by the Member for Caroni East, and it has to do with the allegation that somehow I am interfering in the operations of Chemistry, Food and Drugs. Well, I had a legal opinion done. I will be neglecting my statutory duties as a Minister of Health because by law, I have the responsibility to protect the health of 1.4 million people. That is my sworn duty.

And that is why I am coming back now to one of my points earlier that when certain professionals join the UNC, they forget their medical training, their

dental training and the ethics that go along with that. Madam Speaker, every time somebody from the UNC speaks about my clamping down on the sale of unregistered pharmaceuticals, it is always advocating for the free sale of anything that comes into Trinidad and Tobago.

**11.30 a.m.**

But if I do that, if I do that and somebody dies taking an unregistered counterfeit or contaminated drug, who is the first person that the media, the Opposition would come after? Me. Madam Speaker, the date of 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2024, is important, and I would tell you why. I went on TV6 on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, I went on CNC on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, but before that I was being condemned by a few in the industry of trying to stamp out the sale of unregistered pharmaceuticals in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni East put up a strong defence, but before that I was hauled before the Senate at 11.30p.m. on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 2024, on a Motion on the Adjournment about the unregistered pharmaceutical products by Sen. Wade Mark. And the way Sen. Mark and also Caroni East couched the issue is that I was targeting small pharmacies. I was targeting the small man and letting the big man go. I have the *Hansard* of that fateful night:

“Mr. President, the Minister”—meaning me—“has the authority to issue free sale over-the-counter drugs. He has that authority because we have a Chemistry, Food and Drug Division that does not produce a list online of unregistered drugs...”

He goes on, the hon. Senator—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I just want to guide you with respect to

Standing Order 48(8), eh. Okay? Because you are referring to proceedings in the other place, so, please be mindful of Standing Order 48(8).

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** So basically what I was being asked to do in the other place was to allow unregistered pharmaceuticals to be sold and I stop it there. Caroni East brought up the same thing about DayQuil and the different sizes. Madam Speaker, the reason that I am performing my statutory duty to protect the lives of people in Trinidad and Tobago by going after unregistered pharmaceuticals, aka the suitcase trade, which has been going on for decades in this country under all Governments, is because of the recent information which is in the public domain, which I spoke about on TV6, CNC 3, that cough syrups are tainted with something called diethylene glycol. For the layman what is diethylene glycol? You see that green thick syrupy liquid you pour into your car radiator as a coolant, that, Madam Speaker, is diethylene glycol.

Diethylene glycol has found its way into the pharmaceutical supply chain and in Africa and Indonesia over 40 children have died, because of kidney failure. The diethylene glycol attacks the kidneys and these children have died. But according to Caroni East and the UNC and others, I am supposed to ignore that, I am supposed to give that a pass. But when a child dies in Trinidad and Tobago, if the Minister of Health does not perform his statutory duty to protect the citizenry I am the first one you are going to hang in Woodford Square. And rightly so.

So, I want to put it on record, that because the UNC seems to have some interest in this matter, my attempts to go after these things are going to be redoubled, because I have to protect the children of Trinidad and Tobago.



That is my duty. You see when in Opposition, you have no accountability. You could say what you want, you could do what you want, you could eat what you want, and you could drink what you want. But I have a duty, we in Government have a duty. In Opposition, you could just speak, because you are not held accountable.

Madam Speaker, I come to the issue of CDAP. The UNC from day one when the then Minister of Health, the MP for Diego Martin North/East launched CDAP, have been against CDAP. They have been attacking CDAP, the quality of drugs. It happened again in this debate by Caroni East and yesterday, to some extent, by Cumuto/Manzanilla. Madam Speaker, I know this is not going to be the end of it so I cannot say I hope this stops today, but I am going to put on the public record how drugs are developed and how they are approved for sale in Trinidad and Tobago, including CDAP drugs. So the drug development process:

Step one, discovery and development; two, preclinical research; three, clinical research; four, FDA review. We do not put any drugs onto the formulary if they have not been approved by what we call a stringent authority. A stringent authority is a serious regulatory body like the Food and Drug Administration of the United States; Medicines, England; Public Health Agency, Canada, I believe. Australia. And five, FDA, Post-market surveillance monitoring.

The drugs on the CDAP, which I take myself—which I take myself, have proven to be what we called bioequivalent and bioavailable to the brand names. Let me just put this here. If a product has the same bioavailability it is considered that they would have the same clinical effects and therapeutic

outcomes as the brand name. That is what CDAP is. But taking drugs alone is not going to cure you of these chronic diseases. Chronic diseases need to be handled by one, the availability of quality drugs, which I have spoken about. Two, the availability at the point of consumption, and I am going to put on record now the final report, Evaluation of the CDAP, Ministry of Health, 18 June, 2012. That is when the UNC was in office. The UNC was in office. This is their report. It goes on to say:

“Most public dispensaries...surveyed indicated that patients are better able to manage their chronic disease condition(s) after having accessed medications under the CDAP.

On the basis of these statistics and on opinions obtained through the interview process, CDAP has offered its beneficiaries convenient, faster and improved access to medications.”

This is the UNC's report. But every time somebody from the UNC talks on CDAP the drugs “eh good”. My own HbA1C, how I manage my diabetes, on taking Metformin from India varies between 4.5 to 6, over the past 10 years.

**Mr. Lee:** Excellent.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** That is excellent. My cholesterol, I got the reports this morning. My total cholesterol varies between 172 and 200, by taking simple statin from where, India via CDAP. But what happens in Trinidad and Tobago, and I am going to come to that in a report very soon—as a matter of fact, I will do it now.

**11.40 a.m.**

There is a report “Prevalence of Diabetes, Obesity and Dyslipidaemia in

Persons within High and Low Income Groups Living in North and South Trinidad”. Listen to what this report says and let me quote the authors names: Nayak, Rahming, Rahunanan, Raghoonath, Rahman, Rajh, Rambadan, Ramdass. Pay attention to this quote because I have consistently told the public and constantly told UNC people when they talk about CDAP, it is not only about drugs. And I quote from page 12.

“Another major finding from this study showed more persons being diabetic in South Trinidad compare to North.”

We know that. The East Indian population, like me, because of genetics and lifestyle are more prone to diabetes as the African population because of genetics and whatever is more prone to diabetes—I mean hypertension and prostate cancer. And this I can keep telling the country. But every time I mentioned it I get a backlash.

“The South population were less inclined to take their medications...”

Cumuto/Manzanilla knows that compliance is a major issue in treating chronic diseases like diabetes, hypotension and cancers.

Managing chronic diseases is not only taking medication. Taking medication is one prong of a lifestyle change. So in other words, you cannot take simvastatin like me to reduce cholesterol and eat chicken and chips three times a week. You cannot take metformin to control your blood sugar like me and eat chicken and chips and wash it down with a black sweet drink which is just pure sugar and hope your chronic conditions are going to be managed. You cannot do all of those things and sit down in a hammock or a rocking chair whole day. Managing chronic diseases, as Cumuto/Manzanilla knows, is medication, eating properly and exercising. But the UNC will

never say that. They just say CDAP “ain’t” good. So they set up their patients, they set up people to fail. It is a holistic approach, a word I hate to use. It is overused. But this is what the report says:

“The South population were less inclined to take their medications and were less aware of the complications of these diseases due to their poor education about the disease and the use of the proper medications prescribed.”

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have 36 seconds left of ordinary time. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wind up your contribution.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** You may proceed.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** So that is what we need. We need to stop blaming CDAP and educate people about the holistic approach to managing health.

Madam Speaker, in my last few minutes, I want to deal with a very, very serious issue. I am leaving the most serious for last. Madam Speaker, I introduced my last topic with a quote from a book call, “The Deadly Rise of Anti-Science: A Scientist’s Warning” by Peter Hotez and I quote, because if we do not pay attention we are going to die. He explains how anti-science became a major societal and lethal force.

In first years of the pandemic, more than 200,000 unvaccinated Americans needlessly died despite the widespread availability of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Madam Speaker, it give me no pleasure because in Siparia’s end of her contribution she spoke about vaccines. I do not want to quote too much what the Member said about fake vaccines, about the state-sponsored murder. You know it is unbecoming of a past Prime Minister who is

aspiring to be the Prime Minister again to read to the public everything that a person who wrote it, a former Minister of Education and want-to-be Minister of Health puts before her. Because once you read it you take ownership of it. So these are her words.

A *Newsday* editorial, “A doctor with no facts is not a doctor. He is a quack.” “One of the ironic things about the Opposition Leader...unveiled in her party’s 55-point plan...”—is the—“...way she seemingly courted misinformation as she discussed the Government’s handling of COVID19. ‘Hundreds of thousands were given a fake vaccine...’”

Madam Speaker, I need to apologize today to the following countries. I need to apologize to President Jinping and the people of China because we got vaccines from them. I need to apologize to President Joe Biden and the White House and the people of United States because we got vaccines from them. I need to apologize to Prime Minister Modi and the people of India after the Opposition Leader herself wrote Prime Minister Modi asking for vaccines. I need to apologize to them.

I need to apologize to WHO, COVAC and GAVI. I need to apologize to the African platform from who we got J&J vaccines. I need to apologize to Barbados and Prime Minister Mia Mottley because the first 200 vaccines came from Barbados. I need to apologize to all those people on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago. We are grateful, but there is something in the water in the UNC that when professionals join in they forget their medical training and their medical ethics.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla quoted at length yesterday about infectious diseases specialist Dr. Peter Chin. I am not going to go into that.

But the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla put on record that this Trinidadian disease expert criticizes the Opposition Leader. Madam Speaker, when you are fighting a global pandemic you need all hands on deck.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Countries need to be moving in one direction; sing one song. We could learn from other countries; we could learn from other people. I want to quote lastly President Joe Biden in a book called “Promise me, Dad” on page 42. And, Madam Speaker, this is crucial as to how we develop this country because we now have five people who have seen the light.

We have five people who are putting country before self, and the only person who is going to come out of this anti-vaccine rank with their reputation intact is Cumuto/Manzanilla because he has put professional ethics before parties and politics.

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Joe Biden said:

“I have come to believe that the first duty of a public servant is to help bring people together, especially in a crisis, especially across difficult divides, to show respect for everybody at the table, and to help find a safe way forward.”

That is what the COVID-19 response wanted. Not taking us to court every Monday morning and losing.

“After forty-five years in office, that basic conviction still gave me purpose.” We could have done better in COVID if the UNC could have put aside parties and politics and being anti-vaxxers and talking about guinea pigs,

because 89 per cent of the people who died were unvaccinated. Who is going to take the responsibility for that? And I want to quote with a last quotation from a letter to the editor today, written by one Rushton Paray.

Quote:—

**Madam Speaker:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Sorry, yes. Mayaro, sorry.

“When political loyalty overrides personal convictions, it quickly leads to a loss of integrity...”

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** The only person on the UNC Bench who will leave here with his integrity intact is Cumuto/Manzanilla because he stood up for science, he stood up for truth.

**11.50 a. m.**

I will repeat:

“When political loyalty overrides personal convictions, it quickly leads to a loss of integrity, both in the eyes of the electorate and within the politician’s own sense of self.”

Mayaro, well said. Well said, and if Mayaro had been the Leader of the Opposition during COVID-19, less people would have died. Less people would have died because Mayaro would not have ridden the backs of that guinea pig statement and the anti-vaccine statement, and “sunshine could kill COVID” statement and “Puncheon and rum good for de virus”. Would never—Madam Speaker, how much time do I have again?

**Madam Speaker:** You end at 11:53.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Good, so I have two minutes left. We at the Ministry

and we in the PNM do not need advice from Siparia about vaccines. Why, because PAHO/WHO on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 2024, and I quote:

“The Pan American Health Organisation...wishes to congratulate the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the encouraging results in routine immunization coverage obtained”—over—”...the last year, as reported the Estimates of National Immunization Coverage...published by WHO and the United Nations Children’s Fund...”

This is us. We are one of two countries to achieve this, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. So I need no advice from Siparia about vaccinations. None, absolutely none, and I close by reminding the Members for Fyzabad and Caroni East that there is life after politics. Your professional integrity and what you learned in medical school and what you learned in dental school should stand for something. Should stand for something. As I said, and I will close with this, there is something in the UNC that when medical professionals join them, they forget all their medical training, all their scientific training and just try to be popular.

Madam Speaker, as I close I want to thank the people of St. Joseph for their continuing faith in me. I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for having faith in me. This is my fifteenth budget presentation overall and my tenth as Minister of Health and with those few words, I thank you.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Toco/Sangre Grande.

**Mr. Roger. Monroe** (*Toco/Sangre Grande*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to join this debate on fiscal package 2025,



entitled, Steadfast and Resolute:-Forging Pathways to Prosperity. At this point in time allow me to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister, Member for Diego Martin West and this PNM Administration for its nine-plus years of sturdy, sober, honest, visionary and people-centred leadership.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, before I go forward with my contribution allow me to acknowledge and extend my many thanks to all my constituents of Toco/Sangre Grande for the opportunity they gave me to represent them in this House. I wish to also reassure my constituents of Toco/Sangre Grande of my unwavering commitment and good representation and service to all my constituents by my good self and this People's National Movement Government.

Madam Speaker, this budget would not have been possible without the Member for Diego Martin North/East in the capacity of Minister of Finance and I wish to extend my congratulations to him and thanks for his budget presentation and once again to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Also, I want to put on record of him being the longest serving Minister of Finance in the history of this Government, Madam Speaker. I also want to congratulate him on his prudent management and skilful ability to keep Trinidad and Tobago away from the hands of the IMF.

Madam Speaker, at this point in time I extend congratulations and thanks to my colleague from Arima the Minister of Planning and Urban Development for her contribution towards this year's fiscal package. Once again Madam Speaker, this PNM Government of which I am proud to be a part of, has put before the nation a budget that considers all and takes all walks of life into

consideration as we offer the population of Trinidad and Tobago the best in our given circumstances.

Madam Speaker, this budget offers so much to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. However, I would focus on a few topics and it would be as follows. The Ministry of Works and Transport, Public Utilities, Education, Health, Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Housing and Urban Development, Sport and Community Development and of course, Madam Speaker, the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande.

The Ministry of Works and Transport: At this point in time let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Works and Transport and the Senator, or the Minister in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and their team for their hard work and contribution to the continued efforts of the development of our nation's roadways and our infrastructure throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the allocation set for the Ministry of Works and Transport this year is \$1.41 billion and we intend to see the continuation of a lot of projects such as: landslip repair, bridge construction, refurbishment of existing roadways and highways, general road development, paving initiative, manhole restoration, desilting and river cleaning projects, expansion of the Trinidad and Tobago road network and much more.

Madam Speaker, in the last fiscal into 2024, we saw over 150 secondary road rehabilitation projects being executed at a figure of \$233 million.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Out of that 150, 85 have been completed, 30 scheduled for the first quarter of 2025, and 35 are being tendered at the moment. Madam

Speaker, it has been mentioned in this fiscal package that the secondary roads contractors will increase from 25 small contractors to 50 small contractors to facilitate patching and paving rehabilitation work nationwide. We will also see in excess of 100 roads, that is local roads or secondary roads as I may say, being upgraded and enhanced throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, secondary roads have been upgraded and I will call a few: Palm Road, Clarence Trace, Oropouche Road, Plantation Road, all in Valencia in the constituency Toco/Sangre Grande, Madam Speaker. So, our secondary roads are being upgraded and enhanced to better the lives of our people within the communities and we in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande have been benefiting from such.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, those roads that I just mentioned had in excess of 1,200 metres of road works done to each one of them, right in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande. Madam Speaker, I must mention the highly anticipated Cumuto to Sangre Grande Churchill Roosevelt Highway extension. I saw many persons in recent times making statements and mentioning that there is no highway and they are still in disbelief. This morning I stand here as a proud resident of Sangre Grande and I want to ensure all of Toco/Sangre Grande and our neighbouring communities in Cumuto/Manzanilla and even those who have intent to visit us, that very soon in the near future, the early part of 2025, we will have our brand new highway extension all the way from Cumuto into Guaico Junction, open and

available for us to traverse back and forth.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** It is 1.17 kilometres, it is a connector road. It is going to impact over 155,000 citizens throughout the north-eastern region and in areas such as: Damarie Hill, Guaico, Little Cora, Foster Road, Vega De Oropouche, Ojoe Road, Manzanilla, North Eastern Settlement, Sangre Chiquito, the lower parts of Tamana just to name a few.

**12.00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, as someone who lives in the constituency that I represent, I could tell you of the challenges we face, especially on an evening entering into Sangre Grande with traffic along the Valencia stretch. Sometimes you are in traffic in excess of 30 minutes, 40 minutes or upwards, and I want to assure the people of the eastern part and the north-eastern part of Trinidad that in the coming days, we would alleviate that problem as a government by opening this brand new road and making it available to all of us.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** But it is not just a road that we are going to open as a government, you know. We are also going to open up the town of Sangre Grande and the north-eastern part of Trinidad to the rest of Trinidad and Tobago, where persons could now have the availability of ease and comfort of travelling from point A to point B and also, to set up businesses. So we are opening up the town of Sangre Grande for the betterment of all of our people on the north-eastern part.

Madam Speaker, I sat here attentively, as I always do in my very good

behaviour, unlike those on the opposite side, and I listened to Members talk about our road network and roads that are leading to nowhere, but I want to just touch briefly on the Manzanilla Mayaro Road network and the upgrade that was done here.

Madam Speaker, the town of Sangre Grande is connected to Manzanilla Mayaro and other communities through the Manzanilla Mayaro Road, and because we are all in the north-eastern part and on the eastern seaboard and we share a lot of similarities, we tend to traverse back and forth. But some time in 2022, unfortunately, because of torrential rains, we had the devastation of the Manzanilla Mayaro Road. However, Madam Speaker—and the Member for Mayaro and the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla could explain first hand to this House, the challenges that the persons who live in those parts would have experienced. The fishermen, the businesses and all those who are along that roadway were cut off from the main town of Sangre Grande, and Sangre Grande was cut off from that area as well. So they were not able to trade, they were not able to do business and it was a more lengthy process to get to Mayaro and the upper parts of Manzanilla.

Madam Speaker, this roadway is going to cost \$177 million and it is expected to be completed in the early parts of 2025. We have a date somewhere in January. And I want to say that the People's National Movement Government understands the challenges faced by the people of Manzanilla, Ortoire, Guayaguayare and the other communities, and we are intend to complete this roadway, giving the people of those parts a strong and secure road network as it is the Government's aim to keep the entire

eastern seaboard well connected.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** You see, Madam Speaker, I came to this House in 2020, and I listened attentively to Members opposite on the upper Bench, I must say—because we have two Benches of the opposite side at this time—and let me take the opportunity to acknowledge my colleagues on the western Bench of the opposite side: Tabaquite, Mayaro, Chaguanas West, Naparima and Cumuto/Manzanilla.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** I may not call those five the B team, I think the B team is sitting elsewhere. They are the A team.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, I want to touch on the Ministry of Health. It has been revealed in this fiscal package that \$7.571 billion has been allocated to the Ministry of Health and this is because this PNM Government understands the importance of the availability of good health care and an effective health system to all our citizens. This allocation was intended to continue the smooth operations of hospitals and health facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, such as the Point Fortin Hospital, the Port of Spain General Hospital, San Fernando, Arima Health Facility, Scarborough General Hospital, and all other public health facilities in the SWRHA, NCRHA, NWRHA, TRHA and the ERHA, and this is including something that I am proud to stand here and speak about today. This is including the brand new \$1.1 billion Sangre Grande Hospital Campus.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, this hospital was opened and handed over to the people of the Toco/Sangre Grande and the north-eastern region just earlier this year by the Prime Minister and by the hon. Minister of Health, giving way to serve 155,000-plus persons in the north eastern region. And I want to take this opportunity to thank my hon. Prime Minister for the investment made in the people of Toco/Sangre Grande and in north-eastern part of Trinidad and Tobago, and I also want to thank the hon. Minister of Health, the Member for St. Joseph. And St. Joseph, you all have a good Member of Parliament.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** I want to thank the Member for St. Joseph for his input, for his hard work and dedication, for the time spent in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, the many visits to ensure that the hospital that we handed over to the people of the region of Sangre Grande, the north-eastern parts, is of top quality and it is one that we would be proud of for many, many years to come.

I want to say, Madam Speaker, some of the things that you could find in this hospital. You could find 106 beds, an adult emergency department, an intensive care unit, an imaging department and other services that are essential to cater to the needs of all of the people in the varying communities, from Matelot to Matura, Sangre Grande, Valencia, Cumuto, on the borderline, and we go all the way to Mayaro, the ERHA boundaries. We have provided a hospital for the people of the north-eastern part to ensure that their health care is in the good hands of the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Ministry of Health, and the PNM Government has

done that for us.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, I want to say that due to this allocation, we are going to see the continuation of the upgrading of existing health facilities, the improved and additional health services, the increased supply of medication and also, the filling of vacancies, leading to employment for the unemployed and for the youth. Because many persons in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, and in the region as the whole, have been gaining employment at our new hospital and they are happily giving the service back to their community.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on the wage increase, and anybody knows me could tell that I understand what a wage increase could do for an average individual. I want to say to the Opposition that \$2 may be small for you all, but for the average citizen, an accumulation of \$2 more per hour, giving way to approximately \$500 more or so in their pockets, could make a big difference in that family's life.

**Ms. Ameen:** They deserve more.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, we saw an increase in 2023/2024 fiscal from \$17.50 to \$20.50. In this fiscal package, we saw an additional increase of \$2, bringing us from \$20.50 to \$22.50, for those persons who are much deserving of such. Who are those persons? The CEPEP workers, the CEPEP workers that the Opposition Members all depend on to clean up their various constituencies and communities. So what is "de big thing" about? Madam Speaker, \$2 is not enough for them? It is not good enough for them?



**Ms. Ameen:** They deserve more.

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Is it not good enough for them? They deserve it.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, URP, MTS, they all deserve the increase. But this increase will not only improve the lives of those employees or those that have gotten that increase, public sector minimum wage workers, it is also going to increase the lives of those within the communities that these people live in, such as taxi drivers, the shop, the lady with the lil shop, the store, food vendors.

**12.10 p.m.**

The money is going to trickle back into the communities. Madam Speaker, that is not no hard maths. I do not know what the issue is, but I am happy that, we on this side, have seen the need to give way for an additional increase, and I want to assure the population, whenever the ability is there for us to give a further increase, it would be done.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, I want to touch on tax amnesty, tax and the NIS amnesty. The Minister of Finance indicated that there will be an amnesty from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2024. Madam Speaker, in no way is this Government encouraging tax avoidance, or encouraging persons to be delinquent in paying their taxes, or NIS payments and contributions.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to say, we are giving another opportunity before the TTRA comes in full operation. We are trying be fair and lenient to our people, understanding that some persons may have fell behind

because of circumstances, Madam Speaker, COVID, loss of jobs, business closure. We are not a heartless Government. We are a loving, caring Government to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Not some because you are in a PNM constituency. We love the people of Pointe-a-Pierre, we love the people of Siparia, St. Augustine, Oropouche East, Princes Town, Couva South, the whole Opposition Bench. We love the entirety of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. So when we make the decisions, we make it in the best interest of the entirety of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, some persons who would benefit from this tax amnesty, would be persons who had businesses that were facing challenges, and they now have an extended period to do so, and make the necessary payments. It is also intended to give individuals an opportunity to bring their taxes up to date. It is also intended for employers, most importantly, it is also going to benefit employees, because employers now have an opportunity to bring their employees' NIS contributions and payments up to date. Madam Speaker, you know how difficult it would be as an employee to get damaged on the jobsite and go to the NIS office, only to find out that your employer has not been paying your contributions, and then you are turned away, Madam Speaker. This is an opportunity to rectify those issues.

Madam Speaker, this amnesty is not only about capturing taxes and collecting money, you know, Madam Speaker. It is not only about that. We

are going to see, through the returns of this amnesty, we are going to benefit as citizens, through national development, education, social services, health care, training opportunity, Madam Speaker, and even those who have outstanding refunds, tax refunds for collection, they stand a chance to get their outstanding payments.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to call on all who have their outstanding payments, and who have taxes to be paid, take this opportunity, and forget the noise from on the other side, and do the right thing. Do what is right for you, and do what is right for Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, on the day of the budget, Madam Speaker, I came to this House, and I sat in my vehicle, and I looked on at the protestors that were bussed in here by the Opposition. And I understand a few were asking where you would collect payment for today's job. But those protestors, I hope you get your payment. Those protestors were here and I remember clearly an individual with an axe and a House, indicating that they should axe the tax.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on property tax, and I have no fear about property tax because I am sure, we would hear some things from the other contributions, but I have no fear about property tax. Once you are a property owner, and you are a proud property owner, you should also be a proud contributor to property tax to ensure the betterment of your community and to ensure that the goods and services, that you so desire, and enjoy sometimes, most times, for free, without making a contribution, you should be happy to make such contribution.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, I understand, that as of the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, 2024, some 89,441 residential property owners made a total payment of \$91 million in property tax. And they should be congratulated for that.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, I want say that it is very important for us to pay our property taxes. As a Member of Parliament, who represents a rural constituency, I want to say that a lot of our communities fall within the boundary line of local roads, and we require a lot of local services.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** “You pay tax on dat building?”

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Couva South, I would not be distracted by you today, Sir.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** I am here to speak to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the Speaker, and Toco/Sangre Grande.

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

**Ms. Ameen:** Collecting all the rent—

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine tends to heckle me every time I stand here. I want to say, Madam Speaker, I am a red man from Grande, but I am the wrong one.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Madam Speaker, as I go back to my contribution. Madam Speaker, property tax—

**Ms. Ameen:** “Wah red man? He is ah red man?”

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk.*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order, order, order. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande.

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I continue on property tax, let me make it abundantly clear that, although the Central Government provides funding to the regional corporation bodies across Trinidad, Madam Speaker, we still continue to hear from the corporations. And I could tell you that, Madam Speaker, because before I came to the honourable House, I spent six months at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation as an alderman. And I think I was a harder working alderman than some of those Opposition councillors.

Madam Speaker, I want to say that, although the funding is being made available, we still continue to hear the cries from some corporations, such as the famous words, “no funds available,” “they are unable to assist,” “defective equipment,” and, “no materials.” Madam Speaker, for how long we will continue to hear that. Madam Speaker, those issues may simply just be because of mismanagement on the behalf of the corporation part. Because I know of a lot of things, you know, Madam Speaker. I could join with the Member from Cumuto/Manzanilla, and speak on issues that have been happening in the region of Sangre Grande for hours in this House, Madam Speaker, but time would not permit. Madam Speaker, I want to say that the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, and other corporations, has been giving explanations, as such, it may be as a result of mismanagement, or it may be as a result of the rapid expansion of communities.

Madam Speaker, in doing so, I want to encourage persons to do the right thing. Pay your property tax, and then you could go forth and make your demands as members of communities. Because, Madam Speaker, property tax would make funding available. It is going to make the funding available,

Madam Speaker, for the maintenance and development of your local roads; drainage maintenance; upkeep of public facilities, like the washroom, which they are not fixing in Sangre Grande. The public washroom, for when the poor old people from Toco and Matelot come to Grande, they have nowhere to use by the old post-office on Andre Street, fix it. I am begging the Corporation of Sangre Grande, the Chairman and others.

Madam Speaker, play parks, local market—Madam Speaker, the San Grande Market, we have been clamouring, begging, and pleading for a washroom in that Sangre Grande Market. So these are some of the things that property tax and the availability of the funds could help us deal with, Madam Speaker. Upkeep of the cemeteries, some cemeteries have—apparently they are unable to man it, Madam Speaker.

And then they speak about the hon. Member for San Fernando West; the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, but I want to say hats off to him because thank God for CEPEP, because if CEPEP was not available, Madam Speaker, our recreational facilities, and our cemeteries would not have been maintained. People have to cut track in Sangre Grande, and in other parts, to go to their family's funeral and give them their last rites, Madam Speaker. But thank God for CEPEP, and thank God for the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government; the Member for San Fernando West. San Fernando West, you have a good Member of Parliament, hold on to him.

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

**12.20 p.m.**

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Septic cleaning, clearing of overgrown and abandoned

lots. Madam Speaker, just recently the Member for San Fernando West and his team at Rural Development led a serious campaign to eradicate dengue and the fight against dengue, cleaning lots and overgrown lots throughout Trinidad and Tobago. “Why no Member or the Member from St. Augustine did not mention” and applaud the Member for San Fernando West, the Minister, for that? So, Madam Speaker, as I continue, there are many, many benefits we could benefit as a people if we do what we have to do, pay our property tax. Do not be misled by the Opposition, because our communities would be in a much better place if we do the right thing. Do not be misled by those who are already lost their way.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. I want to mention the many life-changing initiatives and execution of projects this Ministry has done throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and more so in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande. I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, and the Minister in the Ministry, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. Both Ministers, thank you for your hard work and dedication and thank you on behalf of all of Trinidad and Tobago, and especially those in the constituency.

Madam Speaker, that Ministry has been providing grants to improve the home conditions or the housing conditions of persons. I wonder if the Members opposite constituents do not access such, because I am aware that they all access these things, Madam Speaker. There are some grants that they access all, the home improvement grant, Madam Speaker, at the value of \$15,000. In the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, I could say as the

Member of Parliament—and later down in my contribution, I will tell you why—235 persons have accessed that grant through my assistance, and through the work that we have been doing in that constituency, at the value of \$15,000, leading to some \$3 million-plus dollars. PMCU, Home Improvement Subsidy, some 250-plus persons benefiting, 153 persons for home construction at a value of \$50,000, and the home improvement subsidy is \$20,000, Madam Speaker.

I can tell you that a lot of persons, in calling me to extend their gratitude to this Government for these initiatives, have made many life-changing arrangements in their housing situation, Madam Speaker. I want to touch on the Land Settlement Agency. If I come here and speak about the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and not speak about the Land Settlement Agency the people of Toco/Sangre Grande would not forgive me. Madam Speaker, the Land Settlement Agency built some 808 HVIP houses across Trinidad in the last four or five years, Madam Speaker. But, I want to say in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande in fiscal or in '23 into '24, we saw 47 HVIP houses being built for the people.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** The more vulnerable ones, Madam Speaker, 47, and families. Madam Speaker, I want to say that the Village and Housing Improvement Programme itself has been a great success, Madam Speaker. And at present the cost, Madam Speaker, is going to move from \$150—the construction cost is going to move from \$150,000 to \$200,000, and that is because this Government understands the challenges the contractors face because of the cost to construct these houses that are so life-changing to our



many citizens who so desire these houses. And we are happy to make that adjustment to continue the programme.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to bring to your attention today—I do not want to bring you in too much, but I want to bring to your attention today, and the Members opposite who seem to pretend they do not know about the HVIP houses. I want to tell you about a HVIP house, I want to describe it. Madam Speaker, first thing first, it is free.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Second thing, it is a 20 by 24 concrete structure. It carries two bedrooms, Madam Speaker. It carries a toilet and bath inside, steel roof, doors, PVC or aluminium windows. You are getting electrification, and water inside, Madam Speaker. That is the PNM Government working for you.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, I want to talk about two other projects that are being executed by the Land Settlement Agency in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande. Upper Ojoe Road, Jacob Coat, Site C 1 & 2, 93 per cent completed. Madam Speaker, when I was a young “fella”—well younger “fella” I should say—

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. R. Monroe:**—schoolboy, that part of Ojoe Road Sangre Grande was forest. Today, Madam Speaker, it is an unplanned development or more familiarly known as a squatting site. But I can tell you, Madam Speaker, the people who live in this community have benefited from proper driving roads with drainage, electrification, and water. We have improved thousands of

residential lots in those areas, and those people are much off today and they are happy for it, Madam Speaker. Also ongoing by the Land Settlement Agency is the Mora Lands Allotment in Vega de Oropouche. Similar development works is going on such as development of residential lots, roadways, drainage, pipe-borne water supply, and electricity Madam Speaker. So, if that is not your Government working for the less fortunate and vulnerable in society, well then I do not know what to explain here today in this House, again, Madam Speaker.

They say ungratefulness is worse than witchcraft, and if I stand here today and I do not recognize the Minister of Public Utilities, the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, and I dare say, the hardest working Minister of Public Utilities in recent times, my friend and my colleague, then, Madam Speaker, “God will vex with me.” On behalf of the constituent of Toco/Sangre Grande and myself, I wish to thank the hon. Member for his contribution to Trinidad and Tobago—

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:**—and more specifically my constituency. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities has been making life-changing or executing life-changing projects, and sometimes it seems very impossible across Trinidad and Tobago, but by the hard work of my friend and colleague and his astute leadership, they have been successful with a high track record to the point that our neighbouring communities or country are calling for backup when it comes to electricity, Madam Speaker.

The Ministry of Public Utilities continues to execute projects throughout but I want to touch on the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande. I have before

me, Madam Speaker, over the past four years, projects that have been completed in the constituency, four years, meaning 2020. I became a Member of Parliament in 2020, and I want to just use the words of my colleague for Cumuto/Manzanilla. When you approach your colleagues, you deal with them as colleagues. Speak to him nice, he is a nice gentleman. The Member is a nice gentleman and he would do what is necessary because he is in the business of helping all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to say through the CWIP project and through all the other NWSTP and NWSIP, and the Well Development Programme and the IDB Loan Programme, Madam Speaker, In Sangre Grande we see the following. I will just call a few because the list is big. We saw the development of Well 1 and Well 2, Madam Speaker. And, while I am calling here, Cumuto/Manzanilla, Member of Parliament is looking at me.

I shared a ribbon-cutting ceremony with Cumuto/Manzanilla and the hon. Minister for the booster station in Manzanilla, now providing a good water supply to a lot of people in Cumuto/Manzanilla—north Manzanilla, south Manzanilla, upper and lower Manzanilla, Madam Speaker. But back to Toco/Sangre Grande. Completed projects: And these are pipeline projects, Madam Speaker, 1.1 kilometres of pipe laying projects. Petit Trou Road, Mount Calvary, Brasso Seco, Church Street Matura, Sugars Lane, Blake Avenue, Da Marie Hill, St. Albans, Valencia.

**12.30 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, let me tell you about St. Albans, Valencia. This change-out of a 2-inch water main to a 6-inch water main affected some 323 households, leading to 920-plus residents getting a 24/5 to 24/7 water

supply. This is right in the Valencia area, along the Valencia long stretch. Residents of Tattoo Trace, I want to give you a little hope this morning. Tattoo Trace, Valencia, we have heard you, I have had discussions with my colleague, and we are coming to you soon. Water will be available to you, the people of Tattoo Trace, Valencia.

We did some work at the Quare reservoir and the booster and whatnot, leading to 4,200 persons in the KP Lands area, Alexander Street, Valencia Old Road, Plantation, and so forth, getting better supply in the Valencia area. We did some work to the North Oropouche treatment plant, increasing the service and the reliability to over 120,000 persons, Madam Speaker, and we also did some pipe-laying projects, first time, 600 metres-plus in the Pine Avenue, Valencia area, Madam Speaker, benefitting 480 persons. We also did some work, Madam Speaker, in the National Water Sector Transformation Programme, which leads to the construction of a new 5 million-gallon storage tank in the North Oropouche Water Treatment Plant.

Madam Speaker, I want to swiftly run through this list, so I will jump across here, Madam Speaker, to inform that the Tompire Water Treatment Plant and the Matura Water Treatment Plant are well on the way, and scheduled for upgrades for the people of Balandra, the people of Toco, Cumana, Mission, the people of Matura, La Guira and the associated communities. We are well on the way to fix those two water treatment plants and we will rectify your water challenges that we are aware of, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Eastern Main Road, Valencia, we had some changing out of pipelines and whatnot, Madam Speaker, to continue the good service.

But Madam Speaker, just recently, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla

again, joined me and the Minister of Public Utilities in an area called McIntosh Trace, Vega de Oropouche, to witness the start, or the ongoing works, I should say, of well No. 4, which will give an additional 350,000 gallons per day, additional into our system in the northeastern part. And this will affect positively the areas such as Jabodee Trace; Williams Trace; Foster Road; Vega de Oropouche; Sahadeen Trace; Rampersad; Paharry Village, this is in Toco/Sangre Grande; Cumuto, Manzanilla, they are going to benefit; Maraj Hill; Upper Cunapo; Dowlat Circular, Barker Trace, and much more. But, Madam Speaker, there is also another well on the way, and that is three wells in the Turre area, and that is going to benefit the people of Turre, Guaico, Picton Road, Coca, Damarie Hill and environs, Madam Speaker.

So Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities, under its utility company, WASA, has been working for the people of Toco/Sangre Grande, working for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I give full commendation to the Minister of Public Utilities, Madam Speaker.

Swiftly, Madam Speaker, I would still be on public utilities and I would touch on the major street lighting and repairs that were done through T&TEC. In Toco/Sangre Grande, we saw the report, some 6,000-plus lights combined between repairs and installation, and what not. Madam Speaker, as a Member of Parliament, I pay particular attention to the various communities in my constituency and I work closely with my people, and I want to say that I am happy to announce to this House that we have electrified the La Guira Recreation Ground in Matura. We have electrified the Horse Trace community open space. Madam Speaker, we have done

works to the Toco substation, and we did works to the full upgrades to the Sangre Grande substation, major line and pole upgrade, Madam Speaker.

And Madam Speaker, while I am on public utilities, I just want to tell the residents and the members of the community of Balandra, your community recreation ground light upgrade is on the way. Balandra, it is on the way. Mission Toco, Mervyn Dillon Recreation Ground, your electrification of your ground is on the way. And residents of New Valencia, your electrification of your ground in your community would be coming soon, Madam Speaker. So Madam Speaker, that is it for public utilities, and if that is not good representation by the Minister of Public Utilities and this Government, well then, Madam Speaker, I do not know what to say.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on a few noteworthy items. I want to touch on the Ministry of Education. I want to acknowledge my colleague, the Minister of Education, and I also want to acknowledge my colleague on the left of me, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, Minister in the Ministry of Education, two astute young ladies who have been giving yeoman service to the Ministry of Education.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Yes, Madam Speaker, young ladies, they are forever 21 and they would not move from that.

Madam Speaker, in 2023, we saw some 15,714 students benefiting from GATE funding. Students, Madam Speaker, 525—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes of ordinary time available to you. You are entitled to 10 additional minutes to complete your contribution. All right, so are you going to avail yourself to the

additional 10? Okay, proceed.

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, 525 loans disbursed, 277 national bursaries, and so forth, Madam Speaker, with an allocation of \$7.512 billion, Madam Speaker. We intend to see GATE funding, which is expected to be enhanced, national bursaries, student loans, the 20,000 families or students who would be beneficiaries of the \$1,000 book grant, the e-book, which will eliminate and reduce the purchasing of books and taking strain off parents, Madam Speaker. The school feeding programme continues as normal, and I want to thank and congratulate both Ministers for their hard work for our nation's children. Definitely, we could say that the children or the youths of Trinidad and Tobago are safe in the hands of the People's National Movement.

Madam Speaker, as I swiftly run through community development, I want to acknowledge my colleague for Tobago West, the hon. Minister of Sport and Community Development. And I want to say that we continue to get our support from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development.

I want to specifically talk to the people of Toco/Sangre Grande quickly, Madam Speaker, to inform them that in the next six weeks or so, we would see the start, the contract is already awarded and we would see the start of the repairs and upgrade works to the Sangre Grande swimming pool.

We would also see, Madam Speaker, that the Ojoe Road Recreation Grounds is going to undergo full refurbishment where we would see the upgrade of the existing pavilion, the installation of a new pavilion with 150 seats, upgrade of the outfield, refurbishment of the cricket net, upgrade to the car park, upgrade to the electrical infrastructure, sewage treatment plant, and

installation of an electric scoreboard.

And more importantly, Madam Speaker, I want to say to the people of Toco/Sangre Grande, do not be misled by the Opposition that the Sangre Grande Indoor Sporting Facility next to the Ojoe Road Recreation Ground is a white elephant. I can assure you that work is ongoing there and in the early months of 2025, it is going to be handed over to the entire region of Sangre Grande and to the sporting community of Sangre Grande. So we would get our fair share from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to swiftly also say to the people of Toco/Sangre Grande that there are many projects listed in fiscal 2025, and I want to mention, it is a long list, that there is an item here. So I want to say to the Toco Secondary School, we are aware, we have heard you, and some relief is coming to you soon. Rest assured, we have not forgotten you all, and we will do what is necessary to make you all in the Toco area and the Toco Secondary School comfortable, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I know that time is against me and I really came with my report card. I came with my report card, Madam Speaker, on the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, because you see, Madam Speaker, from day one when I was elected Member of Parliament, I had no rest time, I hit the ground running and I started working, continued working in the best interests of the people of Toco Sangre Grande.

**12.40p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I remembered a lot of things when the Member for Moruga/Tableland spoke here, but I will forget the bad things, and I would



just mention one little thing. The Member made mention as if—I want to tell the Member, the PNM is not the problem, you know, the PNM Government is not the problem, it is not that the PNM is giving more to the PNM members than the others, you know, Madam Speaker. The problem is—and you see these things lead to Opposition putting out there—you know, they need to stop protesting, stop making mischief, stop bad talking Trinidad and Tobago, and respect your people who elected you to be here.

Because, Madam Speaker, I want to say this, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago equally gives every Member of Parliament here an upkeep for their office. I want to make it abundantly clear, that is not to eat chicken or drink beer. That is to pay our phone bill, that is to buy paper, that is to buy ink, that is to buy stationery and that is to ensure that your staff and your Members of Parliament reach out to your colleagues. If you wrote them once and they do not respond, write them again. You paid your phone bill, call them, harass them. Do like me, “block dem in every corner ah de Parliament and get what yuh have to get for yuh people”.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** So, Madam Speaker, I may have to put out a press release too, with my report card, but I will deal with that in a different format because the people of Toco/Sangre Grande know of the good work of their MP for Toco/Sangre Grande.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** So, Madam Speaker, in saying that—because time is against me, I want to say that it just goes to show—because I have over—and, Madam Speaker, I want to put them on notice. I have a truthful

magazine that would be released soon, with over 100 pages of real-life intervention and hard work done by myself in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande.

So, Madam Speaker, it just goes to show that in this PNM Government, whether you sit in the back Bench, like myself, or in the front Bench or in the far west, like my colleague from Naparima and Cumuto/Manzanilla, I want to say, without any fear, that it is our leader and Prime Minister's mandate that we give—that his Members give good service and representation to the people who elect us and sent us to this House, and that is how we do it in governance, PNM style.

So, Madam I want to also touch on something before I leave. As a new Member, and a young Member of this House, you know, I tend to look to all my colleagues and I would take a little style from this one or I like a little style—Madam Speaker, there are some good people on the opposite side, you know. Tabaquite is a good contributor; the Member for Mayaro; the Member for Chaguanas West; Member for Naparima; my good friend, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, but Madam Speaker, I want to tell you how I felt when the Member for Siparia gave her contribution. Madam Speaker, the Member give a contribution that left me highly disappointed. The Opposition Leader, forever. The Opposition Leader, forever, right?—

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:**—using degrading adjectives to describe Dr. Eric Williams; good, good, 69-year-old PNM Government. Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia could have come forward and say, you know, “Well, the PNM”—and you could have said, “Well, we are the peaceful, noble

messengers.” Right?

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** They could have said, “We are the permanent national managers.”

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** If you did not want say all of that, you could have just simply say, “The People’s National Movement.” Well, Madam Speaker, I take offence to that. And I want to say today that I have been reflecting for some days, you know, Madam Speaker, and when I think about the UNC, I want to say that I stand wholeheartedly with this Government and the budget presentation given by the hon. Minister Finance. And I want to say, as I mentioned the Minister of Finance, that short people do great things.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Madam Speaker, I want to say, when I think about the Opposition—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. R. Monroe:** I want to say, Madam Speaker, I think about some words, unethical, nefarious, clueless, that is the UNC. Unstable, noisome, and conflicting, that is the UNC.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** Undermining, naughty and chaos, that is the UNC.

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

**Mr. R. Monroe:** But, Madam Speaker, I want to say, under no circumstances, never again, we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, will

elect a UNC Government to run the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, and I thank you very much. Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

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

**Mrs. Anita Haynes-Alleyne** (*Tabaquite*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me as I join in this very important debate, the budget debate for fiscal 2025. Madam Speaker, it is not usual for me to enter the debate at these later dates, and so I know there has been a significant amount of anticipation, given my new seating arrangement, what would be said here and dealt with here today. And so before I get into the crux of the matter, allow me one minute, coming into the debate after the Minister of Health spoke today, to just recognize that October is, in fact, breast cancer awareness month.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And that we here, in this Parliament, have a responsibility to use our platform to amplify voices and to create greater spaces for awareness.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the incidence is about 37 per 100,000 in our population. And in the delivery of the budget by the Minister of Finance, there was some mention about early diagnostic testing for cancer in Trinidad and Tobago, and I would like to use my platform here today, to urge women of all ages, where applicable, early detection can, in fact, save your life, and so let us make use of what is available to us. To the Ministers who hold responsibility, improve the services so we can have early diagnostic and quick treatment, so that we can save even more lives in Trinidad and

Tobago. So I just wanted to start there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to thank, very sincerely, the constituents of Tabaquite who have, for the past four years, shared with me a journey to improve the participation of rural communities in national development; to the constituents of Tabaquite who have been patient in understanding that Opposition politics is not easy politics at all; in understanding that the role of an MP, any MP, is representation, advocacy and, of course, legislation.

As I sat here during this debate, listening to many speakers, I would have heard from the Member for Arima, now Toco/Sangre Grande, who spoke about the letters they would have written. And I try to explain this to my constituents as well, that whether you are a Minister, an Opposition Member or any Member of Parliament, you have to write the letters, and you have to advocate, and you have to advocate responsibly and quickly, because the matters before us, with any budget, you are required to use finite, limited resources to cure an infinite number of issues countrywide.

And so, as I enter this debate, what I want to take centre stage, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are the issues of national development. And the Member for San Fernando West in his contribution—and I think this is the first time in many debates—and I have been here in the other place for three years and then four years, so it is seven years altogether. This is the first time I have heard people, anybody really, break down for the population the fact that a significant amount of our money is in *Recurrent Expenditure*.

And so, when we talk about the development of Trinidad and Tobago, and when we talk about the *Development Programme*, we are talking about

the lower percentages of our overall national development. That is an important conversation that I will get into. But I have listened to the Government Members, and they have been very careful to articulate that they have been responsible, and I want to just let them now—throughout my debate here today, I would let you know two things can be true. You can both be responsible and visionary.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** You can allow yourself to make the difficult decisions, but you can articulate a clear and precise, measurable and targeted vision for Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**12.50 p.m.**

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And so, in that regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to say to the Minister of Finance, and you can check the record, for the most part, when I enter any appropriation debate, or the budget debate, or even in debates in the national discourse, I very rarely ask for more money. I ask for more effective use of the money that is allocated. And for the money that is allocated and spent, which I will go through, and I will focus on the education sector, because I am the shadow for education, officially, still. Seating arrangements aside, I have not been informed otherwise, so I am still. And so, I will use that as the example, but I hope that the message is clear, that you can be both responsible and visionary. You can take the money that you have, and with effective monitoring and evaluation, with an honest assessment of the work to be done, and with proper communication to the public, you can create the type of system you

would like to see.

But before we get into that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had—again, I thank the constituents of Tabaquite. But there has been a significant outpouring of members from the wider public, who would have reached out to me, trying to find out if I would be joining the debate, if I am allowed to—yes I am—and whether or not I would be, like other Members who spoke on this side of the Bench, signaling whether or not this is my last budget contribution. And I would like to say to the members of the public who are paying attention, who have sent their well wishes, that no, I do not believe this would be my last budget contribution.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And you do not know what time will hold, nobody here, and nobody here can say what will happen, and how it will happen. But when I entered the political landscape, I did so with one underlying principle, that I will do my best to serve Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And I will say to anybody that is listening, wherever you are, in whatever vehicle you are in, if you have an underlying principle of national development, you will find a way to make it work.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And we have had, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had in this past year, and in this very debate here, I have looked at and listened to several Members applauding a decision taken by my colleagues—applauding the decision—and myself, to stand collectively for something that we truly believe in. But it is our civic duty, no matter where

you are, for you to equally stand for the right thing.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And so if you can applaud those of us here, you are equally responsible wherever you may stand, whatever colour you may be wearing, to ensure that your political vehicle, your national vehicle, is taking you to a space of national development. If you are not doing that, then your applause will ring hollow here in these halls.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And I want to speak specifically, and I came into the debate, I entered the debate after the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, who I recognize as one of the younger Members in the House of Representatives at this time. And there are a number of us who have entered the parliamentary landscape at ages that you are not accustomed to seeing. And those of us who enter the parliamentary landscape at a younger age, we would have held a very specific responsibility, a responsibility that I have taken very seriously. I entered the other place, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just shy of my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I have always been aware that the eyes of the nation are on me. Internationally as well eh, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That everything we do, we do in the full view of the public domain. That if you are going to begin a statement, and by the end of the statement you are contradicting yourself, everybody will see that. That if you are saying one thing and doing another, everybody will see that. And so, having that responsibility and that duty, I have been very careful to ensure that my actions match my words, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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



**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And so as I sat in this debate, this has been a very, very unique debate for me. Because, you know, outside of the regular “picong”, we have also faced some “picong” from our own side, and that has been very unique. But I cannot leave things unattended, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I sat down here and I listened as a colleague started a contribution talking about A-teams and B-teams—

**Hon. Member:** “Waste ah time.”

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—and ended a contribution talking about a very serious, very important national issue on bullying. That same colleague spent a lot of time this year talking about who was—

**Hon. Member:** “Waste ah time.”

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—“nobody neemakharam”, et cetera.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, Members. Only Tabaquite at this time, please. Only Tabaquite. Member for Tabaquite.

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So from the beginning of your contribution to the end of a 55-minute contribution, you could find yourself disagreeing with yourself on the things that you have done.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** You have to understand that people are watching. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will just say this and close this point, that is not giving A-team behaviour. To contradict yourself in 55 minutes is not A-team behaviour. And take that from me, who has been an A-student my entire life.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And “yuh” could take that from me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so, those of us who are very much aware that people are looking on will understand that you ought not to be contradictory to yourself. If you are going to advocate for something and be an advocate for something as important as bullying in the national society, do it properly. Do it in the right way and then we will take you seriously.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** As I continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hosted this year for the very first time in this format, the Wednesday after the budget debate, a number of students who are interested in political participation. So these are Sixth Form students who I would have met at various youth advocacy programmes, who are interested in political participation and they want to find ways to get involved, and they want to find ways to make a difference. We hosted a programme so that they can get familiar with the budget documents, get a sense for the debate, what occurs, how parliamentary process works, etc. And I would like to firstly thank the six students. We could not accommodate because we wanted an interactive, informal but very interactive space, and the six students who attended, I would like to just thank them for their insights as well—

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—that we brought here to this debate. And key in my youth advocacy space, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I have learned and seen for myself is that there is a significant part of this population that is completely fed up with the way politics is practiced in Trinidad and Tobago

right now. That there is a level of exhaustion. People feel that what is said is not done. People are fed up of the tit for tat. People are fed up of one side standing up and saying, “but we did this”, and somebody else saying, “but we did this, and this other one did not do this.” And at the end of the day, if you are not seeing Trinidad and Tobago for what it is, the population is frustrated, I guarantee you. The population is tired of after 10 years in a reporting structure that you can still say, despite what you may feel, and see, and experience for yourself, things are good.

**1.00 p.m.**

Now, I think it would be easier to accept if you said things could be better. If you said that these are the current targeted interventions that we are taking to make things better in the future, that would be a pill that is easier to swallow. But if you are coming to me and telling me “What yuh complaining about?” That I find to be disingenuous politicking and we ought not to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, we must take a look at where we are as a country and what we need as a country to do better. A clear assessment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would show us that we have obvious issues in terms of our economy, in terms of the deficit that we would have been facing. We have heard from the Minister of Finance, certain plans, and we have heard from the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs as well, as to what can change our future circumstance. But one of the things that we ought to be doing is highlighting very clearly—not simply saying that, as the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande said, “When things get better, you will get more.”

Not so much that, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But more

importantly, when things get better, these are the investments that will make opportunities for you to be able to access that the Government does not have to give you more, but you can give yourself more based on what you can.

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

**Ms. A. Haynes:** The onus is on us, those of us who exist in a political space. And if you want to talk about responsible and you want to talk about moving away from rhetoric and moving away from populism and all of those things, I agree too. But you are also doing it to some degree because you are saying, “One day we will have more and we will give you more too.” But that is not the correct way.

One day Trinidad and Tobago ought to be thinking about how we are going to transition out of the space that we are in, where we have this big recurrent expenditure, we have this smaller developmental expenditure, and we have this constant cycle of people trying to find out, “What will the Government give to us in the budget”, and not, “What opportunities will present themselves so I can give myself a better life in sweet Trinidad and Tobago?”

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

**Ms. A. Haynes:** And, I think that is the part of changing the system that we need to do. And so, as I get into the specifics of the Ministry of Education, I do not know if I have made it clear before, but I will make it clear now. All of my critiques have always been grounded in the fact that I do not think in the system as it exists, if you put any Minister of Education, that you will have the highest chance for success. I think that it is a disservice to some of us and it is very important—and to go back to how I started, if you are in a vehicle, the Government also now being a vehicle—if you are there and you

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Mrs. Haynes-Alleyne (cont'd)

are seeing things are going wrong, and you are seeing that you cannot function at an optimal capacity, and you are seeing that despite \$60 billion, that if you could get \$6 billion a year, and \$6 billion is unable to give you the results that you need, and you are seeing that, the duty is on you as a representative to say, “That ought not to happen.”

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

**Ms. A. Haynes:** I will begin with school infrastructure, because I always say, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you cannot fix the small things, you cannot fix the big things.

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

**Ms. A. Haynes:** So if brick-and-mortar problems are stumping you, to get to the issue of curriculum development, which we need to get to and which is the visionary part of it, I cannot even get to what we need to do in terms of curriculum development, because we are stumped on the simple things. We are stumbling and losing our way on the simple things.

So, in the opening of the new school term this year, Mr Deputy Speaker, we were faced very early on with startling news. Now, typically, I would do a lot of media—and still did this year—at the opening of the school term, on the first hand to wish students well, and to see what was needed to be done. But this year, in full view of the public, we saw St George’s College, we saw Mt. Hope Secondary, and it kept going.

And I am telling you, when I started by saying there is a frustrated population, it is because people cannot understand how millions of dollars are being spent, and they cannot see, feel, and tell where the million dollars were spent, and how it was spent over the vacation period. And then, to say

to those persons who are experiencing the difficulty—the people who are literally experiencing the difficulty, to say to them that “The difficulty you are experiencing is made up. It is in your head. It is not a reality.” You cannot treat with citizens like that, and expect them to repay you with anything other than criticisms.

So when you hear, as a citizen, that \$150 million is not enough, \$40 million, \$36 million, whatever millions of dollars is not enough for school repairs, that is a difficult pill to swallow. It is a difficult pill to swallow. And so, I am going to give the Government a little bit of advice here. Whatever the allocation you are given, and the releases as they come, because if you understand the budgetary process, you know that the allocation and the releases may not always line up, for whatever reason.

But if you include in your accounting to the population when you are having conversations with the population, the list of schools that will be repaired and the time frame for them to be repaired, so that the citizens can manage their expectations and so that my colleague from Barataria/San Juan can say to his constituents, “This is what we have: St. George’s; the repair works programme will start in September. It is anticipated that the short-term priority work will end by December. The medium-term, equally important but not as urgent work, will take this time, and so, by the end of fiscal 2025, we will have completed this programme of work. Your children can go to school safely, and you will have a safe and stable environment in which to learn.” That would be an easier pill to swallow.

But instead, what do we have? We have persons who have to go outside there and protest. You have parents who are asking, begging, and

protesting for a physically safe learning environment. You have in Preysal Secondary School, a rat infestation. You have in the Marabella North Secondary School the building structure not being up to mark. You had in my own space—You have the San Fernando West Secondary School. The Member for San Fernando West, I am sure is aware—Sorry, not San Fernando West. San Fernando Central—ModSec—as we know it, also facing infrastructural problems.

I know that I will be told that the ageing infrastructure is a problem. I know that I will be told that it is an increasingly expensive task. I understand the need for the Government to be responsible with its spending. I have no difficulties with any of those things, you know. I am saying that in your task of being responsible, you can be visionary in how you communicate with the population, making them equal stakeholders and participators in the education sector, so that you will not be out here wondering when, wondering if, or wondering how.

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have served as a representative politician. I am in the House of Representatives so I am aware very acutely of the needs of the public. When you tell them that there needs to be a prioritization, it is not always met with equal levels of understanding. And so that I could have had a landslip repaired in one area, and we will post it today, and the comments will equally say, “What about X, Y, and Z?” I understand where it is coming from, because you want your services delivered.

I would assume that is exactly what will take place in the Ministry of Education if you were to list out your infrastructural repair works programme that people will say, “But what about this one?” or “What about

that one?" But you have to accept and allow for that to happen. Allow for the discourse to happen, but be equally accountable to the people so that it will ease the frustration.

**1.10 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker—I am not for the Minister of Finance asking for any more money. I am saying the money that you have, tell the people exactly where it is being spent, how it is being spent, and that—then you can say, if we have more, we will give more when it when it is possible, and we will accept that. But we also are facing a difficulty, because the longer we allow this to run, the less the population will be willing to accept. The longer you say—you give no information about where the repairs are going and how the money is spent, the longer you allow it to run, the more the population is going to believe that the money is spent elsewhere. So we ought to be very careful with what we are doing in governance structure, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So as I move on from the infrastructural concerns, and I am sure I can list as many may want to do, all of the schools that are facing infrastructural concerns, but they are part of the public conversation. My role here is to show that you can be both responsible and visionary.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** I want to speak very quickly, but I want to be equally very respectful in this national climate discussing the issues around bullying, around school violence, and things that we have been seeing of that nature. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I join with several colleagues in expressing condolences to the family of young Jayden Lalchan. As we grapple as a



society with an instance of bullying that has led to the scariest of outcomes, we are faced with a lot of conversation about what can be done and what ought to be done.

In 2020, I became a Member of Parliament, there were the COVID years with the virtual learning system and we had students come back out into the physical school space. Then we saw a number of videos with particularly violent outbursts within the school system, and as I did then and I will do now and I will continue to do ad nauseam—within our school system, we have to find ways to include within the curriculum spaces that can help students deal with things like conflict resolution and anger management.

We have to find ways, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to create safe spaces within what ought to be a safe space, but the reality is students themselves are dealing with difficult circumstances. Imagine adults found it difficult to cope with the with the pandemic and the fallout of the pandemic, and that you have children, literal children, who would have been in the virtual school system coming out and having to relearn socialization skills and getting adapted into that space, that we must give them a fighting chance—no pun intended—to succeed.

So if in utilizing the space for the Student Support Services and targeting the intervention of the guidance counsellor. So it is not sufficient to have the programme, but you have to let us know that you are constantly monitoring and evaluating the programme to ensure that it is at optimal levels, so that it is meeting the needs. So that if your response, or any

response, is that we do have Student Support Services, and it is funded to the tune of X millions of dollars, alright, accepted.

But in the space that we have seen for the past few years, what we have been seeing with respect to school violence and bullying, you have to make sure you are effectively spending that money that is going to the Student Support Services. That where the schools that require extra support and there are schools that require extra support, that they are receiving the targeted intervention necessary. And that, as with all things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, once you have tried everything, you have to be aware that persons within the school system must be aware as well, that there must be consequences for actions as well. And that we have to move again, if you do short-term interventions and you have your medium-term planning with curriculum development to include things like conflict resolution, anger management, et cetera, then you have your longer term, measurable, developed targets, you will be again on a better path to fighting the scourge, the problems that we are facing within our school system.

So, when I listened to the calls from the population, very frustrated, very sad, calling for something to be done, I think it is important that when reporting what was done, we are reporting equally that we are evaluating our tactics. Because if we as the citizens are saying we are not seeing it working to an optimal level, then we must be prepared to act and change what needs to be changed so that they are working for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I looked very closely at what the Minister of Finance had to say. I was hoping to enter this debate after the Minister of Education, so that if, in the event that the Minister reported on something that I had intended to raise, I would not raise it because there is no need if something is being treated with that we raise it within the debate. The hope is, and the genuine hope is, that we get success in the education sector because the next generation of Trinidad and Tobago depends on the success in the education sector.

So what I have in front of me would be the information given by the Minister of Finance, who would have, I assume, worked with the Ministry of Education and stated some things. So we have the E-book Platform, and the E-book Platform as an announcement is fairly laudable that we will be moving from textbooks to an e-book but, yes, it has been years now, and I will get into that, but the E-book Platform as an announcement on its own—the Government may call it responsible—missing however, the visionary element of an accompanying curriculum development. Because if you are taking the same textbooks and you are using the same programmes and you are teaching children the exact same things, you are not educating the population of Trinidad and Tobago for the jobs that will exist when they leave school.

So if you are taking the same Boyo and Carla book and putting it online, you are not in effect, impacting the lives of the students, so that they are trained for the workforce that they will meet. If it is that you are taking, and we are looking at the focus still, right now, on a curriculum that is outdated and antiquated, we are doing a disservice to the population of

Trinidad and Tobago. My colleague from Naparima, who I think in his delivery, when he talks about Singapore, has now made Singapore a word in this Parliament that is something that people tend to scoff at, right, and Barbados, but Singapore in particular—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—[*Laughter*] you all will miss him. The Member for Naparima, you all will miss him when he is not here—

**Hon. Member:** Siparia missing—[*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—[*Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the Singaporean model when they talk about moving from physical classes to virtual classes and whatnot, it is not simply about the action you know, it is about optimizing their curriculum, creating an education system that will serve those who are being educated.

So that when I listened to the Minister of Finance talk about teacher training and retraining and retooling, and when I hear “e-books”, responsible, yes, but visionary, no, because we have not heard and perhaps it will still come in this debate and so I have no problem being corrected, but the information was not given to us.

**1.20 p.m.**

But if we are not optimizing our curriculum, that we are not allowing our students to take advantage of technological advancement, that we are not creating with the space, that we are not creating within our education sector and understanding—these children can outdo any of us in technology, you know, can and will outdo any of us, utilizing these devices. They could teach us. But our system must be able to harness that natural curiosity about

technology—that you are to be able to harness that and create from that, a springboard for success. But if you are announcing an e-book learning platform for our students in the digital era, and it will done by June 2025, and it is not accompanied with curriculum development, you may be responsible but you are definitely not visionary.

And when I listened—I listened very carefully to the Minister of Finance. He spoke about, again, further investments at the UWI and understanding the cash strain in the UWI at the moment, and that they will be looking at it very carefully, and then equally, on the other end, spoke about the importance of cybersecurity on the national security end, and spoke about digital transformation on another end, but in all of that, missed the ability to connect all. So that you can have—utilizing our spend in GATE, utilizing our spend on the health programme, that is the higher education loans programme, et cetera, so that we have more teachers and more persons going into training and things like cybersecurity—the Member for Naparima and Member for Mayaro raised it—forensic sciences, et cetera. So that you are optimizing all of our programmes, so that what you need to get done in the digital transformation sector, what you need to get done in national security, what you need to get done in the energy sector, that you are tailoring your education sector, so that your citizens are forming straight lines into career paths, so that you are not educating a significant number of the population to then be a significantly unemployed set of the population.

You see, and that is why I said, you can be both responsible and visionary. Because I did not ask for any more money. Use the same money and effectively put people in places where they need to be, and these are

incentivized programmes. When I met with the students for the mentorship programme that I had in my office, they informed me of a Sixth Formers' Association—I did not know about it—the Sixth Formers' Association of students who are currently doing peer-to-peer tutoring and mentorship. And now, the Vacation Revision Programme exists in the Ministry of Education. I assume we have to hire tutors. That is an expense. There is an expenditure—a required expenditure given the exam results that we are seeing; a required expenditure.

You have the Sixth Formers' Association—when I was in my A'Levels class, an alumni of the St. Joseph's Convent, San Fernando—

**Hon. Member:** “Convont”.

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** “Convont”—[*Laughter*]*—*we had—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** So we also had a tutoring programme, where Sixth Form students—and now they form themselves into an association with various schools. Sixth form students are taking their time and their knowledge into primary schools and tutoring primary schools students to raise their math and English language competence, ahead of the SEA. And you have this Vacation Revision Programme, which is necessary, because students are not passing math and English at an acceptable rate, at the SEA level. And I said to myself, would it not be wonderful if the Ministry of Education could partner with these sixth form students, that you can get into a space where persons—and there may be a number of the sixth form students who are going into spaces, like teaching, who would like to be teachers, educators, who maybe like to be all sorts of different things. But

you get into the system, and whether it be via GATE, via the bursary, via the HELP loan, that once you go into the tertiary education space and you have a spirit of volunteerism already, that you create incentivized programmes which would allow students who utilized HELP, who utilized GATE, et cetera, and then they are going to the teaching programme at the university, that they get a space within the Teaching Service Commission to get their interviews done, et cetera. Because they have already shown that they have a passion and a love for the profession.

And so, again, that does not require more money. The money is already being spent. The money is already allocated, it is already being spent. But you have now a space where students who have a passion for teaching can get into the teaching spaces and you solve problems. You solve where you have vacancies. You solve where you have unemployment. I have so many—so many young persons who come to my office who are telling me, they have been awaiting their interview by the Teaching Service Commission, 2017, 2018, 2019. They have no interview. They are unemployed. They did their two years in the OJT Programme. They are waiting. That they are working in a store. They are working in the retail sector. They are looking for any type of jobs.

And you know, if we optimize, as I said, our tertiary education funding, so that we keep track of persons who have entered—you have access to their levels of participation at the tertiary education space, that you can keep them into the system, you will again have a more visionary approach to the education sector and the youth employment sector. So you are killing two birds.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, with the \$1,000 assistance to the economically disadvantaged students, last year when the provision was announced, aware that it would be taking place for this school year, we would have raised certain concerns. At the mid-year review as well, in terms of accessibility—and I raised it in the Standing Finance Committee for the mid-year review, that the application system was an online application system, and that you are to submit certain documents and what not. Understanding the community that I represent, I raised then, and I will raise again, that there is a barrier to access for some of our most economically disadvantaged citizens, that persons who really need to access the \$1,000 grant—as the Minister for Digital Transformation said last night, some of them do not even have bank accounts. And there is a space—I understand and I accept that the responsible thing to do to be able to track the financing, to be able to track how much you are giving out and you are going through the means test, and understanding all of that, there must be some workaround that will allow for those who are most in need to be able to access this \$1,000 grant.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to go—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, just before you move on, you just have about two more minutes of your initial speaking time. You have an additional 10 minutes. Do you care to avail yourself?

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Kindly proceed.



**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** I will avail myself and I really did not know that 45 minutes went so quickly.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And so, when, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in looking at things that needs to be done within the education sector, it is, again—like I said, what I believe the current Ministers—both Ministers of Education are facing, it is that they may have the ideas as well, but they are stuck within a system that does not allow ideas and innovation to really take charge, to be at the forefront. I am aware of that. Because as a Member of Parliament myself, I have a lot of ideas for my constituency, and I am stuck in an antiquated system that does not allow me to make the changes and do the things that you want to see.

**1.30 p.m.**

So it is not from a space—what I would say, it is not from a space of a lack of awareness that it may be a difficult thing, and then in a lot of spaces your hands are tied. But I am saying, those of us who exist in the political landscape now must have the uncomfortable conversations, must be willing to have a space to be change-makers in this country. Because it makes no sense—

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—Mr. Deputy Speaker, being a young politician or a new politician and trying to practise in the old political landscape.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** Once you do that—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** [*Laughter*] Once you do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are setting up yourself for failure.

So I want to discuss as well some of the issues that face my community in Tabaquite, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities raised it. When I became the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite in 2020, I found, not one, now two, not even three, several communities in 2020 at the time without any access to pipe-borne water. I was shocked. I could not believe that in a country that was oil rich, that was natural gas rich, in decades of prosperity that we missed a critical opportunity to deliver to our citizens the basics—the basics.

So when I reached out to the Minister of Public Utilities, I told him exactly what I said here. One of my first meetings as a Member of Parliament was with the community of Corosal. They showed me the community water tanks. The roadways, deplorable. On top of that, you have to go with your vehicle, full up at your community water tanks, buckets of water, and go back home, and these people who live there are teachers and public servants. Then after you go and full up your buckets and your water tank, you have to hit the highway and face the traffic and come up the road, and I said, “This is unacceptable”. So, as I do, I wrote to the Minister of Public Utilities and gave him the full list of all the communities with no pipe-borne water, very well aware that he would not have the budget to fix every one of the communities in my constituency, because as it occurs in my constituency, it will be occurring elsewhere.

I am happy to report, the community of Corosal now has pipe-borne water.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** I am equally happy to report that the community of Cotton Hill will have pipe-borne water.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** And that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I say, I take my job of representation very, very seriously, I absolutely mean it, because—

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—when you talk about basics, these things are required. So I was very happy, very grateful to be able to go to the community of Corosal with the Minister of Public Utilities to deliver on a basic need.

I raised then with the Minister of Public Utilities, as he traversed through the Gran Couva area and into the Corosal area very quickly, that we ought to have invited the Minister of Works and Transport one time, because he really needed to see. Because, you know, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West usually, typically makes a joke during the Standing Finance Committee about the roadworks and the landslip programme, and when the Minister of Public Utilities will always say, “Yes, we getting that done in Tabaquite and we getting that done in Tabaquite”—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** No, no, but the problem is—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members.

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:**—“he says that he getting it done in Tabaquite and then we doh get it done in Tabaquite”, but not like the Minister of Public

Utilities, because he said we were getting it done in Tabaquite and we did.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** So we have, as well, a significant infrastructural problem in the constituency of Tabaquite. We have an infrastructural problem in terms of landslips. We have roads that are poorly maintained, and in the same way, in the same vein, I would have spoken about the Ministry of Education by way of example to be accountable to the population and give us the maintenance schedules for the schools. It is equally important to tell us which roads you are going to fix. Do not tell us you are going to fix all. It is not possible. Tell us which ones you intend to do within this month and next month so that we can report accurately to the constituents.

So, when I have to raise infrastructural concerns, it takes us away from treating with the bigger problems facing Trinidad and Tobago. Pothole problems cannot disrupt the society in this way. If you “doh know that if de road mashin’ up”, you have to fix it, I cannot come here and tell you that. That is not helpful. It is not responsible to say you are going to fix the road that “yuh watch mash up” for nine years. It would be visionary. I know the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West raised, for quite some time, that in the local government landscape we would have access to the planned works under the Local Government Ministry in terms of the secondary roads, et cetera. I hope that comes to fruition because that is equally important for Members of Parliament, so that we could go to the population. I mean, I get frustrated having to write a letter to the corporation to say, “Come to cut the grass in this recreation ground”. Grass grows, I should not

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have to tell you grass does grow.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** So, therefore, if you have a proper maintenance schedule so that we know across this month, this month, that month. This one will be maintained, so that you know that the ground in Tabaquite will be cut every third Thursday, you “doh have” to come to the—imagine you have to come to the Member of Parliament’s office to ask to—and so that when we talk about optimizing systems, these are the things we need to do. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I wind up my contribution, I will end where I began. My job, and our job as parliamentarians and political actors, is not to be here and comfortable in the system as it exists. What is required in Trinidad and Tobago right now are some very uncomfortable conversations that you have to understand that if you have realized that what exists and obtains now is not serving you, we have to fix it so that we can serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** If you realize that there is a problem, a systemic problem, then take off your shackles of party politics and get to do the work of the people.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** So that if it is that your loyalty to your party supersedes your loyalty to the country that has given us everything that we have, you are not making the difference you think you are making.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** If you do not realize that a political party is

merely a vehicle to national development, and if the vehicle you are in is not taking you where you want to go, you can fix it or you can move. Those are your options.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** You ought not to be saying to the population that you are doing your best.

So I urge all political actors, and all aspiring political actors, this is not a job for the weak. This is not a job for the scared. This is a job for persons who are determined to be agents of change.

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

**Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:** If you are here for a seat to sit comfortably, the people of Trinidad and Tobago do not want you, because we need people who are willing to be agents of change. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for St. Ann's East.

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

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you kindly, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to be a part of this debate once again and I want to thank the constituents of St. Ann's East. They have supported me and I have been here advocating and representing them for the past, almost 10 years. I am very grateful. It is a privilege to be a representative of the people. I want to thank the Prime Minister for his confidence in young people. He has a saying that hard work is for young people, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, he does demand a lot from us and I am glad that we have the opportunity as young people to take responsibility for

our country.

I want to thank my sister in service, Minister Lisa Morris-Julian, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. I want to thank her for her support and her assistance as we carry out the business of the people at the Ministry of Education. I want to thank the Minister of Finance. I want to thank the Prime Minister for his astute leadership, the Minister of Planning and Development for the hard work that would have been done in difficult circumstances, to get us to this point of our tenth budget presentation. I want to thank them for their continued prioritization, also, of the education sector.

**1.40 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have three children all of whom are studying locally. Minister Morris-Julian also has children within the education system. Therefore, we have a vested interest in ensuring that what we do benefits our children and the children of the nation. Hence, we were very heartened when the Prime Minister said he chose two mothers to lead the education system who would understand that this system needs our hard work, our dedication, our commitment to be able to function at optimum levels.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take a minute, I have 22 pages to go through and I intend to get through all these pages here today because it is a lot to say, to report on the education sector. But, I want to say to the Member for Tabaquite that I think that at least that Member has stood up here and demonstrated to me that they now understand what the People's National Movement says when we say "country before party."

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is exactly what we are about and I am glad that the Member has come to that realization. Maybe it is the placement of her seating at this point in time.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Whatever the system would have been to bring her here, I want to say that that is exactly what we are speaking about. Systems are not perfect, but we are placed here as representatives and as Members of the Cabinet on our side to ensure that even within an imperfect system, we do our part to strengthen it in our time. We will not be here forever as Minister of Education or Minister of gender or Minister of Public Utilities, but we have a responsibility in the time that we are here giving public service, to be able to strengthen the system and put policies in place so that when we leave—It is not about the personality, it is about the system getting better—

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:**—and about Trinidad and Tobago getting better.

**Mr. Gonzales:** That is right.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** So let me get into it.

What is the role and the importance of education in postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago? This country has always, regardless of Government, always put priority on education because we understand that the fundamental basis for education is the development of Trinidad and Tobago. We understand that we are working here not for ourselves but for those who come behind us; our children and so therefore, there is a clear understanding



in this country about the priority for education. We know that our citizens must possess at this time what we call the “21<sup>st</sup> Century skills”; technological know-how. We know that we want our young people to have sound, relevant, quality, equitable education. We invest in education.

This year the investment towards education and training is \$7.512 billion. With regard to the Ministry of Education specifically, our allocation is \$5.734 billion; \$5,734,586,000. That disparity is because there are other Ministries that do education and training-like activities; the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, and so on. So, the Ministry of Education itself has \$5.734 billion. I heard the Member for Tabaquite relating that this is the first time that she understood, in this contribution, based on the contribution of one of the Members, how this is broken down in terms of recurrent and developmental.

I heard the Member for St. Joseph also speaking to how this is broken down. That is important for our citizenry to understand. Of this \$5.734 billion, what goes as salaries, as recurrent expenditure, salaries being the bulk of it, to ensure that our people in Trinidad and Tobago are kept in pocket to be able to contribute to the economic sector. Recurrent expenditure at the Ministry of Education is \$ 5.278 billion. That is 92 per cent of the allocation to the Ministry of Education and that is critical to understand. That pays for salaries, operational expenditure for schools, our tertiary-level institutions; keeping them operating. That is UWI, COSTAATT, UTT, NESC, MIC, YTEPP.

Operational expenditure for the Ministry of Education offices for state

enterprises under the Ministry, so that is the school feeding programme, and so on, loan repayment and CXC fees; 92 per cent. The 8 per cent is a part of our *Developmental Programme*. This year, allocated to school infrastructure and maintenance, is \$206 million. So that is the first thing that the population needs to understand as we move forward. So we have, with 8 per cent of the allocation; \$456 million, school infrastructure maintenance is \$206 million of that; scholarships and bursaries, another \$142 million; tertiary-level institution projects, state enterprise projects, capital expenditure.

What are we investing all of this money in education to be able to produce? It is an investment and you must have a return on that investment. What we are driving towards is the ideal Trinidad and Tobago citizen who will help us to develop our developmental agenda—who is highly skilled trained and qualified but also has positive values, attitudes and behaviours and that is critical. It is not just about the qualifications. It is about the quality of persons we are producing, and in recent times, that has become even more critical and I will speak a little more about that. So that is the outcome we expect. We are investing this money to be able to produce ideal Trinidad and Tobago citizens who are qualified academically but also have the right attitude to be able to progress this country.

If we are honest, and if we look at the evidence of academic qualification and certification, and our performance, we have to admit and again, this has nothing to do with the PNM or the UNC or the NAR or whoever, Trinidad and Tobago has been fortunate to build a strong, high-quality and robust education system. Why do I say that? I say it because our graduates of our

education system are able to perform regionally; they are able to perform internationally at the highest standards. We send our scholarship winners all over the world. We have some who do not even get to come back; they do not want to come back. Why? Because they have performed so well, being prepared well, in Trinidad and Tobago.

We have students, for example, in the 2023 CAPE Examination, which is a regional examination; in CAPE unit one, Trinidad and Tobago students placed first in 58 per cent of the subjects that we attempted; in CAPE unit two, our students placed first in 52 per cent of the subjects that they attempted. We had five top performers and eight special awardees in 2023 at the CSEC, which is the Form 5 level. Our students placed first in 40 per cent of the 37 subjects that we attempted.

I want to thank our teachers, our parents our principals and our students who are working hard to achieve this success. We have to recognize that we do have success to celebrate. But even while we recognize that, we have to admit that there are areas that we must shore up and that is where we have to place a lot of focus; keeping the success yes, but shoring up the areas where we have issues. Our pass rate in CSEC English, it has increased steadily over the last 15 years. The average is about 72 per cent. CSEC Mathematics though, that has been a lot more variable, our average for 15 years is only 47 per cent. So while we have some students doing very well, we have some students, clearly, who are having a lot of challenges, especially with Math. The average per cent of students achieving five CSEC subjects including Math and English over the past 15 years is 52 per cent.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, would have contended that student performance has declined under this Administration; that is not so and if we keep trying to be petty and pointing fingers, we are going to go nowhere.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Correct.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** The fact is that from 2010 to '15 the pass rates in CSEC English were consistently lower than the 72 per cent. From 2016 to '24 it has been over that average but that is not where we want to nitpick and focus. We want to look at the overall development. I can quote more figures which show that in the Math as well, the figures from 2010 to '15 were under the average, but how does that help us here? What we have to look at is the truth and we have to, as representatives, as Ministers, face the reality, look at where we are doing well, and where we are not doing well, we have to improve that. So this hand pointing, finger pointing, I agree with the Member for Tabaquite, that is old politics and we have to transform ourselves from that if we want to progress as a nation.

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

**1.50 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been placing emphasis on digital transformation, systemic strengthening of the Ministry of Education, increasing student and school performance, increasing the equity of educational opportunity offered across all schools at all levels, and curriculum strengthening. And I am going to go through 10 areas that are based on these that I have just spoken about that speak to what we have been doing with the vision of modern, relevant, equitable, quality education for

all. That is the vision of the Ministry of Education.

I want to deal with policy development. I am going to come back to digital transformation because sometimes we get too hung up on that, it is like a cure-all but I want to speak about systemic strengthening because policy development and organisational strengthening have the potential to do what is required even after the personalities leave office. We can work as hard as we want, but when we leave office, if we do not strengthen the system it is going to go back to where it was and we keep doing this developmental dance of one step forward, three steps back, and that really accounts for a lot of our lack of progress. We have not progressed as we should in this country, *Vision 2030* recognizes that fact, and a big part of that is because our systems are too weak.

At the Ministry of Education, we have focused on policy development. Because you see, we have done a lot over the years, but a lot of it has not been concretized in policy and when we speak about monitoring and evaluation, if you do not have a policy, then you have no measure of what you have been doing or what even should be done and therefore when you are not doing it, there is no measure of the fact that you have fallen away. We have had to look at building the Education Policy 2023 - 2027; the revised National Discipline Matrix; the National Bursary Policy; Registration of Private Schools; Transfer Policy; the Home Schooling Policy; the Patriotism Policy; curriculum enhancement through Cultural Transformation Policy; Lower Secondary Proficiency Examination which was formerly the Primary School Leaving, we have introduced a new policy. The Trinidad and Tobago National Learning Assessment, the school

cafeteria policy.

I am speaking about fundamental things that make a big difference in the way the system works and these things have impact on how schools operate and that has an impact on how students achieve. In progress is the schoolbook policy. We have had to freeze the booklist for two years to avoid the booklist just changing at will, costing parents money but there is not a policy that has been implemented and so we are working on that now.

The data collection and management policy. Who collects what data from the schools, and when is it collected, and how is it used? These are things that are not in existence as a cohesive document and this has nothing to do with the fact that it is the PNM because the UNC was there too. I am speaking about the governance of Trinidad and Tobago and how we progress it. So these are policies that we have been working on to strengthen the system.

What about organisational strengthening of the Ministry? We have had to re-establish the teacher training unit and I am going to come to that. Because we want 21<sup>st</sup> Century students but we are not going to get them without 21<sup>st</sup> Century educators.

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** We must teach our teachers how to get there, so we have had to re-establish that. We have had to establish the Educational Technology Unit because if we are speaking about digital transformation, who drives it? It is this Educational Technology Unit that did not exist before, that must exist now. The education district health unit because having come through COVID we understand that we need now a liaison

between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health so that if anything happens, we have quick access and we can deal with these matters. We have increased the number of school social workers by 80 in 2022 and we added 20 more to that. Increased the number or introduced learning support assistance and we are going to speak about where they are placed. Over 80 of them were assigned to some of our schools. We have increased the number of guidance counsellors to 40. We have increased the number of special education teacher aids in a partnership with the OJT, we have increased that by 400 because we understand the huge demand within our schools. We have collaborated with the TSC to increase the complement of appointed principals, vice-principals, deans, and heads of departments, school supervisors, curriculum officers, and curriculum coordinators. Why is this critical? If we want our schools to operate in the way they should, we want information collected, we want our schools to go through their usual monitoring processes, these middle management positions are critical. And we had a situation where, especially after COVID, we had so many of them to be appointed.

We have had to ask our staff to assist the TSC in making sure that these interviews and so on can go on, but this is critical if we want our schools to operate in the way that they should. So when we speak about the system of education in Trinidad and Tobago, the strengthening of that system through policy development and organisational strengthening, that was a critical component.

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** I will go back now to digital transformation

which is also critical. You know, this conversation about the laptops and, you know, that is just one very minute part of what digital transformation is. And the fact is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this point between 2020 to now, we are at 80,000 devices given to our students and within this year we are going to add some more. So the fact is, if we want to count and if you want to be nit-picking then we would say that in fact the PNM has provided more than the UNC in terms of laptops and devices, but our digital transformation is so much more than that. Devices are one part to the students, we have had to provide devices to the teachers as well. Because if we want everyone to be on the same page they must be there.

We have just received over 2000 laptops to upgrade our school laboratories. Again, critical because we have e-testing going on and we have had a focus on increasing the number of e-testing opportunities for our students and I will talk a little bit about that. We have ICT technical officers in all of our 125 secondary schools. I do not know why the Member for Siparia will say that there are none, but so out-of-touch is she with the reality of what is going on. All of our secondary schools have their ICT officers and they also provide support to the primary schools in their area. Secondary school Wi-Fi, 134 secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago have been outfitted with Wi-Fi and that project for the primary schools is ongoing now in collaboration with the Ministry of Digital Transformation where we are outfitting the primary schools with Wi-Fi as well.

With regard to the e-testing. We have had an increase of over 10,000 students participating in e-testing since 2023. CXC has been pushing forward their e-testing agenda and we have been responding. That is why, it



was so critical for us to outfit the school labs with higher-spec computers than the students have because they have now to do e-testing at CXC. So we have offered it to the private students as we optimize the system with CXC and we are looking forward to bringing that into the main stream for our secondary school students. So they have been doing e-testing in January 2023, 1,530 students; in June 2023, over 3,000 students did the testing for Paper I; January 2024, over 2000 and June 2024, over 3,200. So we are pushing forward with that agenda.

With regard to teacher recruitment, and I want to mention this because the Member for Tabaquite spoke about it. We have reformed that process. What obtained before in the system before anybody could come and apply for teaching and they had to wait for so many years because it was so extremely oversubscribed, that system has been changed. So based on the advertisement for teachers, persons are applying and they are not applying with paper applications anymore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is now a digital process and I will tell you why. Over the years, a lot of persons would have said they lost their application. They come to the Ministry of Education, and they lost their application. It is because the applications were stored in boxes all over. If you could see the number of boxes that they were stored in and sometimes it is mould in these boxes and when it is mould you have to throw it out. So we have changed that system that we met because that cannot go forward. So when you speak about digital transformation it is not about laptops, and we have given out more than the UNC would have given out, but it is not only that, it is the entire system. And that is why we are speaking about system strengthening because for the education system to be

able to get success, all of these things have to go into the pot.

**2.00 p.m.**

The SEA Results Portal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know the last time someone went to a school to see how SEA results were delivered, and to see some children crying because they are in front of everybody. We have changed that. So, just like you get your CXC results online, you get your SEA results online in the privacy of your home. Digital transformation is not laptops; more than that.

Let me mention the e-books. We have already signed the letter of award, and it is awarded for \$3.9 million, and we are doing the e-books pilot. It is starting in our 106 schools of focus, and it is going to be in the subject areas of math and English, and we are intending to reach 25,000 students. An e-book is not just taking a textbook and putting it onto a digital device. There are other activities, and so on, that are combined in an e-book, and that is what we have already signed for, and we will be rolling out in this next academic year.

Also, an online numeracy programme: We have signed the award for that as well, and that will be rolling out in our schools of focus, and we are intending to reach 80,000 of our students between the schools of focus to be able to infuse their math education with an online numeracy programme, which has proven to be more successful because it is more engaging for the students and they have access to adaptive technology, which will test where they are and give them more exercises to work on the things that they are weak in. So, these are things that already have been awarded in the last couple of weeks or so, and we look forward to rolling them out in our new

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year.

I want to move now to what we are doing with regard to equity in educational opportunity, and this is really the crux of the matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we have students who are performing very well. They have all of the factors to help them. They have all the resources, supportive parents, and so on, but we have some students that have extreme challenges, and the strength of the system is going to be tested where we have those who are most vulnerable. That is where the teaching comes in. If you are a teacher, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know that the strength of your teaching and to know if you are really doing well is when you could teach the one who is furthest away from getting a successful result.

So, our ongoing initiatives, there is the inclusive education policy and that deals with our students with special needs. In public special schools, we have 10 of them, at which 428 students are accommodated. We have grants for students attending private special schools as well. So, when our students are going to private schools, we also give them grants. There are 13 private special schools, where over 650 students are given grants to attend, and we are expending \$9.5 million for that this year.

I mentioned the student aides, and those are workers who go into the mainstream school systems with our special needs students. Because that is really the gold standard, where you have our students with special needs, mixed into the general population, so that our students understand that the world does not only exist of people who look like them. There are other people that we have to also understand. They are part of our system. We have 468 special aides deployed in schools across the country.

**UNREVISED**

GATE: We have \$400 million allocated to GATE and more than 20,000 students access GATE every year. HELP: 637 students access it. We have spent \$15 million in that programme. And, of course, we are accustomed with the school feeding programme: \$260 million, 54,000 breakfasts and 79,000 lunches daily from our school feeding programme. And school transport: \$52 million annually, over 5,300 students transported daily. So, we are accustomed with these initiatives that are taking place in our country. What have we done that is new? Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have introduced the schools of focus and the remedial education programme. This is our second year into that programme and we have identified 106 schools—80 primary, 26 secondary—and we continue to work in these schools. Why? Because from these schools, we can pinpoint so many students that are coming out at the end with no qualifications, unable and unprepared to take care of themselves. These are classic candidates for our social development programme, \$5 billion and going.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we do not address these students in these schools now in a serious way and put resources here, then we will put more resources in social development. We will put more resources into national security. We do not want to do it there, so it is better we deal with it here. So, we have put this programme into place, and we are focusing—a strong focus on discipline. The students of these schools, they have discipline issues, they have performance issues, they have social issues, they have socio-economic issues. So, we are focused on discipline.

We revised that National School Discipline Matrix with the input of the TTPS; the NPA; the TTUTA; the Children's Authority, out of the Office of

the Prime Minister; the Ministry of Social Development. All of these came together in about 2021 and 2022, and we revised that discipline matrix.

We have introduced restorative practices also at 11 of our schools as a pilot that we have been working on for the last academic year, and they are in the schools, teaching our children how to deal with conflict, how to manage themselves, how to rebound from tragedy. These are things that our restorative practitioners are doing in 11 of our schools.

The learning support assistants, we have assigned them to these 26 secondary schools and the primary schools as well. Why? Because we noticed from the data, a lot of discipline takes place when our students are unsupervised. A teacher may not be attending school for a day. They have their days that they take. But when our students are unsupervised, a lot goes on; also, in the lunchtime periods after school. So the learning support assistants is there to assist in school operation.

We have hired over 80 school social workers and 40 guidance counsellors. Why? We have assigned them particularly to these schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, we now have 227 school social workers, 282 guidance counsellors, over 500 officers in our schools. Those schools in the schools of focus programme, they have their dedicated school social worker, their guidance counsellor that is assigned to two schools in a cluster in there. Why? Because the workload is more. Our students need more attention and we understand that, and that is why we have done that.

And I want to really express my condolences to the family of Jayden Lalchan. That is a young life that was tragically lost in this country. And I want to say to the national population that the allegation of bullying—

bullying is on the National School Discipline Matrix. It is listed as an infraction and there are procedures which guide principals about how to deal with bullying. Bullying is prevalent. It has been happening for as long as schools has happened, for as long as society has happened, because coming out of this tragic situation, we have recognized that we have a national culture of bullying. It happens on social media like clockwork and we, I think, have started to understand the effect this can have, not only on schoolchildren but on anyone in the country because sadly, Jayden's life is gone but we have seen in this week alone, two other suicides taking place.

We can point to situations in schools, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, where schoolchildren have taken their lives. So it is a national problem that we have to face and we have to think about how we can be kinder to each other. So we—it is not about the politics, it is about drawing attention to a national issue and we, at our schools of focus, have put social workers in there because we know it is a problem. And I want to highlight the cyberbullying, and I have spoken to the Minister of National Security a number of times about this because that is also a problem. And I want to say to all of us as adults, let us show our children a good examples.

**2.10 p.m.**

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** With regard to discipline, we have seen a decrease in school violence over this academic year, based on what happened before. In the last academic year 2023/24, in term one in terms of fights and assaults, we had 1,116. In term two, it was at 786, and term three at 713. So, we are seeing a decrease in the violence, in terms of fights and assaults. If you cast your mind back, you can remember a lot more videos

coming across your phone. And I want to thank the parents, the teachers, I want to thank the students, the Student Support Services, for the hard work they have been doing to help our students. But let me say this very clearly to our parents: The Ministry of Education has a National School Discipline Matrix for a reason, and parents have a responsibility to take care of their children, do not leave that for the teachers.

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** And I want to tell you that expulsion is an option for the Ministry of Education and we have not been afraid to use it when your child, despite our best efforts, is disrupting our schools. There are children who have come to learn. We have a responsibility to create and to maintain a safe space. In 2021/22, we expelled three students. We introduced a method of warning, where we would write an expulsion warning letter to the parent when a child is at the brink of expulsion, and we would deliver that to say, you need to take this child in hand and if they commit another infraction, its gone.

In 2021/22, we expelled three. In 2022/23, we expelled 17 students. This is not a matter of boasting or joy, you know, but this is to say to parents we cannot allow your children to disrupt our schools. Please take control of your children. But in addition to the warning letters, which is to help parents to hold on to their children, what we have done in 2023, we signed an agreement with Servol to take some more children. Because we recognized the children giving the most trouble, they had a lot of difficulty in terms of their academic performance and some could not read, some could not write, so we had an agreement with Servol.

So in 2022/23, while we had to expel 17 students, and we had to give 65 warning letters to parents, we transferred two to Servol. In 2023/24, which is the last academic year, we would have transferred 44 students to Servol, and that is in an effort to help these students have another chance at transformation in an environment where they will be able to get the kind of support that they need. So we are not accepting students who are disrupting our schools, we are doing what is required but we do not want to put students into a situation where they have absolutely no option, and that is where the partnership with Servol and MiLAT is taking place now. And we want to thank the Minister of Youth Development and National Service as well for assisting us where possible to take some of our students, who need a different environment, and we will continue to do that.

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** So parents we are saying to you, we do not want to remove your children, but if you cannot control them, it is very difficult for us. As much as the teachers, and Student Support Officers will try their best, it is very difficult to deal with some of our students. Some of you when we call parents, they admit that they have no control over the children. That is a sad, sad state to be in.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** So we will continue to work with our children as much as possible, so, we will focus on discipline. We are also focusing on students' performance and that is where the Vacation Revision Programme—and Member for Tabaquite, I want to thank you for the suggestion of incorporating some of our Form 6 students, and it is something



that we can pursue. But just to say, that in the Vacation Revision Programme we utilized the teachers. We have trained, last year, our teachers in remedial Math, remedial Writing, and remedial English. So we utilized those teachers to teach in Vacation Revision Programme because they have the particular skills that we need, but I am sure that we could incorporate some of our students to give voluntary service in this area, and we have no difficulty doing that.

We have actually introduced a volunteer mentorship programme into our schools. I want to thank our mentors who are in 20 of our schools giving service, speaking to our students, and encouraging them as they move along. The after-school tuition programme has also been introduced. So in this vacation we are giving more tuition, after school we are giving more tuition with a drink and something to eat from the School Feeding Programme, and that is ongoing in our 80 primary schools, with a focus on Standard 3 to 5, that has been ongoing for the last year and we are continuing. Over 7,000 students have been touched by these programmes.

We have amended the Forms 1 and 2 curriculum in our secondary schools of focus, to focus on numeracy and literacy which are the fundamental skills that they need. We have introduced change the Primary School Leaving Programme, we have renamed that and reformed the curriculum into the Lower Secondary School Proficiency Examination. And our Form 2 students who scored under 30 per cent in the SEA, as a mandatory requirement, they have to do that exam. Why? Because what have noticed is that a lot of the attrition, students who drop out, they drop in Form 3, Form 4, some of them have attained compulsory age of 16. So we cannot keep

them in the system. However, when they drop, they drop out with nothing. So we have changed the curriculum to focus on Math and English in Forms 1 and 2 in those 26 schools, and then they will do the exam after that.

What that allows is that in perchance they drop out of the system, they will have qualifications, that is the minimum qualification for Government employment in some areas. So some of the janitorial positions and so on in the Government service that is the qualifications you would need. So we are offering them a chance to have certification, of course, they move on to their Form 3, Form 4, Form 5, but if by chance they drop out of school, at least they are dropping out with something rather than with nothing.

We have had parent education sessions that is normal part of Student Support Services and they usually do that, and over the last year, 29,000 parents would have participated. I spoke about the teacher training, we trained the teachers of Standard 3, Standard 4, Standard 5 and Form 1, remedial Math and English, and thank you to the UTT for performing this training for us. We had 604 teachers in the Reading remediation, 585 in the Writing remediation, and we had 588 in the Math remediation, and that is critical because our teachers have to have the skills to be able to teach our students.

In terms of the Book Grant, I want let the public know that we did use cheques to pay those who did not have their bank account created, and the digital application is required, because in terms of the efficiency and record keeping, we need to have that, and so we will continue that in this year. And there are some changes to the form that we will make based on our experience in the last year to ensure that our parents can accommodate their

applications.

We want to thank the Adopt-A-School. In 2023/24, we had 25 projects completed. Adopt-A-School that is our corporate sector pouring into the lives of our students \$1.3 million in value. We have 18 projects ongoing and we have 27 projects upcoming and they have combine value of \$2 5 million. So we want to thank our corporate sector more than \$4 million going directly to our schools. Our migrant students, the eligible ones are now a part of our school system and in terms of our national bursary let me spend a little time on this.

In terms of national bursary since 2022, when this was introduced, we have distributed over approximately 1,000 national bursaries to our students, and that is in addition to the 500 scholarships that has been disbursed. So in three years we have handled 1,500 student, if we were at 400 scholarships that would have been 1,200. So, again, we have done more in this three years that would have been done before. And what is important is the bursaries are given based on is means test, it means the money is going to those who need it the most. And in addition to that we are aligning, you get more points for your bursary application if the field of study is aligned to our national developmental list based on the Ministry of Planning and Development. So we are killing two birds with one stone, and we are aligning the investment in tertiary education through our developmental list, as is the best practice for planning.

Let me go school infrastructure very quickly, and I want to emphasize how many things are involved in education. School infrastructure is one of them, but there many other things that go into to it. It is a fundamental thing

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and let me take a little time just to speak about it. There are three programmes: the School Construction Programme, the Emergency Repair Programme and plant upgrade. So in terms of School Construction Programme we have completed 20 schools, we have three ongoing and there are eight new school blocks which were built. And every time you pass and see a school that is incomplete and has been there for some years, just remember the irresponsibility of a UNC Minister of Education who entered into a School Construction Programme with no funding assigned.

**2.20 p.m.**

But we, the PNM, the responsible Government with the vision to give our schools to our students. Member for Tabaquite, the vision, right?

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** We have been approaching this phase by phase. So we have 20 schools completed, eight new school blocks built and three are presently ongoing. With regard to the planned upgrade—and this is where we can speak to what we plan to do, because the moneys are usually given by loan funding. So, in addition to our allocation, because you will notice that our allocation for development and school repair is not as great as the \$5 billion. However, loan funding—and the Minister of Finance would have mentioned that—will go in here, and that will be used to deal with the planned school upgrade. So, I can tell you that we have 15 schools already earmarked, 27 are in progress, and there are 15 more earmarked. I feel I might be out of time but let me just mention a few of the 27: Barataria North, Brazil Secondary, Carapichaima West, Chaguanas North, Chaguanas South, 27 schools and then we have 15 that are earmarked for planned

upgrade and that has already been approved and we are awaiting the loan funding to do that.

I want to talk about the Emergency School Repair Programme and that is the one that finds itself in the public domain, and that is the one that a former Minister of Education could sit from the safety of his retirement now to pontificate. However, he knows the pressure of it because as our infrastructure ages it is more and more difficult, and this is where you do not predict this one. So, your planned upgrade, you deal with that in a systematic way. But this is the one where a sewer goes down, a tank bursts, current goes, lightning strikes a pole and you have an electrical problem to deal with. These are the ones that we have to deal with, and this takes up most of the allocation. So that \$206 billion that I spoke about in terms of—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes of original time left, you are also entitled to 10 additional minutes to wind up your contribution, if you so wish.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will take advantage of that time, so I will quickly say that in 2023/'24 we completed 735 of those emergency projects, and we have used up 126 of the \$128 million that was allocated for that, and we continue to do those projects even as we complete construction of schools, which is planned, and we completed school upgrade, which is planned.

I want to move quickly to the curriculum, because curriculum strengthening and monitoring is most important, and let me make this point in 2012/'13 and in 2013/'14, two academic years, between 2012 and 2014 the curriculum was revised. That was not under a PNM Government; it was under a UNC

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Government. However, Madam Speaker, it was never properly implemented because soon after there was an election, officials would have changed, Ministers would have changed, and to implement a new curriculum takes time. You have to train teachers and all of that.

So when we looked at the fact that there was a new curriculum which did deal with the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills both for students and for teachers we decided that it made no sense trying to say, “Well, is a new Government so we will just change it again.” It takes money and time to do it. You have to hire a company to come in and do all of that, so we decided that we will keep the curriculum, but we will influence in such a way that we will emphasize some of the most important areas so that we could focus more on those.

So to those who are wondering if we have the same curriculum that we had when I went to school, no, we do not. We have a curriculum that was recently implemented and it is now being properly implemented in our schools, because we are training teachers and so on. So, we pulled out two areas, cultural transformation and remedial education, and we are focusing on those. So those are two new policies that go along with the curriculum, and I want to invite the public. On the Ministry’s website you will see the curriculum guides for every subject, you will see the teacher guide as well. They are there, and I encourage the public, go on and take a look at what our curricula are in the different areas.

You would see Values, Character and Citizenship education as a compulsory subject from primary school to Form 3. That is where our students learn civic responsibility. You will see infused in that curriculum critical thinking

collaboration, creativity, communication adaptability. You will see that the curriculum allows for that, and it guides teachers as to how it should be done. You will see global awareness, emotion intelligence, cultural confidence, digital competence. All of those are in our curriculum that is currently being implemented in our schools.

So I want to ask the public, parents especially, take a look at the Ministry's website and take a look at these curricula, and that is what your children are doing in school, and that should reassure you that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills that we want to see are being implemented. And, as we continue to train our teachers, because development of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century educators is a big part of what we are doing as well, and that is why we had to re-establish the Teacher Training Educational Professional Development Division, because we must train our teachers.

And so, they are learning digital literacy, digital pedagogy, designing online lessons, problem-based learning, which is very critical one, educational leadership with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, all of these things, teaching tools incorporated in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, teaching and learning, these are the courses that our teachers are exposed to. What we have done is instituted an annual training schedule so teachers can see what is coming, they can plan for it, and they can plan to be a part of it so that their professional development can take place.

We also have instituted, and this has been continuous in our country for 50 years, the in-service diploma in education for teachers. So many thousands of teachers have benefited from this free in-service diploma for teachers at the school of education at UWI, and over 2,000 teachers have been trained in

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the last 10 years alone. This programme celebrated 50 years this year. So we have been doing a lot as a nation to also develop the skills of our teachers.

I want to also mention nursing. We have consolidated in our efforts to deal with TVET. We have consolidated the nurses department into COSTAATT, and that was necessary to strengthen it. We were offering at the Ministry of Education—the Government was offering a nursing programme at a diploma level, where we have COSTAATT with all the proper facilities and trainers and so on offering a degree level nursing. So we have consolidated that. I heard the Member for Siparia say that we have closed it down. We have not closed it down. We have actually strengthened it, increased it so that more students can be trained at the right level for the Caribbean certification, so that is ongoing and very good.

We want to thank the Ministry of Youth Development and Family Service and the Ministry of Trade and Industry for their collaboration as we focus on lifelong learning, Madam Speaker. We have online communication classes to help our students get a second chance at CXC courses, that is free, the tuition is free, and the examination is free. We spoke about GATE available up to age 50.

Let me say something about UWI. Our UWI fees in Trinidad and Tobago, St. Augustine campus, has not increased in past 20 years. If you look at Cave Hill and Mona they have increased a number of times in that period. Why has it not increased? Because it is Government's policy that we want to keep the fees down as low as possible so that our students have the chance to attend.



I noticed bandied about that our enrolment has decreased; that is not so. I have checked the figures for UWI, UTT, COSTAATT, NESC, MIC and YTEPP. Each of them has reported an increase in 2024/'25 over the last academic year, so our citizens are taking advantage of the opportunity to get tertiary education at our public institutions.

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank Minister Morris-Julian, I want to thank our PSs at the Ministry of Education, past and present, for their contributions; our CEO. I want to thank our teachers, principals, middle managers. I want to thank our valued partners, the MTS, WASA, T&TEC, the Minister of Public Utilities they are doing us yeoman service in partnership with our schools; the Ministry of Works and Transport as well. I want to thank corporate Trinidad and Tobago for your support throughout Adopt-a-School Programme.

Madam Speaker, St. Ann's East has been a quality constituency to represent, and I am so proud for the privilege of having the opportunity to represent them. I want to thank the Ministry of Works and Transport for all the road paving that we have gotten to assist our constituents. I want to thank the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for the grants that we have been able to educate our citizens on and give them. I want to thank the Ministry of Sport and Community Development. We have been able to open the Maracas Bay Community Centre with a lot of refurbishment that was needed in this area; the access centre—thank you Ministry of Digital Transformation—at La Pastora. Very new but very, very much appreciated.

**2.30 p.m.**

I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities for the lighting of the USC Community Grounds, the Maracas Valley community is very happy for that. The Mayfair Gardens water project ongoing to give this area water for the first time. Minister, thank you.

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

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Hillview Drive, Febeau Village, your project is upcoming and the Minister has assured that that will start very soon.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Maraj Trace.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Maraj Trace as well. Thank you very much, Minister. We are looking forward to the Maracas Valley Health Centre refurbishment. Minister of Health, we see that happening. The construction of the Maracas Bay ECCE. We had the Maracas Valley ECCE opened as well, so we are very happy for that centre. Bourg Mulatresse Community Centre is being refurbished and we are looking forward for the Rincon playground. We want to thank UDeCOTT for the allocation of the land and so that Rincon playground in Las Cuevas will be coming very soon.

We work very hard at the St. Ann's East constituency. I also want to thank my staff who give support to all of our areas. So we have had our annual spelling bee competition, seven years in a row, our Poetry Slam Competition in collaboration with NALIS. Thank you, NALIS for that collaboration. We have our Easter parade for our young ones in ECCE. Cooking with Teens Scholarship, thank you to our donors who assist us with that. That has been going on for the past eight years where we take one student from each of our 10 primary schools and we send them for a cooking scholarship, students who are heading towards secondary school, and we encourage our students

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in this way.

We have had two health fares in Maracas Valley and Cantaro. We have had our youth programmes. We want to thank the MIC for the STEEP Programme in the Cantaro Community Centre in 2024. We have had job readiness training for our young people. Ministry of Labour, thank you for that. We have had classes at our community centres that were supported and we are very happy for that. Thank you to the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service for our caravan event held in Bourg Mulatresse that was very, very, good for our young people. They were exposed to a lot of the opportunities and we continue to work with them. We have carried our students to the UWI Open Day because we want them to see where they are heading.

I want to thank the staff at the office for their participation in ensuring that we give out hampers every month, we give out bread every week. We have a weekly free flea market in the constituency of St. Ann's East and we do this to help our constituents and they come out every year. I want to thank our donors who have assisted us with booklist filling, these are things that we do to help our constituents and we are very happy to continue to do so.

Madam Speaker, it has been a privilege to work hard, both in the constituency of St. Ann's East as well as the Ministry of Education, and we will continue to do so, and continue to do so, because we understand that our mandate is not just to the politics it is to our country, the future of our country and we are committed to ensuring our youth are well served. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for La Brea.

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

**The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand before you once again on my fifth occasion to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2025) Bill, 2024. I am grateful to both the hon. Prime Minister and my constituents in La Brea for the confidence and support that they have shown by allowing me to stand before you today. Let me place on record, Madam Speaker, my commendations to the Minister of Finance and his team for delivering a budget based on a most apt theme that is well thought out and imbues optimism for the coming year.

To those opposite I will try to convince you and I have to say—not you really, but put another way I am happy that stripped of partisan politics and blind loyalty, we have been able to get five of what I consider to be some of the best contributions over my last five years. And I am happy that you are finally seeing the light.

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** The Minister of Finance has been criticized for having a five and a quarter hour deliberation. And sometimes it is very difficult to please people in this country, because if he did it in one hour, we would get a barrage of questions saying, why he did not explain this and why he did not explain that. But he took the time to go through a budget that was quite comprehensive and which at this time in our economic life is critical to what we do and how we go forward in the future, we somehow would always find a way to throw water on what we are doing.

Madam Speaker, if we look at the international community post-COVID-19 we see a number of them are in fact growing and there is some—yeah, they are just growing. But in Trinidad and Tobago we have some unique issues with revenue and somehow we always seem to point at the expenditure side to say that we want more of this, more of that, it is never less and/or dealing with it in a balanced way, it is always about more.

And as the Member for Tabaquite would have indicated, that the question is not always about more, sometimes it is about using what you have, using it creatively and using it in the best interest of citizens. Ask the five. *[Laughter]* Some of the things that at the level of labour we look at within the economy are, the unemployment rate, and over the last four years the employment rate has moved within one or two points but it has been steady somewhat. Another indicator is the labour participation rate which seeks to identify how many people that can access jobs are actually working and who are not.

In the last four years that figure was constant, around 560,400 people employed in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, one would ask why and how can you have about the same figure every year for the last four years. And the answer is quite easy, Madam Speaker, and that is, there are lots of persons who would have lost jobs and who would have come out of the employment market. But because this Government created new jobs, the jobs that were lost, people found alternative jobs and that shows that there is a measure of growth although it does not seem that way, because if we lost 5,000 jobs in the 560,000, then we would have also created 5,000 jobs to keep it at a standard and steady figure. So it is not all doom and gloom and it does

not—oh, by the way, where is my good friend the Member for Couva South. I guess he would be running in the Chamber any minute now. He would be running anytime soon, we would see him coming. I hate to have these speeches without him.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** You know, Trinidad and Tobago in terms of its approach to labour and providing citizens with decent work in a safe and healthy environment and so on, have aligned ourselves with the international labour organization, global coalition for social justice. This coalition seeks to achieve social justice and decent work for all, expanding multilateral cooperation to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. Signing on this coalition cements Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to social justice and allows the country to benefit from access to potential partnerships as well as an invaluable forum for exchange of knowledge on the best practices available.

**2.40 p.m.**

Before I get more deeply into the work of the Ministry of Labour, there are two issues I wish to deal with. The first being, Madam Speaker, on the whole aspect of social justice, we must make mention of the notable step the Government took in the past fiscal year to move the minimum wage from \$17.50 to \$20.50 per hour. As we know, this is an increase of \$3, or 17 per cent, and affects 190,000 workers across Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Finance announced a government decision to increase the minimum—well, let me give some clarification.

I have been asked, as Minister of Labour, about the new minimum

wage. Let me say, categorically, that the minimum wage in Trinidad is \$20.50. That is the minimum wage. However, employers can, if they so wish and they have the ability, to move the hourly rate of those they employ to anything they want. They can move from \$20.50 to \$23, to \$25.

The Government, as a responsible government, took the position that we have a certain classification of workers within the public sector that is in receipt of \$20.50, and because we feel that based on their hard work and their contribution, that the Government can increase their hourly wages to \$22.50, that decision was made. That is a 9.8 per cent increase and if you add that to the 17 per cent in January of this year, you will see us going in the right direction. Some persons may say that that is not enough. But again, what is enough? What is enough?

We have impacted, and will impact, the lives of many of our workers in the public sector like CEPEP, MTS, URP, and that is approximately 18,000 people. I urge those private sector companies, who are still at the \$20.50, there is nothing holding you back—if you feel that you are getting the productivity levels and that your workers are good—for you to increase their rates. The Government has not said, and will not compel you to do so. That is a decision for each business to make on its own. But keep in mind that sometimes profit is not the only measure of being a good businessman or a good citizen. Some may argue about the businessman part but certainly, as a citizen, you can do some good with those who support you.

I am sure, Madam Speaker—I wanted to take away two lines or so from the Member for Couva South, because he will bring it up, about the Government not utilizing good industrial relations practices by not engaging the worker

representative in the 5 per cent proposed increase. But this is a budget, Madam Speaker, and in budgets, we cater for what we intend to do in a particular period, and if it is not budgeted, if it comes to fruition and you have to pay it, then you cannot pay it if it is not budgeted.

Therefore, by signalling a 5 per cent to public sector workers, the Minister of Finance has essentially said that we are budgeting 5 per cent, we expect to engage the worker representative, and they can either accept, or reject, or renegotiate the order. That cannot be done in a budget, but we have to budget for it to be done. Therefore, I would hope that the issue of engagement of those in the worker representative groups will not be an issue. This is basic business.

Madam Speaker, as we are on the topic of minimum wage, I want to recognize the excellent work being done by our Labour Inspectorate Unit in promoting compliance with the Minimum Wages Act and other pieces of labour legislation. The labour inspectors have been working diligently towards educating and enforcing the new minimum wage provisions, along with the continued enforcement of the Maternity Protection Act and investing reports of child labour across Trinidad and Tobago.

You see, Madam Speaker, we have a number of policies and a number of laws and so on, but people sometimes do not do the right thing. People do what you inspect not what expect and therefore, the inspectorate plays an important part in creating fairness throughout Trinidad and Tobago. You will be surprised, Madam Speaker, how many businesses do not pay their workers minimum wages; how many businesses may try to employ child labour; how many businesses do not treat pregnancy and paternity leave, and



so on, in the way that it should be. This unit does a yeoman service to ensure that these people are not marginalized or taken advantage of. During the period—oh, welcome, Couva South.

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** I have been waiting on you and giving some advice in your absence but you are here now.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I will give you more advice.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** During the period October 2023 to September 2024, the Labour Inspectorate Unit provided information and advice on labour rights and responsibilities to 275 walk-in clients and 724 via the telephone. For this same period, the unit received 386 complaints and labour inspectors conducted 802 inspections, resulting in the recovery \$1,728,000 to people who did not receive wages and/or increases illegally.

Not only the Labour Inspectorate Unit but the Ministry's Conciliation, Advisory and Advocacy Division, CAAD, has been hard at work in treating with conciliation and mediation matters, providing advice to both employers and workers. For the period 2023—2024, the division engaged in over 3,000 hours of conciliatory meetings and 84 collective agreements, and reviewed 76 proposals for negotiation. Madam Speaker, unlike those on the opposite side, we understand that to boost the morale of the workforce, we strive to keep them informed.

To bridge the gap in knowledge between employers and employees, the Minister conducted numerous public education sessions in both private and public entities. Some of these include the Communication Workers'

Union, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the Estate Police Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired, and many others.

**2.50 p.m.**

These sessions focused on sexual harassment in the workplace, industrial relations procedures, progressive discipline, natural justice, grievance handling and conflict resolution, to name a few. This is not all.

The Ministry has undeniably sought to understand and protect the rights of migrant workers. To this end, CAAD, the conciliatory group has supported the migrant community through sessions held with La Casita Hispanic Cultural Centre, Living Water Community's ministry of migrants and the Office of the United Nations, High Commissioner for Refugees. These meetings were aimed at providing advice on seeking redress for employment related issues and areas for further collaboration. I am pleased to announce, Madam Speaker, that a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry and the Living Water Community on October 31, 2023. This MOU signals the unrelenting commitment to protect the rights of migrant workers as we do for all workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me say, Madam Speaker, that based on signing on to various ILO Conventions and so on that we do not treat issues raised by migrant workers any differently than we do to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We have a duty of care to ensure that all those who access work in Trinidad and Tobago are treated fairly regardless of race, colour, political affiliation or country of origin.

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** Since I have been at the helm of the Ministry of Labour, I have emphasized time and time again the importance of data and evidence in order to understand the labour market and to guide our policies and programmes. It is in this regard, that we have been consistently working to strengthen our labour market information system at the Ministry. I am happy to say that these efforts have borne results.

For instance, Madam Speaker, our Labour Market Information Unit has been diligently working and now has completed the job vacancy survey of the private sector and state enterprises and the job vacancy census on the civil service. These surveys are geared towards determining employees' unfulfilled demand for labour in specific sectors. When approved by Cabinet, the information from the surveys will provide valuable demand side data and work to inform policies across the Government and also the private sector. Madam Speaker, while these surveys present baseline data for utilization, it is the intention of the Ministry to continue these surveys on an ongoing basis so it can be timely and updated on an ongoing basis.

In the coming year, Madam Speaker, the Ministry proposes to undertake job vacancy surveys on the municipal and regional corporations, regional health authorities and protective services. Work has already begun and will continue on the vacancy surveys of the teaching service, statutory boards and similar bodies. These activities will give us a much clearer picture as to where the demand for labour exists in these sectors. In addition to these studies, we are working assiduously with the Ministry of Public Administration to have these and other data sets available to the public via the Ministry's website.

I turn my attention to legislative reform. Madam Speaker, it is no secret that one of the key priorities of the Ministry is the modernization of our labour legislative framework. As we all know, legislative review is a lengthy and inclusive process and while I will not list all of the work that has been done since this project started, allow me to mention a few:

1. The Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Bill is currently before the Chief Parliamentary Counsel.
2. A policy paper on the Employment Exchange Act was approved by Cabinet in March of 2024 authorizing the Attorney General to move forward with amending this legislation.
3. A draft policy position paper on the Maternity Protection Act, Chap. 45:57 was submitted to Cabinet in May 2024 and the public consultations were held in Trinidad in September 2023 and in Tobago in 2024, on legislation to govern HIV and AIDS in the workplace.

In addition to continuing work on these pieces of legislation, it is proposed that in 2025 that we focus on an employment standards Bill which seeks to develop basic terms and conditions of work, the Truck Act, Chap. 88:07 and the Trade Disputes and Protection of Property Act, Chap. 88:03. Moreover, Madam Speaker, the Ministry expects to do further work on the Industrial Relations Act and the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, which is an advanced stage, ready to move forward.

We also speak at our Ministry with regard to the formation of policies. So while we speak about work on the review of labour legislation, the team at the Ministry has also been strengthening the policy framework that guides

rights and responsibilities in the workplace. The national workplace policies, Madam Speaker, provide employers and employees and stakeholders with the guidelines and standards expected in the workplace. The Ministry continues to collaborate with all its stakeholders to ensure inclusive, safe, healthy and productive workplaces.

Madam Speaker, we have a problem in the workplace in Trinidad and Tobago, which is known as sexual harassment in the workplace, where many, not only our females but one will not—there is also sexual harassment with regard to males. And it is an issue and the Ministry aims to really ensure that the creation of this policy reaches its targeted audience by sensitizing employers and employees virtually and in-person as to how to manage this particular issue. It is also an issue particularly among the migrant workers and in that regard, the Ministry has translated and printed all its brochures in Spanish to address this language barrier.

The Ministry has also launched a national trilingual, English, Spanish and French, hotline or helpline, 800-CAAD in June of 2023 to specifically address sexual harassment in the workplace. The helpline assist and support employers and employees inclusive of migrant workers. Our efforts, Madam Speaker, to achieve a more inclusive workplace and keeping in mind our migrant population, the Ministry has been building capacity through the assistance of the International Organization for Migration or IOM to improve the proficiency of labour inspectors in Spanish. Although I am sure we could get some lessons from some of those opposite, you know, how to speak Spanish well.

**3.00 p.m.**

These upskilling programmes have enabled our officers to better perform their investigative duties by improving their ability to communicate and interact with Spanish speaking migrant workers, both those exploited, and those involved in the decent work.

One of the things, Madam Speaker, that struck me when I got to the Ministry four years ago was the issue of a national workplace policy on HIV and AIDS. I, at that time, in my ignorance, thought that AIDS and HIV were somehow not very prevalent, and it, with all the advances in medicine and all of those things, was actually going down. And then I recognized that the issue of AIDS and HIV is not just about infections. It is about mental health. It is about people's views. It is about how they see someone who has the disease. It is about the society, inclusiveness, and how we treat people. You know, we speak about bullying and so on, but we also have that kind of aspect in the HIV and AIDS framework.

Therefore, when we create such a policy and implement it—You know, we really need to reduce the stigma and discrimination in the workplace against people who are affected with HIV and AIDS. The Ministry of Labour, to this end, and if we were to look at some statistics, we would have gone out, or the HIV Workplace Advocacy units would have engaged 72 workplaces and 129 workers in the sensitization activities. Furthermore, the unit assisted 25 workplaces in developing their own workplace policy. So, besides our national policy, many organizations do not have an individual workplace policy that guides their behaviour and how they do things.

As we know, Madam Speaker, policies and programmes need to be revisited and reviewed to ensure they meet current and future needs. In this regard, I am pleased to mention that the Ministry has engaged the University of the West Indies health economic unit centre for—no, let me say that again. We have engaged the University of the West Indies Health Economics Unit, Centre for Health Economics St. Augustine, to conduct a national baseline survey on knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices on HIV in the workplace. This survey will gather important data to inform the current national policy as well as guide strategies for intervention in the future.

Moreover, we are also engaged in looking at mental health and how it impacts and works along with HIV in the workplace. The National AIDS Coordinating Committee, Madam Speaker, would have done a poster entitled or called “Psychosocial distress of persons living with AIDS and HIV in the workplace in Trinidad and Tobago.” This was prepared and presented at the 25<sup>th</sup> International HIV Conference in Germany in July of 2024. The project findings are expected to be presented at the National Health Research Conference, being held in Trinidad in November 2024.

I move to child labour, Madam Speaker. In keeping with our commitment to implement ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, the Ministry has been enhancing its efforts towards the prevention and elimination of child labour in this, our beloved country. To guide this work, we have constituted and reconstituted, in February of this year, the national children committee for the prevention and elimination of

child labour. Under the guidance of the committee, some major achievements made include:

- The development of a draft situational analysis on child labour;
- The production of a jingle and logo to be used for outreach and sensitization activities
- The launch of a child ambassador programme, with 30 child ambassadors being appointed in seven secondary schools across Trinidad;
- The hosting of a national multipartite stakeholder consultation on child labour; and
- The hosting of key stakeholder consultations for the development of hazardous and light work lists for Trinidad and Tobago.

This programme has been conducted both in Trinidad and Tobago during the period 2024. In recognizing the issue of child labour, we really need a collaborative approach. The ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean donated tablets for use by labour inspectors when conducting inspections.

Madam Speaker, the support from our international partners has been tremendous as we are offered the benefit of their expertise. In this regard, the Cabinet has recently agreed to the Ministry of Labour engaging the International Labour Organization for technical assistance towards the development of a national policy. I am pleased to say that this initiative will be expedited in the coming year 2025.

With regard to the safety and health of workers, the Ministry is cognizant of the importance of promoting the safety and health of all



workers. Unfortunately, too many times we have been reminded of the importance of this, when it was already too late. We have a number of deaths that took place in Trinidad and Tobago over the last decade that could have been avoided, but that really took place because we did not have in place the mindset or the necessary regulations to deal with them. And it is important and quite heartening to see that the International Labour Organization has recognized this safety and health of workers as a fundamental principle in 2022.

The Ministry of Labour continues to drive initiatives aimed at ensuring workplace safety and health through the Occupational Safety and Health Agency. Sometimes, Madam Speaker, a number of us see OSHA as a necessary evil, and we get very upset and concerned when they stop doing work or doing things in our particular area. It is all well and fine for them to stop work and do things in other people's environments, but when they come to our workplace and raise issues, we somehow have problems with how they work and what they do.

I want to speak to all employers that are hearing my voice here. It is important that you take health and safety seriously. Sometimes we do not get to attach limbs, and we cannot breathe life back into dead bodies. If we do not recognize that we require some basic issues in the workplace to make it safe and to save just one life, it will be worth it. Too often, we see people taking things for granted. You know the proverbial. Something is down and you step over and pretend you did not see it, and then somebody passes and slips and that is somebody in a wheelchair after that. So, please, I urge you

to put your safety policies and procedures in place. Ensure that they are adhered to.

**3.10 p.m.**

Simple things, Madam Speaker. I walk down steps all the time and I walk through the steps in Parliament here, and I see my colleagues going down the steps and nobody is holding the rail. All we need is one trip and a slip and you are history, yeah? So, very simple things like that, just walking down the steps, hold on to the railing, you know. Or you see some water on the ground because a teacup broke and you step over it and the maid will come and fix that, you know, those simple things have far-reaching effects. So I urge everyone at the sound of my voice to please take some personal responsibility also for your actions.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to productivity. And I have heard a number of people over time speak towards the productivity in Trinidad and Tobago. And if we are honest with ourselves, we will know that productivity is really not what it should be. From people doing work in your home, to people doing work in government businesses, to people doing work on plants, we somehow have an issue with productivity.

In a past life when I worked in an area that dealt with engineering and contracts, when we did estimates and we needed to normalize those estimates between foreign bids and local bids, there was like a 20-point spread between what we call wrench time, which is the time you actually do work. And there are actually some standards around that, and what we found is that foreign companies may come with a 70 per cent wrench time against local companies that we will gauge at a 45 per cent wrench time.

That has implications for the length of time the work gets to be done, and it really speaks about paying more for getting less. And if we really were to try and define it, we would find that we would have different ideas about what productivity is, and what it means.

But, I said all that to say this, there is an issue with national productivity and there is a National Productivity Council which the Ministry of Labour would have revived in 2023, October. And part of its mandate is to develop indicators and matrix to allow for the effective measurement of productivity at the micro, macro, and mezzo levels. Additionally, the Council will be undertaking studies to capture pertinent baseline data on productivity across sectors and is also formulating a programme to educate the population about productivity and engage with citizens with a view to influencing behavioural change.

I turn now to employment promotion. Most people listening to my contribution will ask what about jobs? The most prevalent question I get from people that I engage with on a daily basis is, “Boss, you are Minister Labour, give meh ah wuk”. And, “You are Minister of Labour, dial somebody and you could make it happen”, [*Laughter*] you know. And—

**Dr. Gatsby-Dolly:** We get it.

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:**—well, I am told that my other colleagues get it, you know, and people sometimes do not seem to understand how jobs are created, and where they come from. And in my mind, there are a number of ways that we can enhance job creation and improve the workforce, but everybody seeks sustainable employment. But where does that sustainable employment come from? I want persons to think for a moment, Madam

Speaker, and as the Finance Minister would have made in his presentation, and he spoke about Government's commitment to empowering individuals through supporting the creation of sustainable jobs.

And if we look through the budget we see that a number of projects have been included which speak to road and highway rehabilitation, modernization of hotels such as: Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort, Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre, an international branded hotel in Tobago, the Maracas Bay Hotel, the creation of a marina in Tobago, just to name a few. Not only will the construction and development of many of these projects generate employment at the construction phase, but when they are functional, more sustainable jobs will be created both in the tourism sector and at the particular sites. I can speak to that kind of activity through many of the Ministries that we have. I can speak to it from the Youth Development and National Service, education—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes of original speaking time available to you, you are entitled to 10 more minutes to wind up your contribution. Are you availing yourself of same?

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** Yes, I will.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, please proceed.

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** Time flies when you are having fun. Madam Speaker, we have a number of areas in which the Ministry of Labour helps support the jobs and so on, and that is through our National Employment Service. We also do it through the OJT Programme, and we also do it through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programme, more commonly referred to as

the Canadian Farm Programme. And just to say that in relation to the OJT, we are looking at expanding to 6,000 from about 4,500 that we have now. Something that is important to mention is that we have a number of new service providers coming on, and we have signed a number of memoranda of understanding with a number of companies including Phoenix Park Gas Processors, TOSL Engineering, Telecommunication Services of T&T, Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation, Lake Asphalt, Hand Arnold. Because we recognize that in many instances there are many graduates and technical people coming out of school now, that requires a different kind of intervention than the O' Level and the Associate Degree-type persons. So, we have to actually go out there and look for service providers who could give us some of those openings to place people. We have a lot of engineers now, that are doing—we have entered into a collaboration with the Ministry of Education for some support. We have also looked at the Public Utilities and WASA where we have a number of technical and engineering OJTs and so on, being assigned to. And therefore we are quite happy with that.

### **3.20 p.m.**

One of the major issues that, in my short time, I would like to mention is with the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies, and I am particularly indeed happy with our collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service for the development of a community-based action for resilience and success. This is being oversubscribed, this particular intervention, where we are looking to create opportunities for our young people, both by way of developing them mentally and by giving them opportunities within the college to look at careers that they may not have

looked at before.

One of the things that I would like to put on record is that, when I came into office, I had a conversation with the Board and management of the Cipriani College, and I told that as a labour institution and an academic institution, I expect them to be at the forefront of all things labour. They should be advising both workers and workers' representatives and businesses on labour issues.

I am happy to announce that they would have taken up that challenge and today, for instance, they have, and within the college itself, had people and lecturers and so on, who would have published three books with major international academic publishers. They have published a refereed academic journal; they have collaborated with multiple international partners to assist in the conduct of research and development policy; and they would have created a number of academic conferences, which have drawn participation throughout the region, and sometimes even further out.

They recently signed a contract with the Caribbean Development Bank to conduct groundbreaking research into labour market differentials in 16 countries, from the Bahamas in the north to Suriname in the south. This is pioneering work and it will provide governments and the social partners in the region with detailed analysis and a data set that has a specific grounding in the Caribbean experience.

Like most of the speakers before me, Madam Speaker, I did not realize that time could fly so fast and therefore, I now turn my attention to my constituency and those in La Brea. La Brea is a different kind of constituency because of our geography and so on. Sometimes to get from

one end of La Brea to go to the next, you have to take three taxis and go through two other constituencies, and that is just how it is made up. But I am grateful that over the last four years, that we have gotten some of the pie. I understand that with 41 constituencies, you cannot get everything, you will not get everything, but you have to prioritize and fight for those things that you really do need.

I would like to thank, first, the Ministry of Works and Transport for the work they would have done, particularly in the area where we had some road slippages and so on, and that they have repaired. I know they have some more work to do, but I am grateful for the work that was done.

The Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, we are doing some really good, groundbreaking work with them. They have given us the Los Bajos Youth Facility. They are doing some work on the beach camp area with MiLAT and Shade housing, and they have provided a number of different programmes that the young people have taken to, one of which being the heritage apprenticeship programme that we are currently enjoying.

I also want to acknowledge the work that is being done on the velodrome in Palo Seco. That should be completed in the first quarter of 2025.

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** We also have a community centre in the community of La Brea, which is about 98 per cent complete and should be commissioned before the end of the year. I would like to thank the Minister of Public Utilities for the work done at providing lights at the Vance River

ground—

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:**—and I would let him know that the children and those are already using it—making perfect use of it.

Before I run out of time—I have some other things to say but before I run out of time, I also want to say, on behalf of the citizens in the area from Erin to Siparia, a very, very hearty thank you from the residents to WASA for the work they would have done in providing water where there was none before.

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** We have seen—WASA came into our community, made promises and everybody said, “Yeah, right, yeah, okay,” and with the hard-working Minister, I have seen every promise made, fulfilled. The people of the La Brea community, we are overjoyed, over-happy to get a commodity that is basic to life—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Twenty thousand people.

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:**—right?—for almost 20,000 people. So, you know—I also want to thank all the sponsors in my community like TOFCO, Heritage, TGU and all those who have helped in our educational thrust, where we have instituted in our schools, the STEM programme, homework centres, the provision of laptops and other equipment to make students’ lives better.

I want to thank the cultural groups who would have done work with regard to the emancipation celebrations. We also created some parang competitions, which is the first competition every year in Trinidad right now. We have done plenty work on roads and drains, and in particular, in the community of Parry Lands, we would have done some really extensive,



what you call, retaining walls and so on, that really saved scores of homes from sliding off hills and so on.

There are so many things to be grateful for and be thankful for. I will not, and I will never count what I do not have, but I will bless what I do have. In that regard, I thank all my colleagues who would have supported me, who I would have harassed, who I would have cornered, who I would have jacked up and who—I would have made some creative words that we all know—

**Mr. Gonzales:** And good friendship.

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:**—and good friendship. So, Madam Speaker, with that, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity; again, to the Prime Minister to the residents in La Brea for allowing me this opportunity to make this short contribution.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

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

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I join this debate here this. Immediately, it is imperative that I put on the record that the response of the Leader of the Opposition to the Minister of Finance's fiscal package for 2025 is a clear-cut demonstration that the UNC is on the way to be the next government of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, we have tried and tested leadership. We have the capacity. We have the expertise. And, Madam Speaker—

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

Appropriation (Financial Year 2025)  
Bill, 2024  
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—the Leader of the Opposition, in her response, she was clearly able to expose a decade of debt, deficits, destabilization—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—and destruction. It was insightful. It was realistic. It was futuristic and a vision for Trinidad and Tobago between 2025 and 2030.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, the realities are on the wall, you know. Some of them—in fact, all of them could begin the process of beginning to pack, clear their desks and so on—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—in relation to what will be or what will unfold in the next general election, Madam Speaker.

**3.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Bodoë:** Dey packing suitcases soon.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Their responses have been bereft of any vision, and direction, and creating any hope for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, it is clear, not one of them have been able to stand in this Parliament and offer any assistance to the helpless Minister of Finance in their contribution. And, as we speak about the presentation of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, Madam Speaker, as you know, my previous profession before I came into the Parliament was of a labour background and so on.

**Mr. Padarath:** You are a leader, man.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And, listening now to the Minister of Finance in terms of a budget presentation, the trajectory he was on the last fiscal year, and

now in this fiscal year, it has become an occupational hazard for me.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** In fact, Madam Speaker, if the population of Trinidad and Tobago puts God out of their thoughts, and puts them back as the next Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I think that the House Committee or the Standing Orders Committee may have the need to call in the Occupational Safety and Health Agency, and take away these chairs, and order what we may call, more friendly, ergonomic chairs, so that they could probably withstand another painful diatribe from the Minister of Finance, if that—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —as I said, if the population put God out of their thoughts, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** You will have to put hospital beds in here.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, as I said—and that is important, because I too take the opportunity here, on behalf of myself to express my commendation, and my endorsement of the contributions of my colleagues. They have continued in a very clinical and systematic way to demonstrate to the country sector by sector, that we are prepared, and we have the plans, and we have the policies to take charge of restoring and rebuilding Trinidad and Tobago under the United National Congress. Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And, Madam Speaker, if you permit me, you know, I had a, what we may call a semi-prepared text, but based on—we know of their deceit, we know of their deception, I do not want to use the

unparliamentarily language. So,—

**Madam Speaker:** You know, in a way you are bordering on that. Okay. So, just watch where you are going. Okay?

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I assure you, I will not run afoul of, but I will use the English language to describe their untruths in terms of what they have presented during the course of this budget presentation.

And you know yesterday the Minister with responsibility for CARICOM and Foreign Affairs came into the House as a visitor, and in recent times, they seem to have been obsessed with the business of what is taking place in the UNC, and a number of them on the Government side they are resorting now to reading letters, and reading statements, and so on, into the record, and so on. And I came across—and I would want to recommend some very insightful and incisive reading for them here this evening, Madam Speaker, because I came across a letter written to the Editor in the *Express* newspaper dated the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, 2024 written by one, Richard Deane of Diego Martin and—

**Mr. Padarath:** Maybe North/East. Maybe North/East.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —Diego Martin.

**Mr. Padarath:** His constituent.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—and it is dated the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, Madam Speaker. And the headline—

“What did Kamla do wrong as PM?”

**Mr. Padarath:** Truth stabbing.

**Madam Speaker:** Remember we started on this note yesterday. Okay? Even though you are rereading the letter, we still have to abide by what our

Standing Orders say. So, you would have to change that word, if that is the headline. Okay?

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Certainly, Madam Speaker.

“What did...”—the Member for Siparia—“...do wrong as...”—  
 Prime Minister?

And very quickly:

“I have lived now to the ripe old age of 79, and there is one undeniable fact about Trinidadians. We love the good life. We use it.”

And the letter goes on to say:

“We abuse it and after we have drained every drop of goodness out of it and it is no longer available, that is when we realise ‘that was a good thing.’

Unfortunately, at that point we have already totally destroyed it, so we can no longer enjoy it.

That seems to be the case with the...”—Member for Siparia.—“Can anyone tell me what was her sin? What did she do wrong when she was prime minister?

When she saw any Minister do wrong she sent them packing. What was wrong?

She built hospitals, health centres, sporting complex, fire stations...”—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —“...schools, the Children’s Life Fund, free computers for students, roads and bridges, and lots more.”

And I want them to listen, all who have been reading letters from the

newspapers and quoting, Madam Speaker:

“Can anyone name another prime minister who did that much?”

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And the letter goes on to say:

“It is astonishing to hear UNC members casting blame on her for those losses.

If those of you do not get together and fully back her in the next election, it would be you and not her responsible for another loss should that happen.”

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** So I commend, I commend, Madam Speaker, what is good reading for all and sundry, in this House. The 41 Members who are present in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** Diego Martin North/East would never be a part of that.

**Hon. Member:** —he “cah” be part of that.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And, Madam Speaker, again, as I said, I have the responsibility to put the wrongs, right. And you see, the Member for St. Joseph, during his contribution, went on to speak about “Political loyalty can compromise personal integrity.” And he went on to indicate that, taking populist measures and so on, is not in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And I want ask the Member for St. Joseph, where was his integrity when he made or came to a false conclusion about the tenure of the Member for Siparia, and the People’s Partnership Government? Because I want to read from an article dated, well today, that was written by one Joey Bartlett of *Newsday* newspapers. And, Madam Speaker, this is someone

who is a journalist, who writes on behalf of the *Newsday*, and, Madam Speaker, it says that,

“Responding to the...”—Member for Siparia’s—“...October 4 budget response, he reiterated his claims about populism.”

‘It is a form of politics where you try to appeal to the masses by misleading them into thinking that if they elect you, their future will be bright.’”

And he went on to say:

“He asserted that a UNC government...”

—and he spoke about the issue of old age pension and he and he said:

“...he recalled the party’s election promise of 2010...”

And he said that if you:

“‘Vote for me and I will give you a \$3,000 pension. Well, it didn’t happen, because they reneged on that promise. They rode on the backs of 100,000 elderly citizens.’”

**3.40 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Just one minute, I am a little confused. Is that the article you are citing, or is it *Hansard*? I am not sure.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** This is the article I am citing, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, all right. Okay, sure.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Written 55 minutes ago, 55 minutes ago by one Joey Bartlett of the *Newsday*.

**Madam Speaker:** The “he” is the author you are talking about?

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, all right.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** ““They rode...the backs of 100,000 elderly citizens, just as they will attempt to ride on the backs of 200,000 persons working for minimum wage. It is not going to happen.””

Madam Speaker, you see, when you want to speak about integrity, you must have integrity.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Because I want to refer the Member for St. Joseph to the Budget Statement of 2015, page 32, and it speaks about pensions, under the broad heading:

“Pensions...

Senior Citizens

- i. the senior citizens pension will be increased by \$500 per month to \$3,500 per month and will cost an additional \$200.0 million and impact 84,720 senior citizens;”

Madam Speaker, it was done, and therefore the Member for St. Joseph has indeed misled this House.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** He has been dishonest to this House.

**Madam Speaker:** I would ask you to retract the part about misleading the House. All right. I will ask you to retract that.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, well, the Member—I retract. The Member for St. Joseph misled this House as it relates to—

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

**Madam Speaker:** But you just retracted it. All right. I have asked you to retract it, you repeated it.



**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** I withdraw, I withdraw, Madam Speaker. But the facts are the facts as it relates to what was told.

**Madam Speaker:** Yeah, but again, when you retract, it is unreservedly. You see the “but”, and what you said after? The “but” does not comply with a retraction. So retract it completely.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** I retract, Madam Speaker, and I move on. Madam Speaker, it is important for me also to speak in the context of this issue of the minimum wage, because we heard about populism and doing it in the interest of attempting to win and buy votes in election campaigning. Madam Speaker, I want to refer you to the fiscal package—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, point of order 81(6) states that:

“The debate...shall be confined to the financial and economic state of Trinidad and Tobago...general principles of Government policy...as indicated by the Appropriation Bill and the Estimates.”

Could I get a ruling on this please? Is the Member allowed to speak about everything under the sun?

**Madam Speaker:** No, no—

**Hon. Member:** [*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance, I overrule. The Member is responding to certain things, and as we all know, especially those of us who are as senior as you, that the budget really is not so confined. And Minister, in terms of what every Member said, including the budget statement, lots of things outside the Estimates were said. Member for Couva South.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam

Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph, as I said, pointed in a direction about the minimum wage, and big brouhaha about attempting to ride the backs of workers and people in the context of populist decision. And as I said, I want to refer you to the fiscal package of the Minister of Finance, that is the 2024, and under the heading:

“Minimum Wage.

Madam Speaker, I propose to initiate action to minimise the country’s socio-economic imbalance and stimulate consumer spending aimed at economic expansion. To achieve this objective, I propose to increase the minimum wage by 17 percent, or \$3.00 per hour, from \$17.50 to \$20.50 per hour. This measure will benefit approximately 190,000 persons...”—

They went off in a glee, a dance, stomping the desk, beating the desk in 2024, as it relates to the fiscal package. Madam Speaker, that was their position in 2024 across the board.

In 2025, Madam Speaker, their position is:

“...we will increase the minimum wage earned by public sector employees, from \$20.50 an hour to \$22.50...”

Per hour, and it—

“...will benefit 5,100 workers at MTS, 6,900 at CEPEP, and 6,200...in URP.”

Madam Speaker, what would have guided this decision? In 2024, it is across the board in the interest of 190,000 workers and in 2025, it is less than 25,000. This is naked electioneering.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** There is nothing less than that. This is a reward. This is an inducement, Madam Speaker, and this is an instruction to get in your section, put on your red jersey, and we will marshal you to every political meeting when the general elections is called.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And, Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, it is important.

**Madam Speaker:** Members, it is rare that I have difficulty in hearing the Member for Couva South.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Madam Speaker:** It is very rare. I have commended him time and time again for having a voice that could fill any chamber. But I think today the crosstalk is really challenging me. So I really would not want to have him carry it up an octave, so I will ask all Members to cooperate with me so that we can have the Member speak within reasonable volume. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And if they feel they could distract me, I could lift the tempo further.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** So you see, what has happened here is an undermining of the Minimum Wages Act, Madam Speaker. I want to ask the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in their attempt to induce and in an attempt to buy votes, naked electioneering, have they gone back to what we would call sectoral wages or wages that existed in the context of what prevailed before

1998? Again, I want to put on the record, it is a UNC Government that brought the minimum wages into effect and gave a semblance of dignity to all workers in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** You see, this kind of what we would call “unbridled madness” that is taking place under this Government, in terms of undermining the rule of law and the laws of Trinidad and Tobago has to come to an end, Madam Speaker.

**3.50 p.m.**

And this leads me to address some further issues. Because, Madam Speaker, I am sure that it is important to put further on the record—because the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo during his contribution said that he had difficulty in locating the 100-plus schools built by the People’s Partnership Government under the leadership of the Member for Siparia.

So this evening, I want to assist the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, and every Government Member. I want them to see clearly now, and hear clearly now also, Madam Speaker. So I want to put on the record, and I want to read from the House of Representatives *Hansard*—

**Dr. Bodoë:** Dated—

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, 2029, pages 216—

**Madam Speaker:** 2029?

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—2019. Sorry, Madam Speaker, pages 216 to 223. And quoting from the *Hansard*, Dr. Gopeesingh, the then Minister of Education:

“Under the management of Mrs. Persad-Bissessar as Prime Minister,

the Ministry of Education constructed and completed 69 early Childhood Care and Education Centres, 31 primary schools, and six secondary schools. In addition, additional blocks were built at another secondary school. In addition to that...when we demitted office, we had, under various stages of construction, 37 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres, 19 primary schools, six secondary schools, making a total of 62 schools that were under various stages of construction...and in answering the Prime Minister's question, the 31 primary schools completed, it would include those schools that were open in three of the sitting Ministers, now in Government, including the Prime Minister..."

And the then Minister—well, the former Minister of Education started, Madam Speaker. And I will enter into the record:

- “1. Rousillac Presbyterian Primary School
2. Riversdale Presbyterian.
3. Tunapuna Government Primary.
4. Balmain Presbyterian.
5. Penal Rock Road SDMS...”

Madam Speaker, and further for the records, I want to, because as I said, I have quoted the relevant pages in the *Hansard* of the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, 2019.

And as I said:

- “26. Point Cumana RC...
27. New Grant Government Primary...
28. Cap-de-Ville Government Primary...”

—Madam Speaker, shows you that the Paramin RC School—we were able

to build schools throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, and for their edification, I recommend this very insightful piece of reading for the benefit of all those on the other side who continue to tell you—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—they cannot locate, they cannot see, but I am sure that we have brought this argument to an end, and we have debunked the falsehood—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—and propaganda of every PNM Member. So, after my turn at “de crease”, they cannot continue to continue this argument or narrative, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Hosein:** Solid evidence.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And the solid evidence is here, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Hosein:** The legend.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** I listened to the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West and the Minister of Public Utilities. I heard the Member for Tobago East say that the Member and her constituency are getting water to “buss pipe”, and the Member for Point Fortin indicating to this House during his contribution that there is water flowing all over Point Fortin, Madam Speaker. And the biggest mamaguy I think that I have heard in this budget presentation amongst a proliferation of what has been presented by Members of Government in their attempt to defend this budget, was when the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West told this debate that 70 per cent of the country’s population will have a continuous water supply by the end of 2024.

Madam Speaker, the only government that has been able to achieve

this percentage of water distribution in the political history of Trinidad and Tobago was a government that was led by the Member for Siparia, Madam Speaker,

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And it is clear, as I said, we have the leadership, we have the capacity, we have the expertise—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—we have the tried leadership, and we will do it again between 2025 and 2030, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And just to amplify and support and embellish what I am saying to you for the benefit of the listening population, Madam Speaker, I want to enter into some record into the *Hansard*, and put on the official record that on Monday of this week, between 12.22 p.m. and 12.24 p.m., I received a number of WhatsApp messages from a disgruntled constituent living in Calcutta #2, and I quote:

One minute is repair to 16 inches main. Now, it is electrical repairs. Next, it is the Desal shutdown. Oh yes, Diwali next. Problems for water always comes around for Diwali. Strange coincidence or victimization 58 years and continuing. No water 10 days now. I thought they commissioned two additional wells last year?

And an additional constituent on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, Madam Speaker, at 11.25 a.m. in the morning from Seereeram Trace in Calcutta #2:

Good day, Mr. Indarsingh, can you inquire when Calcutta #2 will be getting water, please? The last supply was last Tuesday.

8.07 a.m. from that said constituent:

This is eight days now with no water. I requested a truck-borne water supply.

And in addition to that, Madam Speaker:

I appreciate whatever assistance that I can get. My tanks are empty.

And on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September at 6.23 a.m. from Central Park in Balmain,

Madam Speaker:

Good morning MP, hope you are doing well. Can you help us with our water supply, please? Speaking to anyone in WASA is like talking to cardboard. I attended many meetings and was told by WASA that the drilling of three wells in our area was going to solve our water problems, well, it did not. Whereas we did see an improvement initially, it has gone back to WASA, when they feel to give us. We do not have a schedule.

And it says—what has been described to me, Madam Speaker, is a genuine sense of frustration, and the WhatsApp messages that I received from my constituents is reflective of the sentiments of all of our constituents in the 19 constituencies.

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

**Hon. Member:** Yes, Couva South!

**Hon. Member:** Correct, correct, correct.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** If they are able to get in the constituencies under the control of the Government, we are happy for the citizens of the country, but do not come and tell this House and tell the country that there has been a transformation of the water supply in Trinidad and Tobago.



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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** That is the biggest mamaguy, Madam Speaker. That is why I will continue to say that they are very deceptive as a Government.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** They pose or they push propaganda and they attempt to paint a picture that “We are concerned about the future of Trinidad and Tobago and all the citizens”.

**4.00 p.m.**

You know, as we are speaking about WASA and Diwali and so on, Madam Speaker, in recent times, I have seen a number of Ministers donning kurtas and so on. They are moving all over central Trinidad and south Trinidad. In fact, I am reliably informed—Madam Speaker, from a Hindu point of view, we are in the period of Navaratri and you know, when you get an invitation—I heard some of them, they are looking for something that is called *nevtaa*, but it is an invitation that they are looking for, and they are paying, they are bribing their way, they are looking—

**Madam Speaker:** Withdraw the word “bribing”, please.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** I withdraw, Madam Speaker, but I am—

**Hon. Member:** Solicitation.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—they are soliciting invitations and in fact, they are going to temples throughout the length and breadth of central Trinidad. But I want to tell them—because even the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West boasted that when he went to a temple down in Monroe Road, that he got a request from the leadership of the temple and he acted upon it within 24 hours, about a request for security, when they were engaged in

their all-night vigil or *jagran*, as it relates to the Visarjan for Ganesh Utsav. I hope that all of them can listen and deal with the issue of a reliable water supply—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—for the entire Hindu community in the lead up to Diwali 2025, Madam Speaker. We know your agenda. “We make you out before you come around de corner”—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—in terms of—we know your agenda. As I said, they are working, they are all over, within every nook and cranny, looking for *nevtaa*, pleading for an invitation, as it relates to attending religious observances under the guise of praying to God, Madam Speaker, and being truthful. This is a time—as I said, every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago has made out their real agenda and what they have set out to achieve, Madam Speaker, but we will say more about that on the campaign trail, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to move on to the very important issue too of what was said by the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara in relation to the UNC MPs, not to politicize bullying in schools. Madam Speaker, the reality is the current school environment is not one that is healthy, that gives a sense of comfort to students and their parents and so on. It is clear that we, on this side, we have a track record of empathy and giving support to all and sundry in their hour of need and time of need, and this was clearly demonstrated by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, when she reached out to the family of Jayden Lalchan, who succumbed to that unfortunate

scenario in relation to what transpired in his school. I want to join all of my colleagues on this side in continuing to be a pillar of strength, and a support of strength to the Lalchan family, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, bullying is not something that is nice to deal with. I, within recent times, have been confronted with the reality of the issue, when a grandfather from Couva came to me. He indicated to me what was transpiring in the Carapichaima East Secondary School. His grandson is a Form 1 student, Madam Speaker. And I immediately telephoned the school supervisor with responsibility for central Trinidad.

Unfortunately, when I followed up, up to last Friday, with the grandfather, no action was taken. The grandfather, they took the decision—the family took the decision to withdraw the child from Carapichaima East Secondary School, and they are still contemplating because they are in a very difficult decision, and they do not have the necessary funds to send their child to a private school.

So, Madam Speaker, after going into their tenth year, if the Government is incapable of addressing what is taking place in the school environment, the Opposition, which is the alternative government of Trinidad and Tobago, will speak about it—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—in the Parliament and outside of the Parliament. It is known that the Member for Siparia and the former Member for Caroni East are the two best examples of progressive Ministers of Education—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—in the political history of this country, Madam Speaker.

At the end of the day, this is not about bullying, this is not about politicizing, Madam Speaker. We want to ask the Minister, and the Minister in the Ministry of Education, what is the Ministry's position on the introduction of a psychological first aid training policy for principal, teachers, guidance counsellors and school staff, inclusive of security. What is the Ministry's position on a comprehensive anti-bullying campaign, which will embrace all stakeholders, teachers, parents and students?

The reality is that we are not in a healthy place. Parents are very traumatized. Parents are contemplating whether I should send my child to school or not. That is the reality, Madam Speaker. And they have had nine years to address this issue—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—and it is very clear that they are incapable, they do not have the leadership, and they do not have the political will, and that is why this is not about politicizing, and this is not about attempting to gain political points, but it is a clear-cut demonstration on the part of the Opposition that we are prepared to provide the leadership—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—to transform the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I will now move on to another very critical issue of—the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Madam

Speaker, during his contribution, the Member for San Fernando West boasted—you know, every time they get up to speak—and they have very little achievements to talk about. So when they get the opportunity to boast, “dey does be in ah” mood that borders on—they want to celebrate. They could dance and prance in this House, and beat their chest. And he said that—the Member boasted about the passage of whistleblower legislation and he said that if you see something, you say something.

Madam Speaker, the whistleblower at the Couva Children’s Home, she said something when she saw something. But, Madam Speaker, you know, what was the end result after she said something?

**Hon. Member:** They fired something.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** That the whistleblower was fired, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And not only the whistleblower, but three additional caregivers at the home were fired. Where is the protection, Member for San Fernando West, that you boasted about when this legislation was passed? I am asking, is there a cover-up as it relates to what transpired at this home?

**Hon. Member:** Good point, good point.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** If we are unable to protect the most vulnerable in our society and protect those who are brave enough to step forward, who are prepared to do the right thing, Madam Speaker, we are heading down a slippery slope when we try to intimidate and silence whistleblowers and end

up in a cover-up, Madam Speaker. That is the reality. If we do not support and we do not operationalize this legislation and protect whistleblowers, then we will be spinning top in mud, and I ask the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, if there is a cover-up as it relates to what transpired at this home, Madam Speaker.

**4.10 p.m.**

And, Madam Speaker, I want to go onto the point on their collective bargaining. The Member for La Brea attempted to skirt around the collective bargaining issue—not the health and safety—but the minimal wage issue, and some other issues about child labour policy. And I will come to the very important issue and hypocrisy of the Government as it relates to sexual harassment and so on. But, I want to say to all and sundry to understand how the PNM has approached, this Government has approached, the issue of collective bargaining in our society. You have to understand the DNA of the PNM. The PNM has never been on the side of workers.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** They have never been on the side of people. They have never been on the side of trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you have two more minutes left of the original speaking time. An additional 10 minutes, after that to wind up. Are you going to avail yourself of this?

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Certainly, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, please proceed.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** So, Madam Speaker, they had—they signed a memorandum of understanding prior to the general election of 2015, and also in their manifesto, they promised with the backdoor engineering of the former Minister of Labour, one Jennifer Baptiste-Primus of “shellem-berger fame” and—

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughing*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—“hotter than ah chula”. That is the only thing I could remember about that Minister. “Hotter than ah chula” and of “shellem-berger fame”.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, they promised an immediate settlement of all wage negotiations. They promised a comprehensive review of all labour legislation. They promised health and safety. They promised social dialogue and tripartism, Madam Speaker. But you know what has transpired? What has transpired—and this is why I continue to say that—what is happening under this Government—this unbridled madness that is taking place—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—it has to stop, it has to come to an end. Because the independence of the collective bargaining process under this Government, has been reduced to a hijacking of the collective bargaining process. It is no longer free. It is no longer fair. It is no longer independent, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And, Madam Speaker, we have an industrial relations crisis in Trinidad and Tobago at the moment. That is why there is a shut down. No work is taking place on the port. Recently we had a situation, first time in the history of this country, pilots engaged in a silent protest at the Piarco International Airport, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And I want to ask the Minister of Finance, whether the Vice President of HR at Caribbean Airlines has been forced out of his job at CAL.

**Hon. Members:** Or.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, and it has nothing to do—

**Hon. Member:** What!

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—with him going on to greener pastures, but it is political pressure that was applied unto him—

**Hon. Member:** Lies.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—to settle the issue of the negotiations as it relates to the pilots, Madam Speaker. And coming back very quickly, it is collective bargaining now, by divine rights.

**Hon. Member:** Or.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** It is what the Cabinet says, and what the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. So the CPO is now—he has been reduced to a waterboy.

**Hon. Member:** “Ahh”

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** He is like the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> man.

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



**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** It is no longer meeting and treating under the Industrial Relations Act and subscribing to the grievance procedure, Madam Speaker. Where the unions will submit proposals and the CPO will counter—they will meet and treat in an atmosphere of genuine collective bargaining. And if there is a breakdown, you go for conciliation at the Ministry of Labour or the special tribunal and if there is a breakdown at the Ministry of Labour, it goes to the Industrial Court for final arbitration, Madam Speaker. This is collective bargaining by divine rights under Prime Minister Dr. Rowley and the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

**Hon. Member:** Lord Imbert.

**Madam Speaker:** The first—calling people by their names, so you want to say Prime Minister, you could say the Member for Diego Martin West.

**Hon. Member:** Sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Alright. Just try and remember that. Let us try and practise that.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** So, Madam Speaker, if this unbridled madness continues, you know what will happen? One morning you will get up and find out in this country, this Government will move to repeal the IRA.

**Hon. Members:** Ohhh.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** They will move to abolish the office of the Chief Personnel Officer, and they will invite trade unions to come and meet and treat with the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Member:** “Ahh”

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And that is why this unbridled madness has to come to an end in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, the rule of law as it relates to the IRA, and the basic principles of good industrial relations practices, have been destroyed by this Government. And that is the legacy, that this Government—they want no union in the work place, you know.

**Hon. Member:** Absolutely not.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** They want no—and every year they boasting. Every time Labour Day comes, the Minister of Labour and the Prime Minister issuing messages and lauding the labour heroes of 1937 and so on. Butler, Rienzi, Selwyn John, Francis Mungroo, Basdeo Panday, every one of them must be rolling in their graves, based on what has been transpiring—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —as it relates to collective bargaining in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. And, it brings me to the very important issue as it relates to one of the—well we were told by the Minister of Finance and in passing, I will address this issue of three companies that were identified or three proposals that were found by Scotia, and by the valuation committee, to be worthy of consideration, as it relates to the future of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery.

And I want to specifically speak to one of the prospective companies, the Oando Plc, a company based in Nigeria, Madam Speaker, and I want to point out this to the entire government:

“Issues facing Oando

In 2017, two...”—Oando Plc—“...shareholders petitioned the Securities and Exchange Commission of mismanagement and

infractions, leading to the suspension of the oil firm's annual general meeting... The company moved to...challenge the suspension.

In April 2021, SEC said that its action against Oando Plc, was due to the company's 'severe breaches of capital market regulations', noting that some of the breaches were criminal in nature.

Due to the conflicting judgments in several courts, SEC said in April 2021 that 'parties and relevant stakeholders are enjoined to maintain the status quo, which includes the suspension of the annual general meeting pending the determination of its cases and its appeals'"—and so on.

**4.20 p.m.**

This in itself raises a very big red flag as it relates to the prospective companies that are being shortlisted. I want to warn the Government that the United National Congress, under the leadership of Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, will not rest. We will ensure that there is transparency and accountability and good governance as it relates to the future of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Very quickly, I want to turn to the issue of the great constituency of Couva South, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I want to put on record the support that I have gotten and the unwavering commitment, loyalty and dedication of the office staff led by the office manager, Reshma Maharaj—

**Hon. Member:** Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—and the constituency executive led by Mr. Sharma Sooknanan.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I want to tell the constituents of Couva South, because they are locked on and listening. They are viewing. The Minister of Works and Transport has committed the Ministry to undertaking 100 new projects of road paving in 2025. Their record of delivery and implementation is very questionable. Road infrastructure has collapsed in this country.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** In fact, the legacy of the Minister of Works and Transport is one where now Trinidad and Tobago can be entered into *The Guinness Book of Records* for the country with the most potholes in the world, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. Member:** Shame.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** In that regard, I have written— In fact, Madam Speaker, if I lift up this bundle—and if I brought all the letters that I wrote to the Minister of Works and Transport, the Minister of Public Utilities, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, it will not have room. I would have had to get support from my staff to bring—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—the number of letters that I have wrote to all of them; not even the decency of a reply with a comma or a full stop, Madam

Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** “Ooooh!”

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** I want to tell the Minister of Works and Transport to be honest and be truthful with the constituents and residents of Calcutta No. 1, 2 and 3.

Calcutta No. 2 Road is the worst road now in Trinidad and Tobago, and when will he reply to the numerous requests for the road rehabilitation of the Calcutta No. 2 Road, Madam Speaker?

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, driving between the Rivulet Road and the Balmain Main Road—and they are very familiar where the Nutrimix factory is, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** You know, the entire Cabinet, inclusive of the Prime Minister, and every one of them, came to the sod-turning ceremony, and they returned to the commissioning of the plant, Madam Speaker. In spite of writing letters on behalf of the residents in that area and getting that road repaired, Madam Speaker, they seem to have forgotten where the Nutrimix factory plant is located, and the legacy is broken ends, bent rims, burst tyres, Madam Speaker.

In recent times, Madam Speaker, we have been told of new desilting projects in 2025. Madam Speaker, that is pure mamaguy, pure deceit—

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—pure deception and nothing will happen or be for the benefit of the constituents of Couva South. I thank you very much.

Appropriation (Financial Year 2025)  
Bill, 2024  
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

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

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Works and Transport.

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

**Hon. Member:** Tender your resignation.

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):**

Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, firstly, I must thank you for the opportunity to speak in this House. I also want to thank the three Benches of this House, the A team, the B team and the real team.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity to thank the Minister of Finance for his prudent leadership that he has given to Trinidad and Tobago over the last 10 years.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, thank you.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** He has not only stabilized the ship, but he has also placed the ship on a course that this country is on the right path to success again. Finally, we have a Minister of Finance who understands finance—

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—and not like what the UNC thinks, that finance is all about contracts, contracts, contracts.

**Ms. Ameen:** “Look who talking.”

**Hon. Member:** “Look who talking.”

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, this country is not an easy country to govern when you have finances and your resource is not at the

level that you expect. However, Madam Speaker, this Government came into office in 2015 on the banner of, “Let’s do this”. We all remember that, “Let’s do this”, 2015.

Although the challenges that we faced, this Government created a roadmap to go forward, and I can tell you, as we stand here today, more than 70 per cent of the projects, that was on both the 2015 manifesto and the 2020 manifesto of the PNM, have been implemented by the Ministry of Works and Transport. Madam Speaker, despite the challenges, the global challenges that we face, war in Ukraine—

**Hon. Member:** War?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yes, war. I know you all “doh” understand what is happening on the outside. You all think everything happens only in central, but the world—things are happening around the world.

Madam Speaker, I would report on the progress of the Ministry of Works and Transport, but before I go there, and I have quite a lot to report on. I need to address some of the—I do not want to use an unparliamentary word, and I will not say it, because I know you would tell me not to say it—the untruths. I think we need to establish what is an untruth and what is—the word that a lot of people was stopped from using yesterday, which I will not use, that word, “lie”.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** I will not use that word.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, if you could withdraw it. I mean—

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yeah, I will withdraw it.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, please.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** But I have a problem when people say it is an untruth, but they know it is an untruth and they still use it. That I have a problem with, because if you did not know and you say it, we could say it is an untruth and we can correct it. But what I saw happening in the debate by some Members, especially the Member for Siparia and the Member for Oropouche East, was a lot of untruths being said, and they should have known better.

If it is one reason I wanted to speak in the House today is to correct some of that, because once something goes on the record in Parliament, it is there for a long time on the *Hansard*, and if someone do not correct it, then it is taken as the truth. But before I go to correct the untruths placed by those two Members, I want to deal with the last speaker for a little while. I just want to remind him that the People's National Movement introduced the IRA.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** So when he talk about, "The PNM will abolish that", I just want to remind him that it was the People's National Movement who introduced that, also the Industrial Court. So to say that the PNM is against labour, that is another untruth. That was introduced by the People's National Movement.

Madam Speaker, I know sometimes we say things in the Chamber, but we have to understand sometimes that there are people looking at us nationally. Sometimes we may say things here thinking we are joking with one another, one side of the floor, "ah little picong" on the other side, but we have to be very, very careful, because this country could find itself in



problems if we do not control some of the statements that we make. I say this because I notice the Member—and I do not think it was intended the way it could come across, Couva South, making memes about the Members on this side going to Hindu functions as though that is a problem. This is Trinidad and Tobago. Every creed and race finds an equal place—

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—and we all—

**Mr. Al-Rawi SC:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yeah. We all enjoy each other's festival and religions.

**4.30 p.m.**

We do not make any memes about the Leader of the Opposition going to a Baptist celebration. That is something that we must be very careful of. I sat in the Senate for about six years and I never saw a Hindu Member of the Opposition standing up to bring Divali greetings. I never said anything about that.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Really?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yes. They were East Indian Members, of course. At the end of the day, this is Trinidad and Tobago. We have to be very careful sometimes because sometimes this thing goes a long way. There was some time ago that the Prime Minister was invited to the Divali Nagar and there were comments by the then Government, the UNC was in Government, that, “who invite him”? “He should not be there”, and there was a comment there, from a Member of the Nagar that I know, offended the Prime Minister. He was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, a place

where “every creed and race find an equal place”. So we must be very careful. I mean, I could stand here and say, “Look where dey put the Pundit from Chaguanas West”, the only Pundit on the Bench, but I would not do that because, I mean, we are here in politics. So let us be very careful. I want to apologize, as a Hindu, to all my Members on the PNM Bench, do not be offended by what was said, and you are welcome to all our festivals.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** All. Madam Speaker—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yeah, the Maha Sabha had welcomed the PNM. As that great gentleman Sat Maharaj said—he has freed up the Hindu votes, they took it for granted.

Madam Speaker, I want to go a little bit into the Leader of the Opposition’s contribution—three and a half hours? Okay. I would just want to look at one area. You see, in 2011, I sat at Balisier House with a general secretary called Mr. Ashton Ford.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** We decided at the time, let us look at the missteps of the Government. We started to document everything, and by year three, we had reached close to 400 missteps; 400 missteps. And then, I had to tell him, “We running out of paper, hold up there, is only a matter of time for them”, only a matter of time, because from day one, missteps started. I noticed that the UNC, in their contribution tried to take a page from that and they listed 29 missteps by this Government. Well, if after nine years you could come up with 29 missteps, when in your five years we came

up with over 500, that we could have defended,

I started to think, let me see what is this 29. So when I looked at the 29 I saw one, two, three, four, five, six pertaining to the Ministry of Works and Transport and I said, “But wait, I need to correct that”, because if you speak about that in the Parliament, I need to put my side of the story. What is this misstep about? Then I looked at the others and I said, “Paintings; \$3 million”, I said, “Is that a misstep”? A Benz for \$2 million. I said, “But what is the impression of corruption or whatever it is there”? What is the misstep there? But I will leave that for Ministers in those Ministries to deal with.

I want to deal with misstep 12: *Cabo Star* mobilization fee, \$13 million. The Member must know that that is not true. This country—to start with, the *Cabo Star* never came to Trinidad and Tobago; never came.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** So not a cent was spent on that. That contract was cancelled when the boat was somewhere in Panama or somewhere. No money was ever spent but you have that the Government spent \$13 million; you know that is an untruth. Why would you put it there? So I want to correct the record on that. So “yuh gone” down to 28 now. The *Ocean Flower II*; \$20 million, not 13, \$20 million was the *Ocean Flower II*, that was cancelled. So that never came, so minus \$20 million. Then we have the *Cabo Star* mobilization fee, \$13 million. Madam Speaker, why I want to correct these things is because they keep repeating these things all time and now they have entered it into the Parliament, so it is there for the records. So I want to correct these things.

Madam Speaker, the *Cabo Star* came to Trinidad because we knew what happened with the *Superfast Galicia*, which I will get into in a little while. The mobilization fee for that was US \$500,000, which is about \$3 million, not \$13 million.

**Mr. Young SC:** They must have asked for the 13 “to tief” the 10.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** No, well, I will come to how much they normally pay for mobilization—you see—that deals with that. So that is another thing that they have to—so we are down to 27 and I will take off the six that the Ministry has. Madam Speaker, \$8.9 million ramp to accommodate the *Jean de La Vallette*. That is a vessel we brought when we had no vessels. Yes, we spent \$8 million on the ramp, but if you bring a vessel to Trinidad, that our infrastructure cannot handle, right, you must accommodate the vessel because you cannot have passengers diving in the sea and then climbing on the boat.

**Hon. Member:** And vice versa.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** We built the ramp, the ramp could be used for any other vessel at that height and material from that ramp, if it is not used, will be used by NIDCO, which they are doing in some of their projects. So it is not a loss to the country. I want to compare that—and you see, they called these big mobilization figures—to the vessel that they brought, the *Superfast Galicia*. You see, the history of Trinidad, we brought a few vessels here. One was *The CAT*, \$280, 000. There was another vessel that came; the *Cabo Star*, \$500, 000; and the *Emprededora*, \$30,000.

Madam Speaker, they brought one vessel to Trinidad, which was the *Superfast Galicia*. You know what was the cost to mobilize that vessel? I

have a cheque here, made out to the Port Authority from the then, Ministry of Works and Transport. They paid \$23.9 million for the mobilization and infrastructure adjustment for that vessel. You have to add to that because the vessel could not berth, rather than build a ramp, they paid a company to rent a barge for the two years it was here; \$12.5 million.

So you add \$12.5 million to \$23.9 million and that is what they paid for a vessel, but in their information about the PNM, a set of untruths. The only vessel coming to Trinidad that cost that kind of money was when the UNC brought a vessel and I have the proof here. So if they want it, they can get it. Yet still, they will put that and come in the Parliament and put—they would not say they spent about \$15 million on a ramp; \$15 million and another \$21 million to mobilize a vessel. The Member for Siparia went on to say that we spent \$50 million on the Mosquito Creek. Well, I think the Member for Oropouche yesterday, which I will come to in a while, said, “Well, no money was spent, it is still before Cabinet” but she already said we spent \$50 million. Madam Speaker, \$140 million—another one—on the *Galleons Passage*.

**4.40 p.m.**

The *Galleons Passage* was bought when there was no vessel available, not for rent, not for sale on the international market. The Minister of Finance and his team found this vessel and the Government paid something like US \$16 million for it; US \$16 million. That vessel, up to today, is working between Trinidad and Tobago. It is working whenever there is a disaster in any part of the Caribbean. Up to last week, I had a request for the vessel for one of the small islands. It is a vessel that is being

looked at for trade between some of the islands; working perfectly. What is the scandal in that?

The vessel was worth way more than we paid for it when we bought it, but the UNC has termed that a scandal. What is the scandal in that? The scandal is when you paid almost, what?—\$36 million just to bring a vessel here. That is a scandal. That is not the rental of the vessel I am talking about, eh—\$36 million just to bring it, almost half of the price that we paid for the *Superfast Galicia*, to be paid for the *Galleons Passage*.

Then the Member went on the say another one, lease for the *Jean de La Valette* for a two-year period. What is the scandal in that? So if you go through the 29 points that they put on the PNM, why you should vote for the UNC, you realize none of these points will give you any inclination that the PNM has done anything wrong over the last nine years. And if these 29 points are the reasons why you should vote back the UNC in office, I want to tell this country, be prepared to lie on the bed that you made; be prepared. Because the debate that I heard in the last couple of days by certain Members, especially, Mayaro, Chaguanas West, Cumuto/Manzanilla, there are many people on that side there who do not put the country first. I want to congratulate the Members who have decided to take a stand on the other side and put the country first. We all have to live here. Our children have to live here. Our grandchildren have to live here and if we do not do what we are supposed to do while we exist and live here, then this country will not be the paradise that we know it can be.

Madam Speaker, I want now to turn to the Member for Oropouche East. And Oropouche East reminds me—when I used to live in Grande,

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there was something called—what we called the local Play Whe, “whe-whe”. And the “whe-whe” banker would go and “buss de mark” 11 o’clock in the morning—those of us from the country, we will know about that—and he will go and “buss ah mark” like six o’clock in the evening. And what he will do, he will write the number he is going to “buss” and he will put it in a matchbox. And when they go in the cocoa, and they go wherever, he puts it under his shoes, and you will collect all the bets and everything, and then when all bets are inside, he takes up the matchbox, he opens it and that is “de mark he buss”. Right? That is how—so the Member for Oropouche East, he is a good “whe whe” man. “He does buss mark”. But unfortunately, the Member came yesterday to “buss some mark”.

One mark, the Curepe Interchange. I want to start with that, the Curepe Interchange. He was saying that the reason why the Government was able to cut the price in half is because the Government told them to reduce the scope, take out some of the roads and that is how we were able to bring it in at \$219 million, as compared to close to \$600 million, \$545-plus this, plus that. But. Madam Speaker, I have in my hands here—and I will make it available to the Member—the two plans. One from 2013/2014, and one from 2017, and what you will find in these two drawings is that there was no adjustment downwards.

You see, what had happened with this project, there were two Ministers at the time fighting to award the contract. Each one had a contractor and “ah bacchanal break out”, and one Member went and told the Prime Minister, “Well, look, he want to give it to so and so, and I want to give it to so and so.” One of the contractors ended up saying, “Well, we

going the court because I suppose to get it at \$600 million.” And the next one said, “Well, no, I cheaper by 500 and something million.” The contract was aborted because they could not do it.

When we came in, we decided we were going to do the contract, but there was a little glitch in it because you cannot put out the same scope. So what we did, we added two roads. We did not take out “no” roads, we added two roads. So, wherever the Member got the information, he got in the reverse. Sometimes you look at a form upside down and you did not see it. The Ministry of Works and Transport, in 2017, added two ancillary roads to it and was still able to bring it in at half the price. So I want to put that on the *Hansard* because that was an untruth that was told yesterday, that we reduced the scope of the work to bring it in cheaper.

The Member spoke about—he had in his possession a freedom of information request that they wrote to NIDCO about some evaluation for the vessels and he was basically making reference that a certain, Minister, Minister Young, Member for Port of Spain—

**Madam Speaker:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Sorry, yes—

**Madam Speaker:** [*Inaudible*]—okay?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Sorry, sorry, sorry—a Member of Cabinet—

**Mr. Al-Rawi SC:** Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yeah—the Minister of Energy and Energy and Energy Industries, a Member of the Cabinet, was involved in the evaluation of the contract. Madam Speaker, I got a copy of that freedom of information request and the answer. What the Member did not do is read all the



information that was given to him. There was a freedom of information and one part of the answer was, there was a Cabinet-appointed committee—and I want to be very careful to make the reference to the two right committees. A Cabinet team was set up to review the proposals.

You see, these proposals came as a visit by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago from Australia, government-to-government agreement and arrangement. It was a government-to-government arrangement for the vessels and Cabinet appointed a team to review the proposals, and that team was headed by Minister Young—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, sorry. That team was headed by Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. And the team comprised the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—sorry, he was the Minister of Communications at the time; the hon. Retired Major General Edmund Dillon; Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses; Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte; Mr. Marvin Gonzales, Director of Legal Services, Ministry of Works and Transport; Mr. Stephen Gardiner, Project Manager, Office of the Prime Minister; and Captain Sukhjit Singh from the Maritime Technology Cooperation Centre, University of Trinidad and Tobago; and Mr. Demi John Cruickshank.

**4.50 p.m.**

They were the evaluation team, but the Minister tried to give the impression that—that team was the evaluation team. That team was just to look at the proposals. The evaluation team that was set up to negotiate with the provider was another team that was headed, without any Cabinet

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Ministers, by Mr. Herbert George of NIDCO. It is sad that someone could have a Note in their hands that has everything on it and only choose to read the parts that would create confusion and give an impression that somebody is doing wrong.

The evaluation team was headed by Mr. Herbert George Chairman of NIDCO; Mr. Stephen Gardner; Mr. Steve Garibsingh, President of NIDCO at the time; Tara John Senior, Legal Officer of NIDCO; Demi John Cruickshank, businessman; Colonel Ret. Lyle Alexander, Chairman of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago; Mr. Ezekiel Wacker, Maritime Engineer, the University of Trinidad and Tobago and Mr. Marvin Gonzales, Direct Legal Services, Ministry of Works and Transport. Sorry. So—sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister—

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Sorry. Sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** I know you might be having a challenge because of in the other place you all call people by their names, but here if the Member is a sitting you will have to call them by the constituencies or their portfolio. So maybe I suggest you could say now, member of wherever, you know?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I apologize. What happened I am reading from the Note and this was at the time, so at the time he was—

**Madam Speaker:** So—

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** So, I will correct that.

**Madam Speaker:** —that is why I am suggesting to you saying, now—

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yeah. Okay. So the point I am bringing across, Madam Speaker, is that the Member yesterday misled the House by saying—

**Madam Speaker:** It is out of order to accuse a Member of misleading House unless it is a substantive Motion. So you will have to find a way to say about the inaccuracy that you want to point out.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Thank you again, Madam Speaker. What I will say is, the Member yesterday said an untruth, that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was the chairman of the negotiating team. That is not true.

Madam Speaker, the Minister went on—sorry. The Member for Oropouche East went on to speak about the collapse of the Mosquito Creek and waved a document that he had in his possession. Madam Speaker, the Member was correct when he said, he asked me for that document several times, but I am a responsible Minister and I knew if he got that document what he was going to do with that document, and so said, so done.

Madam Speaker, I want to go back to what happened in this country with LifeSport. Remember LifeSport, when somebody came to the Parliament and waved a document and everything, and spoke about the content of that document? What eventually happened with that? People who should be behind bars today are roaming free. People lost their lives in this country, money was lost and because of irresponsibility, nothing came out that so far.

Madam Speaker, look what happened on that same highway with the OAS report. Remember that OAS debacle on that highway when on the eve of an election somebody tried to protect OAS on the eve of an election and took a clause out from the contract, when that contract should have been terminated when OAS went into bankruptcy, somebody went in and took

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clause out the contract that allowed the Government to claim the bond.

Thank God we have good lawyers on this side.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Again, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries had to championed that cause and we went back to the court and we able to get \$1 billion. We got \$1 billion from OAS because we were responsible. They took out a clause on the day before the election.

Madam Speaker, what I saw happened yesterday is that, again, another attempt to stymie this Government from recovering any money from anybody who was at fault for what happened on the creek, because the Member would have seen in that document that he had that there is a recommendation by NIDCO that we should go after whoever fault it was. It was a design-build contract and the record shows it was a design failure. On record we had an original designer and we have another designer now. They have indemnity insurance, professional insurance, and if they do something that leaves them at fault, then the client, which is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, can go after them for that. But what the Minister did yesterday is that he came in the Parliament and declared that it is the Government's fault. The Government tell them "doh do this and take out dat" to cut the cost, giving whoever we have to go after ammunition to fight us in the court. That to me is not someone who cares about Trinidad and Tobago and the future of Trinidad and Tobago.

So today, I condemn that action. It is irresponsible and Trinidad and Tobago must take note of who has their interest at heart, because if there is a clause that says that you have indemnity insurance and you are at fault, I

have the option to claim that. So whatever money has to be spent on the creek, somebody has to be responsible for it at the end of the day. And if we have to go to court to get it, just like we did to go and get the \$1 billion, which they tried to prevent us from doing, we will go. Do not kill our chances here in the Parliament of doing that.

Madam Speaker, I can spend a lot of time talking about some of the nonsense that I heard. However, I must now report on what the Ministry of Works and Transport has done. Because I would have time in the other place to continue, but I would want to give level of reporting as to what the Ministry was able to achieve, not over the last year, not over the last five years, but maybe over the last nine years.

Madam Speaker, we would have, as I said, come into office in 2015 and made several promises in terms of the mega projects and some of the projects in the urban and rural areas. If I am to report on some of the mega projects that we had promised between 2015 and 2020, I can say simply say, we promised the San Fernando to Point Fortin highway, to complete that. That has been done and delivered—signed, sealed and delivered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The construction of the Wallerfield highway to Sangre Grande and a ring road around Sangre Grande. Madam Speaker, that is in progress and we are hoping to have that completed by February of 2025.

**5.00 p.m.**

Removal of all traffic lights and constructing overpasses and interchanges from Port of Spain to Sangre Grande. We have been able to deliver on the Curepe interchange, the Diego Martin interchange, and very

soon we will be starting the Macoya interchange. But of course, we are a very responsible Government and we must take into consideration the revenues of this country, but plans are already on the way to have the construction of the Macoya interchange started.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, implementation of a comprehensive drainage plan. I told this House on several occasions that the Ministry was working on a national drainage plan. Since 2018 we started that plan. We have been working with the foreign consultants, the Andean Development Bank, and several professional individuals to come up with a national drainage plan for Trinidad and Tobago. That plan has been completed and we can say now in Trinidad and Tobago we have a national drainage plan that could take us for the next 10 years, on a phased basis to address most of the areas that we have challenges with flooding.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Implementing a comprehensive programme for the construction and maintenance of all roads and bridges throughout Trinidad and Tobago. That plan has also been completed. So we can now say we have a plan to do our road restoration, bridges and so. Later on I will report on how much of that have already been implemented.

The development of the national transportation plan: The last national transportation plan in this country was 1967. So, we have been working with a 1967 plan, up to recently, 1967. Think how cars we had on the road. Madam Speaker, that plan is almost completed. It took us about four years to have it completed. Again international and local consultants are working

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on it. That plan will be presented shortly to the Cabinet. That plan is completed, so we now in Trinidad can say we have a national transportation plan and not the 1967 plan.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, a promise we made to the people of Tobago, and Trinidad, was to have an effective air and sea transport between the both islands. We have done that. “When last you hear people complaining about ferry to go Tobago, the ferry breakdown, the ferry breakdown, or cargo can’t go to Tobago?” Right now, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, we have five vessels working.

**Hon. Member:** That is right.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Five. Never happened before.

**Hon. Member:** “They say it collapse.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** And they say it collapse. Five vessels working, no shortage of seats. Our vessels—only last night I spoke to the port head that Tobago Carnival is coming up. I said double up the vessels, as they come offload, load and go back. He said, “Minister we could do that. Once we see the crowd, we will do that.”

Madam Speaker, the construction of a new first-class road to Toco, thus providing a faster alternate sea-root to and from Tobago, from east Trinidad opening up the entire coastline region. In other words, the Government promised to upgrade the roadway all the way to Toco. We have completed phase 1. You pass on the Valencia Bypass road, completed. We are now on two packages on the way to Toco, soon to be awarded. The road work is going on. All the statutory requirements for the port are being

finalized, EMA is almost ready, the Government. That promise is in progress and the Government will deliver on that despite what the people on the other side say. I can tell you that the road work up to Toco Main Road have been completed and other phases are now about to start.

Construction of a new first-class road to Moruga and a modern fishing port. Madam Speaker, again, the roadway is going full speed ahead. Whatever the Member for Moruga /Tableland may say, we have done over 70 landslips on that main road; 70.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** The first phase of the port is completed. I am just waiting for an opening date which I should get maybe next week or so, because I know we are all here involved in the budget. I will invite the Member for Moruga/Tableland to come. I heard the Member in her speech saying “if she doh get invited she coming to protest”. You do not have to protest. I have a seat in front waiting for you.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** I am hoping to have that port open within the next two weeks. The port is complete. The land side is complete. Now we have to do the seaside. Moruga will have a port like no other, a fishing port like no other in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** First phase complete, delivered. Madam Speaker, this Government and Ministry of Works and Transport have delivered over 6,000 projects in the last nine years, over 6,000 projects. I do not know any Minister of Works and Transport who could stand in the



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Parliament and say during his tenure over 6,000 projects was delivered. And, if the Members want copies of that I can make that available to them. Especially, none of the Ministers—under no inflated price, projects, 6,000 projects.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Under the UNC, 2010/2015—

**Mr. Imbert:** High quality.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—there were nine Ministers of Works and Transport; nine. Not one of them could stand up and say they did say 100 projects. There were nine Ministers of Works and Transport between 2010 and 2015, nine.

**Mr. Young SC:** Nine?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Nine.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Right. None of them could stand up and talk about projects being done and the projects were done around Trinidad. My colleagues sometime heckle me sometimes and say I am doing too much work in the UNC constituencies. You all hear that. "You all see the kind of licks I does get in Standing Finance Committee, alright, but that is who I am."

**Mr. Paray:** Appreciated.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Right and thanks for appreciating the work. We had the build out of the major highway network, upgrade of rehabilitation to main and secondary roads, flood mitigations and coastal protection work, landslip and bridge repair, development of the civil aviation

sector, development of our ports, and strengthening our digital connectivity. We also undertake numerous projects in the areas of infrastructure, including road rehabilitation, drainage slopes, stabilization, and bridge reconstruction.

Madam Speaker one of the projects that I am very proud of in the Ministry of Works and Transport, we have deployed clean and green initiatives such as the launch of the solar park at the Piarco International Airport. Madam Speaker, that solar park generates 700,067 kilowatt-hours annually.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister you have two more minutes of your original speaking time left. You are entitled to 10 additional minutes to wind-up your contribution. You are availing yourself of it?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Yeah?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yes, Madam Speaker. That solar park effectively offsets up to 500 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year. Now, in terms of these solar parks that may sound small, but what the airport was able to do under Ministry of Works and Transport is to establish the first commercial solar park in Trinidad and Tobago. And I am very proud of that. The Piarco Airport is one of the few airports in the Caribbean to established a park like that, and they have made arrangements to have that expanded.

We have invested heavy on bolstering in Trinidad and Tobago position as the regional logistical hub. The Ministry have invited suitable qualified competent companies to participate in the port privatization. Right now, as we speak the port is negotiating—they are doing the evaluation of

the EOI for that PPP that the Cabinet had approved the port to go out. We have some serious interest and we are hoping that coming out of that we will be able to get an international partner to partner with us in the Port of Port of Spain, to continue to develop the Port of Port of Spain. The EOI did give us the impression that there were a lot of people who are interested in investing in Trinidad and Tobago and that continues.

In terms of our airport, Madam Speaker, we have continued to upgrade our airport terminals and we are activity working on expanding opportunities and improving airlift. In November 2023/'24 Trinidad and Tobago signed an agreement with the Kingdom of the Netherlands Antilles focusing on Curaçao, strengthening our ties with the region. In May '23/2024 we expanded the horizon with the signing of an air service agreement with the State Qatar, establishing a vital link to the Middle East through Doha. Most recently, on September 27<sup>th</sup> 2024, we entered into an agreement with United Arab Emirates, paving the way for increase connectivity with the thriving hub in Dubai.

### **5.10 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, we have been executing these air services agreements around the world. In September 2024, we reached an agreement with the Federal Republic of Nigeria and very soon we will be signing on that. Regarding Ghana, another important road hub in Africa, we have made substantial headways in signing an agreement with them. We are in active discussions with 15 other states and hopefully we should be signing agreements with these 15 states within the next year or so: South Africa, China, Colombia, Chile, Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru, Brazil, Saudi

Arabia, Germany, the Netherlands, Rwanda, Singapore, Kuwait and France

Madam Speaker, we are serious about the aviation business and that is why the Government has invested in the airport in Tobago, because Tobago now is a designation that has been added to air services agreements where it is an international airport that they are looking at there. So, the Government is serious about the aviation business and that is why we would have made significant improvement not only in the airport facilities but also in the aero park. Trinidad and Tobago will have the first aero park in the Caribbean. State-of-the-art aero park in the Caribbean. After 20 years, finally we are getting tenants now to be placed in that park.

Madam Speaker, I want to just turn to our projects in terms of our infrastructure and our Road Rehabilitation Programme. We have looked at that in three ways. One is the build out of the highway network, because we have to continue to build out the highway network, because the aim is to have the entire country connected, all major towns and cities connected. It should not take us more than one hour to get from point A to point B, just like how you could reach now from San Fernando to Point Fortin in less than 20 minutes. That programme continues and that is why we can talk about the Manzanilla to Mayaro Road upgrade. We can speak about the Wallerfield to Sangre Grande, and that network continues.

We also spoke about the upgrade of the existing road network, because it is not only about spending money on the highways. So we have an upgrade of the primary and secondary road network, and since 2022, the Prime Minister had promised this country after the COVID, that a significant amount of resources would have gone into those roads. And I can stand here

proud and say that we have road paving going on in this country every single day in all constituencies. Major roads are paved at nights and the roads with lesser traffic are paved during the day. Every single day in every single constituency.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** And the aim of that programme is to ensure that every road that needs rehabilitating in Trinidad and Tobago is rehabilitated, but it must be done on a phased basis. A phased basis. I saw the Member for Moruga/Tableland shaking her head. Most of our budget within the last four years went into Moruga. Most of our budget, over 70 landslips, the problem in some areas is that there is a constant movement of soil and there is nothing we can do about that. Right?

So, we are looking at all areas in Trinidad and our road programme, and one thing, I am happy that we are not hearing in Trinidad now, is that they are only paving for elections because everybody saw us paving since 2022. Budget is going on now but road paving is going on outside. You do not have to wait until the budget is read and the budget passed, because we have planned our work that our Road Paving Programme will continue in this country until we address all the roads that need addressing. We also have a programme call the Traffic Alleviation Programme. And if you look at Arima, you look at some of these areas where we are opening up some of the intersections, so we have a Traffic Alleviation Programme ongoing, and there are several projects under that.

As I said before the Curepe interchange, that was a project to ease traffic, the next one is the Macoya interchange. So while we continue the

major projects that we were able to deliver we have projects coming on, and these projects will be done on a phase basis based on the availability of funding from the Minister of Finance. I am in consultation with the Minister and he said that this year I will smile, so I am really hoping that we will get a lot of these projects coming to completion before the next financial year.

Madam Speaker, we have basically under the PURE programme and the Highways Programme, that is where most of the road work is done, and as I said last year, the Highways Division was able to do close to 200 projects, this is changing culverts and things like that, road rehabilitation, slope stabilisation. So between the PURE unit and the highways unit they are out every day working on roads. So if it is that the road next to you, the road you are living on is not up to the standard, just hold a little strain, we are coming. And I am sure you will see on your way home, you will see road paving going on, because all cannot be done at the same time. The Government is going to address every single road in Trinidad on a phased basis, because that programme will not stop. It is continuing. You will see road paving going on now, you will see it next month, and this has started since January 2022 in this country.

Madam Speaker, I know time is running out and I cannot go into the projects, but I just want to touch on a few of them.

In terms of our bridges programme, over the last nine years—and I am again proud of this—we did over 70 bridges in this country. Madam Speaker, 70, they are at different stages, 70. Never before had that been attempted. Never before. And I listened yesterday to, I think it was the Member for Caroni Central, and I am sure Couva North may come with that,

some bridge collapsed. “This Government doh build bridge that does collapse”. That is a figment of their imagination. There was a bridge in Chaguanas that collapsed, PNM did not build that. That was built since the NAR days. On an emergency basis I instructed the Ministry to get that bridge back up immediately while we do designs and go out for a tender. Through miracles the Ministry was able to get the bridge up in about eight days. Eight days.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** I say—anyway let me not say what I saw, there are pictures to show. That was a bridge that collapsed, a temporary bridge. We got it back up. Obviously, we have to restrict the load, so we put a bar on top. Because while we were there big cement trucks were passing on the bridge. The bridge was never designed for that, so we put a bar and that controls the weight. Because the higher the truck in most cases is the weight. People started to abide, but one night somebody passed with a big truck and hit the bar, the bar came down, I am hearing the bridge collapsed. The bridge never collapsed. The bar, and the bar is there for a purpose.

There was another bridge in the Member for Chaguanas East’s constituency, we went on the bridge, the Member for Chaguanas East was on my case for about a year for that bridge. So, we went to open the bridge. The mistake I made was to invite the Member for Chaguanas East and the Member for Chaguanas West. That sent the UNC in a tantrum. They both—every day. So, the problem there is that we opened the bridge, the bridge was completed but the ancillary roads were not completed, they make a—oh, the bridge collapsed. Madam Speaker, I wish I could get about three

hours to go through projects, but before I close, I have to thank my staff at the Ministry of Works and Transport.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** I have to thank my Permanent Secretary, and I have to thank all the people of Trinidad and Tobago who have had patience with us and are now seeing the fruits of their patience. Madam Speaker, I thank you again for this opportunity, and to the three teams in the Parliament I want to say, let us all be patriotic to this country, let us not do like what the Member for Oropouche East did and deprive—

**Hon. Member:** Four teams.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Oh, they have four teams—and deprive this country of any opportunity to get back any funding that is due to this country due to error of anybody working for this country. I was very disappointed when I saw what happened yesterday where—

[*Madam Speaker stands*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Oh, sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin Central.

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

**5.20 p.m.**

**The Minister in the Office of the Prime Ministe-Communications (Hon. Symon de Nobriga):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, usually I would be following an Opposition speaker—

**Hon. Members:** “Co-llapsed”.

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:**—but clearly—

**Hon. Member:** They quit. They gave up.



**Hon. S. de Nobriga:**—the Government has grinded—has grounded the Opposition into the dust and they have collapsed in this budget debate—

**Hon. Members:** “Co-llapsed”.

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:**—sorry, “co-llapsed” in this debate. Madam Speaker, I am happy to stand on behalf of the constituents of Diego Martin Central in what I believe is now my fifth budget debate.

Madam Speaker, before I begin let me just take the opportunity to thank those constituents for their continued support for me as their representative, and for the continued trust that they put in me to be here on their behalf. Madam Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity to thank my PS, my DPS, and all the hard-working staff at the Office of the Prime Minister- Communications, as well as my office staff at the MP’s office in Diego Martin Central.

Madam Speaker, let me join the long list of persons who have stood here and congratulated and thanked the Minister of Finance and his team, along with the Minister of Planning and Development and her team for their collaboration—

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** It will come, it is coming—for the collaboration which resulted in the budget for the fiscal year 2025, which was presented last Monday, and to share as well, in the Minister’s optimism, that we have done remarkably well in extremely trying times. Madam Speaker, you see, the exercise of acknowledging the reality of the environment that we are facing regarding our revenue, managing state expenditure in that environment, while continuing the support mechanism the State provides across all strata

of society is no easy task. But the truth is, we should not be surprised.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance has presented 10 budgets in the last nine years. Taking us in October 2015, from the parting gifts that the Opposition left us after their five years of mismanagement and outright looting, acknowledging a stagnant economy and a weakened energy sector, massive shortfalls in the billions in revenue collection, and the Central Bank overdraft, a whisker away from its legal limit, the Minister of Finance negotiated that time, through plummeting energy prices, costing us tens of billions of dollars of non-realized revenue, billions in back pay payments to be paid on top of that, and slow global economic recovery. And that by itself, quite frankly, would have been a magnificent achievement.

By 2020, we had seen the strategies implemented and the management of the economy through those difficult times taking root. Revenues had increased, inflation was down to 1 per cent, expenditure was reduced and being managed effectively, and the truth is, Madam Speaker, that going through that time, one would have thought we had seen the worst of it and it was all behind us. But 2020 to 2022, the pandemic hit and the Ministry of Finance was tasked with managing, yet again, not only the obvious and dramatic impact of the pandemic on our revenues, but also with the expenditure decisions to be taken to protect lives and livelihoods. And all of these life and deaths decision were being taken against the backdrop of an Opposition being obstructionist in Parliament, working to undermine the vaccination efforts of the Government, the Ministry of Health, by bringing law suits, which they lost outside of the Parliament, and engaging in a protracted, prolonged and purposeful disinformation campaign, which they

continue to this day, with the Opposition Leader and others and their fake vaccine claims.

Madam Speaker, by 2023, after navigating through the pandemic, skyrocketing global shipping costs and global food prices, and a volatile energy sector, the Minister of Finance has continued the hard work of finding ways to manage the economic recovery, reduce our public debt, maintain our social security net, find ways to support the business sector and lift the standard of living for all, especially those that can be counted amongst our poor and vulnerable in society.

Madam Speak, I want to tell you that the Minister of Finance, not only the longest serving Minister of Finance, clearly the best Minister of Finance, could only be a PNM Minister of Finance, has done yeoman service—and Madam Speaker, I go through this simply because it requires context at all times. It requires for us to have a clear understanding, not only as a Parliament, but as a nation, as to what we have seen over the last nine years, the path that this Government has had to navigate for this country, including those represented by the Opposition, maintaining a level of the status quo, protecting lives and livelihoods, and being able to build a future for all citizens in this country.

And, Madam Speaker, it is important that we understand where we are now because through the hard work and efforts of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, running all over the globe, trying to extract the best in all deals when it comes to our energy products for this country, we now know that there is a timeline that we can measure. We are seeing 2027 as a milestone for this country, and what the Minister has been doing, continuing

government fiscal policy, is creating a path for us to follow between now and then.

Madam Speaker, if there is one thing that I took from this year's budget debate is the marked difference, now that we have five Members of the Opposition who have gotten rid of the shackles of the Opposition they were a part of before, and are now speaking in a way that shows the national population what can happen when you have a responsible Opposition, what can happen when we disagree on policy—we may not agree on the use of funds or how—the timelines for certain things, but not obstructionist, coming here to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem. Madam Speaker, I hope the national population understands now what has been happening in this Parliament and impacting them in their daily lives for the last four years. And I want to thank the Members for Tabaquite, Mayaro, Chaguanas West, Naparima and Cumuto/Manzanilla for being a voice for the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, even on the night of the budget, imagine the UNC voices in the public domain, the night of—on the panels were predominantly those five; were predominantly those five. And the marked difference between the contributions on those panels of the Members for Tabaquite and Mayaro, as opposed to the Member for Oropouche West, was stark, it was glaring, it was there for all to see.

Madam Speaker, I am looking forward to the coming months, because maybe we may see some productivity out of the Opposition, now that there is a Jiminy Cricket, so to speak, sitting on the shoulder of the Member for Siparia, or maybe five Jiminy Crickets being a conscience, if you will, for

those opposite.

**5.30 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, before I start, there are a few things I would like to address. I talked about the nature of the conversation that we have been having over the past few days and the stark difference, almost a line, not just the walkway that separates—well, five plus their schoolmaster and the others, but the quality of their contributions.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva South came here and as part of his contribution, which quite frankly really boiled down—forgetting the amount of time he spoke for—to maybe about seven minutes of a real contribution. Besides that, it was all bluster and bramble, loud speaking and I suppose the other words are non-parliamentary so I will not use them. Madam Speaker, the Member came here speaking about the Minister of Finance's offer minimum wage increase, accused us in this Government of buying votes, populist actions, delivering an election budget, going so far as to say we are undermining the rule of law.

Madam Speaker, it is unbelievable that instead of adding value, instead of understanding that his very constituents, the same people that they—I do not know if they take it out their pockets, if they have a fund for it—paid to come here protest out front, left here \$2 an hour richer than they came here—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, 48(6), no Member paid anybody to assemble outside.

**Mr. Young SC:** That is not true.

**Hon. Members:** That is not true.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, 48(6).

**Madam Speaker:** Alright, so I ruled, please proceed. Please proceed Member for Diego Martin Central.

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Thank you Madam Speaker. The Member continues talking about we are against unions and we want to undermine trade union movement. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was a proud advocate for trade unions in his past iteration. Madam Speaker, there is a *Guardian* article that I would like to quote from:

“UNC ignored us since 2010 over use of Rienzi, says union.”

Written by Geisha Kowlessar. And the article says:

“Since 2010 the All Trinidad General Workers’ Trade Union...was trying to negotiate with the UNC over rent issues of the Rienzi Complex...the party had ignored the union over the years.

So said the union’s president, Nirvan Maharaj, to members of the media during a protest at the Ministry of Agriculture, St Clair, yesterday.”

It goes on to state:

““The party so far has failed to so do.””

That is of course, to speak with them:

““In fact the party has treated the union with utter disdain and contempt and has never once sat down or...”—received—  
 ““...correspondence the union would have sent them concerning a lease arrangement.””

Madam Speaker, it is very interesting that I saw yesterday, a press conference by one of the trade unions in this country and half the press

conference was spent by them talking about their conversations, discussions with the UNC and speaking about all the things that UNC was going to do. I want to tell them, if you cannot learn lessons from your past, you are doomed to repeat them, right. We have all seen what has happened with the UNC and their courting of unions, their courting of—my God—basically anybody. It all falls apart. There is nothing that comes of doing business with this organization but destruction and chaos.

Madam Speaker, over the last five budget presentations, I have waited for the Opposition Leader and her team—and of course, when I say her team I will no longer speak about the Independent Bench. I am speaking about the eastern wing here—to come with rebuttals, positions that are worthy of their office. Yet again, the Member for Siparia has come and been subpar. Madam Speaker, I keep hoping, I keep hoping that she will come and be reminiscent—the Member for Siparia will come and be reminiscent of her predecessors in the Chair.

Reminiscent of Basdeo Panday, whom she ejected from the party after she said that he was too old to win an election. Reminiscent of Mr. Manning whom she replaced as Prime Minister. Reminiscent of the Member for Diego Martin West whom she replaced—who replaced her, sorry and to whom she herself has suffered and will continue to suffer enumerable election defeats. Madam Speaker, for yet another year my hopes have been dashed in this place, and I am an optimistic fella, I try to see the best and I hope for the best—dashed in this place. However, I suppose I may be a sucker for punishment. God willing I will be here to watch the Opposition Leader, the Member for Siparia grow into her role over the next five years

and maybe by 2030, she will be in a position to give a rebuttal worthy of her office.

Madam Speaker, the Members opposite are full of ifs and buts, full of ifs and buts. If we would do this and maybe we could try here. Madam Speaker, not one iota of evidence is being put forward as to how the issues that they are raising here could be changed. Not one iota of evidence as to how they could fund—where they will find the money for their suggestions. Everybody wants a bigger piece of the pie. Everybody wants to see a bigger pie, but there is a reality to where we are.

As I said at the start, Madam Speaker, we must have context for the struggle, the yeoman service that has been done by the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Prime Minister to navigate—I cannot even say choppy waters—the storm that we have faced over the last nine years but we are seeing the lighthouse. We are seeing where there is a light at the end of the tunnel and we are creating a road map to get there.

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

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Madam Speaker, but I suppose you see, the contributions are indicative of the lack of an argument against the budget because there is no one here who has come and put forward any argument—even those Members who disagreed from the Independent Bench. Disagreed on policy, disagreed to say well, we would like to see these things being done, but we understand the value of what you are doing. We understand the challenges that you are facing and we accept that part of it.

So what do they do? They chart out the same time-worn arguments,



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none able to disapprove or to truthfully challenge the accolades being poured on the hon. Minister of Finance for his presentation. Here is the problem for them Madam Speaker. It is not just us. In their focus on Trinidad and Tobago's budget 2025 document, auditing firm of Ernst & Young said:

“...property”—tax which has been—“(set at the reduced rate of 2% on Annual Taxable Value) is a component of gradual fiscal reform. Compared to regional and international standards, our resistance to such a tax is arguably a storm in a teacup.”

**5.40 p.m.**

It went on further to say that, noting that:

“...the Privy Council sanctioned the implementation of the...(TTRA) aligns with international best practices, and although not a panacea, has the potential to enhance taxpayer experience while increasing collections. By streamlining processes and creating a more efficient tax, it can foster a cooperative relationship between the Government and its citizens”—well minus the ones who sit there clearly—“one built on transparency, fairness and mutual benefit.”

Madam Speaker, as I said these are not my words, these are not the words of the Members sitting on this Bench. These are studied conclusions of an internationally reputable firm that has cast their glance at the actions of this Government as we seek to progress the country's development.

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

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** But, Madam Speaker, what do we get from those opposite? Nothing of this nature and the issue, as I said, is not that you cannot disagree, but you come here with the most vile arguments casting

aspersions as you always do,” bussing mark that is not ah mark”, just rinse and repeat, rinse and repeat, rinse and repeat. The five that have left you and are standing there still on your side, in many ways, that is the best of you that has gone and now we are left to have to contend with the rest.

Madam Speaker, the position, as I said, put forward by Ernst & Young, that is an outlier. Business chambers, the average man on the street, small business owners, all are saying that there is something in this budget for them. My constituents are saying it to me. It must be worrisome to those opposite because as increasing numbers of a population get fed up with this sea of negativity that the Opposition constantly pours into, it seems more disingenuous, their claims, and the more ridiculous their propositions become.

They are at the point now that, left with no other legitimate response to the irrefutable facts of the economy and the Government’s performance, gain, as I said, they resort to these tried and tested, however, easily disproved formula of misinformation and fake news and manufactured outrage and selective memory. Blatant prevarication from them on that side and unashamed intellectual dishonesty.

**Mr. Hinds:** Oh, well put.

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

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** But, Madam Speaker, you see, I could understand the dilemma eh, I could understand the dilemma because having baited the population in the lead-up to the election, having gone from pillar to post to tell people what was coming, tell people how they were going to be impacted, tell people what the Minister of Finance was coming to take from

them, tell people all the evils that would happen to them, what happened? What happened? Were there new taxes? No new taxes.

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

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Madam Speaker, did gas go up? Gas did not increase. Did the Minister reduce impact of transfers and subsidies on those most needed by? Nothing like that. Was the dollar devalued? Dollar was not devalued. Has the Minister proven on their lifelong claim that the economy is in freefall? He has not, and he is backed by both local and international powerhouses saying that we are not in free fall.

Madam Speaker, on top of that, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is not in shambles. In fact, it has more money now than when they were rejected and ejected from office in 2015. What else has happened? The same people, as I said, outside protesting, no idea why they are here. The Member for Toco/Sangre Grande regaled us with hearing them looking to see who the paymaster was outside. Minimum wage for CEPEP, URP, MTS. There is one more, Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Reforestation.

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Reforestation workers also increased. Public servants offered a 5 per cent increase over the three-year period 2020—2022. In short, Madam Speaker, nothing they predicted came to past. In short, Madam Speaker, they had nothing to legitimately complain about. I hope the population—I genuinely hope the population sees that those opposite with nothing to legitimately “grouse” about resorted to their age-old tactics, scaremongering, deliberate misinformation and disinformation and of course, Madam Speaker, dog whistling. But we will get to that as well.

Madam Speaker, let me speak a little bit about my portfolio. As the Minister of communications in the Office of the Prime Minister, I have under my purview the Government Communications Division, the Freedom of Information Unit, the National Library and Information Systems (NALIS), TTT Limited, Government Printery and the National Archives Information Division. All dedicated to the gathering, curating and disseminating of true facts, authentic and verified information and the general education of the national community.

All of these agencies, Madam Speaker, combine their efforts to ensure that we have a population that is kept informed and educated. And, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you that those opposite make my day hard every single day. Unfortunately, as I said, a considerable amount of their time and energy has to be redirected to combating the Opposition's daily diet of misinformation or fake news, negativity, victimhood. So much so, Madam Speaker, that I am certain that if they were to see our Prime Minister walking on water, they will start to complain about how much he splashed on them.

Madam Speaker, you know I started off four years ago thinking that they saw that they were seeing shadows and conspiracies in every corner. That is not what it is, Madam Speaker. "They don't, yuh know ." They know fully well what the reality is, but, you see, if they can get everybody else to believe in their shadows, if they can get everybody else to believe in their conspiracies, what you end up having is a population that does not trust anything. A population that has no regard for words and facts coming from places, people of authority. A population that feels separated and

disconnected from their Government. Madam Speaker, what you have is chaos. The problem with that is that I do not know if they realize that chaos cannot be managed and that would come back to bite them.

Madam Speaker, every single action, every single statement that is made or taken by this Government, the Opposition ties and turns it; turns it around to try to build arguments for corruption, for nepotism, for mismanagement. However, the fact is that we inherited in 2015 the most dysfunctional economy and it was only through prudent management and quite frankly, a Minister of Finance who understood what his job was and was not here to make friends, that we got through those dark days. But the problem is if you only know one way to be, you could only see things through that lens.

**5.50 p.m.**

So everything that they see is tainted by corruption. Everything that they see is tainted by nepotism. Everything that they see is tainted by backroom deals. Madam Speaker, I could spend—moving on from them—my entire contribution today regaling you and the national community about the extensive work being done by NALIS and the very many successes over the last five years. I could tell the national community that NALIS continues to be a beacon of light in the darkness of misinformation and fake news spewed daily by the Opposition.

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

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** I could tell the national public that NALIS continues to successfully manage 25 public libraries, all the libraries in the secondary schools, 48 special libraries, like those right here in the Parliament, the

Judiciary, the Industrial Court, and even at some Ministries. In addition to that, the four institutional libraries at the women's prison, the maximum security prison, the Youth Training and Rehabilitation Centre, and the St. Jude's School for Girls, and a growing number of primary schools.

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

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Madam Speaker, I could tell you and the national public that we have successfully opened the Diego Martin Public Library, and before this calendar year is finished, we are set to open the La Horquetta Public Library and the Mayaro Public Library, as well as, continue the preliminary works for the Toco Library, and the continuation of the Chaguanas Library.

Madam Speaker, I could speak to you all about the important work being done by their co-located libraries, and the amount of work that is being done by NALIS in its library refurbishment works across the entire the network, ensuring that these spaces, these safe spaces, these places where young and old alike can come to find refuge from a very, very loud and intimidating world, can access Government services and access the services and training services of NALIS through their own programmes to ensure that all of these places are being refurbished and brought up to the highest standards, ensuring that the customer experience for NALIS, for those persons coming to the public libraries, is of the best it can be.

Madam Speaker, I could tell you that NALIS has won several regional and international awards for its work in managing the country's library and information service. I could you tell that NALIS has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the national libraries of Cuba, China, and several other

Latin American countries. I could tell you that the Government, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are now the proud owners of the magnificent flagship national library building, located just a few doors down, having earlier this year successfully completed all the payments under the old arrangement entered into with the Republic Bank subsidiary, London Street Project Company Limited, some 20 years ago.

That magnificent structure, Madam Speaker, purpose designed by an architect, Colin Laird, now adds to the lustre of our capital city, and it is ours. Madam Speaker, these accomplishments by NALIS will amount to nothing in the eyes of the Opposition Leader and her team because the problem is that they represent an impediment. They represent an obstacle against their negativity and misinformation.

Madam Speaker, let us speak a little bit about TTT. TTT continues to fulfil its mandate to be a creator of, a platform for, and a supporter of local content, to be a source of timely information and accurate news, and to be a place where our citizens, young and old, can see excellence that looks and sounds like them. It is because of that final mandate, Madam Speaker, that TTT took the conscious and patriotic decision to acquire the local television broadcasting rights for the recently concluded Paris Olympics. Notwithstanding the presence of our local athletes and our regional athletes competing at that international level at those games, no other media house was willing to go out on that limb to ensure that our athletes' performances were seen in real time.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, TTT Limited has signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Council of Indian Culture, the NCIC, to be

the official broadcast partner of the celebrations at the Divali Nagar. I wonder, if by the same metric, that the Member for Couva South would judge Members of the Parliament going to festivals, sometimes in their constituency, and sometimes attending as a Minister of Government, would he also say that TTT has no right to enter into an agreement like this? By that metric, Madam Speaker, I suspect that he would.

Madam Speaker, TTT has also signed with the Tobago Festivals Commission to be the official broadcast partner for the 2024 Tobago Carnival and with the NCC to provide similarly services for Carnival 2025. It is that mandate, as I have said before, Madam Speaker, that led TTT to continuously improve its news programme, its morning show, and its newsmagazines, very much like our *Delving Deeper*. And the return of TTT to its, what I would like to say, its premier place in the local media landscape was also telegraphed recently when it captured four media awards at the recently concluded Caribbean Broadcasting Union recognition ceremony in Belize City.

Madam Speaker, just to give you an idea of what TTT won. TTT won the award for the best entertainment programme for our radio, Talk City 91.1 *Saturday Brunch*. It won the production award, TV, for the best documentary programme for the best village story. It was awarded with the advertising award, the Minister of Health will be happy to hear this, advertising award for the best public service spot, Ministry of Health, Men's Health Awareness. Special mention award, the production award, digital, for the best news story, for a segment called, "See Yourself," that is done



from the newsroom. And a production award, digital, for the best entertainment item, for the *Mash Up: The Music That Made Us* - Rapso.

Madam Speaker, improvements, engagements and endorsements such as these underscore in no small way the need for and relevance of a national television station, and simultaneously negates the arguments of some naysayers who argue that TTT's value must be tied to a financial bottom line. TTT has been, and is still indeed the home of media. As more and more persons realize the biasness and anti-government reporting engaged in on other platforms, very often led by those opposite or their proxies. It is my hope, that they will join the flood of journalists who now want to be a part of TTT Limited, and citizens who are making the switch to come back home.

Madam Speaker, for the sake of our naysayers, when I talk about anti-government, negativity, and these things on other platforms, I want to be clear, I am not saying that there is any expectation or desire, or even the ask for any media house or platform to engage in propaganda on behalf of the Government. Quite frankly, the Government does not need propagandists. What the Government asked for, and I think rightly so, for all citizens, is for fair, objective, balanced and accurate reporting. And it is certainly not about making us look good. Madam Speaker, I am quite sure that if we stick to the facts, and we deal with what is true, I would back my side.

Madam Speaker, this annual budget presentation, allowed us to see again in the public space the same talking heads being used to comment on every issue under the sun. Even those who have mounted political platforms against the Government, on behalf of those opposite, being called upon to

give, allegedly, unbiased opinions. And this is not about muzzling the press in any way, eh. This is not about restricting journalists' freedom to report on anything because the evidence, Madam Speaker, of this Government's interface with the media is clear.

**6.00 p.m.**

The World Press Freedom Index for 2024 ranked Trinidad and Tobago at number 25 out of 180 countries in the world. This, Madam Speaker, is a remarkable jump from our 2016 ranking of 44<sup>th</sup> in the world, illustrating, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we have one of the most liberal fourth estates amongst the countries in the world. And, Madam Speaker, against the backdrop of that is this constant narrative from those opposite that, one, the Government is always harassing the media, and two, out of the other side of their mouth, that the Government has bought the media for some reason, although I cannot pick up a paper in this country and find evidence to support that this Government could have bought any single media house in this country.

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

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Madam Speaker, it is the objective international reality, not the contrived perception of our friends opposite. Every time the Opposition speaks, they make a more compelling case for the retention of a state media service and government communications division, if only to counteract the non-stop negativity and misinformation that flow so easily from their lips and so easily from the tips of their pens.

Madam Speaker, the unfortunate result is that many otherwise educated persons fall into this trap of disbelief and mistrust in Government,

doubting the country's ability and capacity for greatness, in short, doubting their own capacity for growth and development. You see, Madam Speaker, it is a well-known psychological principle, eh, that if you feed someone a diet of negativity and bad news of their inability to perform well, of their unattractiveness and things like that, they will eventually come to believe these things, unless there is a strong enough counteraction that tells them the opposite.

The Opposition Leader and her merry band have so fallen in love with this warped notion of Trinidad and Tobago, and it not being a real place, of our country falling apart at the seams, of nothing good coming out of this beautiful place, that nothing of worth or substance comes from their lips, Madam Speaker, not here, not on a Sunday, not on a Monday, not on a Thursday, not when they are in their MP offices, not when they are anywhere else—nothing; a steady diet of negativity, so rancid at times, Madam Speaker, it would make you gag. They have led their supporters to believe that we are heading swiftly to perdition, using the strategy of the lie told repeatedly, becoming revered as the truth. But you see—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes of ordinary speaking time available to you. You are entitled to 10 more extended minutes, if you wish to avail yourself.

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** I will, Madam Speaker. Sorry, and my apologies for not sitting as you stood. It has been a long few days, Madam Speaker. They have come here, so in love with this image that they have created of the country and of themselves, that they come and there is a problem with every solution. They do not miss an opportunity, Madam Speaker, to play the

victim card for their supporters, whether those are outside, in the gallery, listening on television, pulling the clips that they will—because what they do is, for all the nonsense sometimes that is spoken, they will just pull 60 seconds and all of a sudden and on all of their platforms, this is being put out, not based on any logic, not based on any reality but further stoking the fires for their supporters.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Madam Speaker, I want to tell you that that is one of the worst parts of my job, that I actually have to reduce myself to look at some of the bile that is put forward by Members opposite as a responsible Opposition, totally undermining not just this Government, eh, but the psyche of this country.

Madam Speaker, throughout this debate, I heard Members opposite going back to their normal tried and tested bag of tricks, right, and the go-to one is this geographic discrimination. Every single Minister that came and spoke here about what they were doing at their Ministry, the next person was standing up to say, “Well, that doh happen by us and it does only happen in these places.” But the problem is, is that they know that the general population does not listen or watch what is happening in this House every Friday that we are here.

So they know they could play the odds that those persons are not listening at the time when the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the Minister of Works and Transport, the Minister of Youth Development and National Service, the Minister of Public Utilities stands up, having been questioned. And the question is only, Madam Speaker, for

the benefit of news and for the benefit of social media, you know. It is never about the answer, proving time and time again that this accusation of discrimination is completely baseless, that money is spent on works are done across this country, both islands.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you, I sit as a PNM MP and sometimes I want to go to the Member for San Fernando West—I caught myself, Madam Speaker—to say, “Oh gosh, well, pull ah little bit from there and send by me, nah, I have these projects.” But I would not do that because I also know that the Member would not entertain that, because that this is not what this Government is. This Government is not a PNM Government for PNM supporters, it is a Government for all Trinidadians, all Tobagonians.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch briefly—I am so sorry. I had so much that I wanted to speak about. Let me speak a little bit about my constituency, Madam Speaker. If I did not have to spend so much time dealing with—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Ignore him.

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:**—the Member for Couva South—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** But you are right, I will not be distracted any further. Madam Speaker, as I started, I will end, by giving my commitment to the constituents of Diego Martin Central, of my continued love and support in being, and having the honour of being their representative, looking forward every day to being able to provide solutions to them. And in that vein, there are a few things that I want to point out and give my thanks to a few of my colleagues here.

First and foremost, Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities. The Minister has assisted immensely, particularly in the last year as we looked at the infrastructure—well, the infrastructure, particularly when it comes to WASA and its impact, not only on the delivery of water to our constituents but also on the roads in the constituency. Madam Speaker, it makes no sense for the Government to spend millions of dollars to repave a road, when the underlying issue has not been addressed.

In pointing out these things to the Minister and pointing to specific arteries, main traffic arteries, I am happy to report that the Minister, through one of his programmes in WASA, would have replaced well over 2 kilometres of pipeline along the Morne Coco Road. And we are actively working with the Ministry of Works and Transport to have that road now repaved, having gone through that exercise of changing the valves, changing out the main, ensuring all the connections are good, and that there are no leaks. We are now at the stage where we are looking to repave what is probably the second most used traffic artery in the Diego Martin valley.

Madam Speaker, on top of that, the Minister of Public Utilities, through WASA, has also added and improved a number of booster stations in the constituency of Diego Martin Central.

**6.10 p.m.**

Much of my constituency is hilly terrain, and very often that hilly terrain is not developed in any organized way. So, getting water to our constituents has been and continues to be an issue. We are working right now. I want to tell the residents of Cocorite Terrace that we can expect to see in the coming weeks, the booster station there to improve their water

delivery. The residents of Pioneer Drive can also expect a booster station there and, of course, the improved booster stations at Four Roads, at Simeon Road, and the Minister has also assured me that we will be looking at the Union Road booster very, very soon.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Tobago West, in her contribution made reference to the Cocorite Community Centre and told the House that the Member for Diego Martin Central is always “ringing down” her phone. Well I am glad that she said it, because I want the residents of Cocorite to understand that I have pursued this from day one. Madam Speaker, that Cocorite Community Centre is one of those gifts that we got from the Opposition on their way out.

In 2015, as the Member for Couva South likes to say, in an attempt to buy votes in Cocorite, they hustled to open this Cocorite Community Centre, cutting ribbons mere weeks before. That Community Centre was never, never able to be used by that community in any productive way; total mess. It has been shut down, boarded up, not used for years now. Madam Speaker, through my constant interaction with the Minister, I can report to them that I am aware that a contract has been issued, that they are waiting just to have the mobilization paid and the people, the good citizens of Cocorite, can look forward to their community centre. That refurbishment, if I am to believe the timeline they have given me, in early 2025, works will be completed and the community centre will finally be able to be used.

Madam Speaker, there is so much more that I can say. I will find other times and places to speak to the rest of it. Thank you so much for the opportunity to enter this debate, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the

constituents of Diego Martin Central for the honour in representing them.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tunapuna.

**Mr. Esmond Forde** (*Tunapuna*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to enter this debate at this time. Good thing, Madam Speaker, my intention is to speak to the listening public of Trinidad and Tobago, because as I look across the aisle, two Members of the Opposition are in their Chairs. It is amazing. Our oath of office, where is the representation this evening? It is only 6:13. It is early in the evening, Madam Speaker, but that just goes to show the Opposition that we have to deal with, Madam Speaker.

Colleagues, fellow citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and constituents of Tunapuna, very important, the constituents of Tunapuna, it is both an honour and a privilege today to contribute to the National Budget debate for the fiscal year 2024 to 2025. The theme, I must say, a very excellent theme chosen by the Minister of Finance for this particular budget: “Steadfast and Resolute: Forging Pathways to Prosperity”, “...forging pathways to prosperity”. A budget that seeks to respond to the evolving needs of our people and the challenges of a changing world, as we look to not only address pressing issues, but also to pave the way for a more sustainable and prosperous future for all of us in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the budget highlights, one, we have heard a lot of the minimum wage being discussed and it is only about empowering our workforce in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, one of the cornerstones of this budget is ensuring fair wages and improving the quality



of life for our hard-working citizens.

The increase in the minimum wage from \$20.50 to \$22.50 per hour represents a significant step forward in protecting the livelihoods of our lowest-paid public sector workers. We have already identified the CEPEP company workers, we have already identified the MTS workers, we have identified the reforestation workers with regard to the persons that would seek to be involved in this minimum increase, and also the URP workers of Trinidad and Tobago—providing them with a more secure foundation to support themselves and their families.

This increase is a reflection of our Government's commitment to ensuring that as the cost of living increases, so too must be the income of those who work tirelessly to support the country's public services. We recognize, Madam Speaker, that fair compensation leads to higher morale, greater productivity, and ultimately improved service delivery within our country of Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition, Madam Speaker, to the minimum wage increase, there is also, as the Minister of Finance laid on the table, a 5 per cent salary increase with regard to negotiations that will commence shortly with the public sector workers. Our public sector employees are the backbone of this country, whether it be in health, education, national security, or administration. They work tirelessly to ensure that the public continues to receive essential services. This Government, Madam Speaker, is committed to treating our public sector workers with the fairness and respect they deserve, and this salary adjustment is a tangible expression to that commitment by this People's National Movement Government, under the hon. Dr. Keith

Christopher Rowley.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, another budgetary highlight, new fleet for national security, 2,000 new police vehicles. Madam Speaker, national security remains a top priority for this Administration. The acquisition of 2,000 new vehicles for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service represents our continued effort to safeguard our communities and provide the tools necessary for effective policing in Trinidad and Tobago.

This new fleet will enhance the mobility, efficiency, and reach of our police officers, allowing them to respond to emergencies and threats more quickly, Madam Speaker, cover wider areas, and improve overall law enforcement efforts. Our Government is resolute and will continue to be, Madam Speaker, in ensuring that the men and women who protect us daily have the resources they need to carry out their daily duties with professionalism and speed.

A third budgetary highlight, Madam Speaker, the e-passports and immigration forms, modernizing our borders. Madam Speaker, in line with our commitment to digital transformation, the implementation of e-passports and digital departure cards will bring Trinidad and Tobago immigration services into the 21st Century. This measure will not only streamline the immigration process for citizens and visitors alike, but also enhance national security by introducing a fingerprint system at different points of entry at our borders. This implementation of e-passports will simplify travel, reduce waiting times and increase the efficiency of our border management systems.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, by introducing biometric technology

such as fingerprints, we will bolster our security capabilities, making it easier to track and verify identities, as well as prevent fraudulent activities at our border entry points, Madam Speaker.

Fourth budgetary highlight, Madam Speaker, electronic health records, by 2025, a health system for the future. Madam Speaker, as we work towards achieving a more efficient and responsive health care system, the integration of electronic health records (EHRs) by the year 2025, will revolutionize the way health care is delivered in this country, providing seamless access to medical information for health care providers and improving the quality of patient care throughout our health system network.

**6.20 p.m.**

EHRs will allow doctors, nurses, and medical professionals to have immediate access to patient history, reducing the risk of misdiagnosis or medication errors, and increasing the efficiency of healthcare delivery. Additionally, Madam Speaker, this system would provide long-term benefits such as improved data collection, better monitoring of public health trends, and enhanced overall management of healthcare practices.

Removing taxes on electric vehicle equipment, driving towards a greener future. That is our fifth budgetary highlight, Madam Speaker. As part of our ongoing commitment to promoting environmental sustainability, the removal of all taxes, and all taxes as stated by the Minister of Finance, on equipment for electronic vehicles by January 2025, is in line with our climate control goals and efforts to reduce our carbon footprints in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** Madam Speaker, by removing these taxes, we aim to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles, which will help reduce air pollution and reliance on fossil fuels. This policy shift will reflect a strong commitment to green technology and position Trinidad and Tobago as a regional leader in the fight against climate change. We believe that this initiative will also make electric vehicle ownership more affordable, thus driving us towards a more sustainable transportation system.

Our sixth budgetary highlight, Madam Speaker. Tax exemptions on sporting equipment supporting health and wellness are very important. We would have heard the debate of the Minister of Health, identifying the importance of health within our people of Trinidad and Tobago. The exemption of taxes on all, on all sporting equipment, with the exception of clothing, Madam Speaker, keeps in line with our drive to promote a healthier and more active society. This measure is intended to encourage participation in sports and physical activities at all levels from grassroots to professional athletes, Madam Speaker.

By making sporting equipment more affordable, we are supporting our athletes, schools, and communities in fostering an active lifestyle, and a healthy lifestyle also, Madam Speaker. Whether it is for cricket, football, tennis, basketball, swimming, or any other sporting activity, this tax exemption will make a tangible difference in ensuring that sports remain accessible to everyone, helping to build stronger, healthier communities, and also individuals of Trinidad and Tobago.

Number seven budgetary highlight, Madam Speaker. VAT refunds for small and medium businesses boosting business confidence in Trinidad

and Tobago. This Government recognizes the importance of small and medium businesses, SMEs as we call them. As the backbone of our economy these enterprises drive innovation, create jobs, and contribute to the overall prosperity of our nation. Small and medium businesses owed VAT refunds will be paid in cash by December 2024, which is just two months away, Madam Speaker. This measure intends to inject much-needed liquidity into the business community, allowing SMEs to invest in the operations, expand their operations, and hire more workers in the operations. We understand this critical role that these refunds play in keeping businesses afloat, and we are committed to ensuring that these payments are made promptly, helping to resolve business confidence and economic stability in Trinidad and Tobago.

Budget highlight number eight. Road infrastructure: Paving the partway for progress. Just two speakers ahead of me, Madam Speaker, we would have heard from the Minister of Works and Transport. Infrastructure development is a crucial and important development with regard to the growth of our economy, and the improvement of the lives of our citizens. As such, the Government will embark on a project to pave over 100 roads at an estimated cost of \$210 million before 2025. As mentioned, the road paving activity has been ongoing, it has started and continues even while, as the Minister of Works said, “we are debating here in Parliament.

This investment in road infrastructure will not only improve transportation across the country, reducing travel times and vehicle wear and tear, but also will create jobs and stimulate our economy in the construction and related sectors. From urban areas to rural communities, this project will

ensure that our roads are safer, more efficient, and conducive to economic growth and development. Madam Speaker, this budget reflects our unwavering commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This budget is a reflection of our balanced approach to governance, addressing both the immediate needs of our people, while preparing our economy for future growth and sustainability.

Madam Speaker we have taken significant steps to ease financial burdens, support businesses, and modernize our infrastructure, all while maintaining fiscal responsibility, the removal of taxes on electric vehicles equipment, and sporting equipment. The assurance of no rate increases for essential services, timely VAT refunds, and a robust infrastructure plan demonstrates that this Government is committed to building a future where every citizen can thrive in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** As we continue to navigate the global and domestic challenges ahead, this Government stands ready to meet those challenges head-on with clear innovative solutions. We are working to build a safer, stronger, and more prosperous Trinidad and Tobago for everyone. And I repeat, we are working to build a safer, stronger, and more prosperous Trinidad and Tobago for every citizen. Madam Speaker, I wish to thank our hon. Prime Minister, I wish to thank our hon. Minister of Finance for presenting the 2024/2025 budget that sets up the solutions of our nation, Trinidad and Tobago over the next year, and for the future.

The Budget 2025 was themed “Steadfast and Resolute: Forging Pathways to Prosperity.” This Government has been privileged to serve the

people of Trinidad and Tobago for the last nine years. People claim they await to the end of the budget, choosing to focus on the pocket issues of what the budget has for me. What the budget has for me. A Government as this one is accounting to the people, treats this responsibility as an uncompromising high-stakes one in matching of planned revenue to expenses for the period under review in every economic and social sector of goods and services. Every decision for this Government is a pocket issue.

**6.30 p.m.**

Therefore, coming out of this incisive Minister of Finance's presentation on Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2024, the number one criticism that emerges from local conversations, and of course those on the other side, including, and which states, the budget was too long. The budget was too long, but the budget was too long in order to ensure that the Minister of Finance explained and identified every fiscal situation with regard to Trinidad and Tobago as we continue along, and also reporting on the last nine years—

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

**Mr. E. Forde:**—of fiscal and prudent management.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Nine years of achievement.

**Mr. E. Forde:** And I will add your point, Chief Whip, of achievement. We on this side intend to educate the population on how their money is and was spent.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** This Minister of Finance told us how insignificant and reckless that responsibility was interpreted by the then Opposition in 2010 to 2015 in office, spending upwards of 40 per cent without a corresponding

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link to revenue.

Madam Speaker, rather than bus supporters, B-U-S, bus supporters, to heckle Members that other supporters have put in office, we will continue to educate the citizens so that they know where to redirect their support now and for the future.

**Hon. Member:** Correct.

**Mr. E. Forde:** Madam Speaker, therefore, the Minister of Finance told us, a pathway to prosperity is a move to shift dependence on oil and gas in diversification of our non-oil sector.

He indicated, the Minister of Finance, in his estimates the work has already begun, that performance in this latter sector provided an important buffer to the underperformance in oil and gas. We are halfway there to diversification, Madam Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** Madam Speaker, despite the victory in the courts over the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, TTRA, and the eventual collection of property tax as a caring Government reduced from 3 per cent to 2 per cent, and I repeat, property tax as a caring Government reduced from 3 per cent to 2 per cent. And as you know, Madam Speaker, Tunapuna is leading the way to ensure property tax payees are provided with an efficient and comfortable service as they pay their property taxes daily.

Madam Speaker, Tunapuna, despite the infrastructure work to improve drainage systems, continues to see flooding on the Eastern Main Road. It is not that the drains are not working, very important; it is not that the drains are not working, it is the change in rainfall patterns from long to



shorter durations of heavier rainfall capacity is the revised normal.

Madam Speaker, the Minister referred to a multifaceted approach linking highway and artery solutions with drainage and coastal defences. A secondary road rehabilitation focus will result in increasing contractors from 25 to 50 contractors to deal with nationwide demands. Together with the necessary legislation, a list of bonded contractors will give flexibility and timeliness to the demands of road repairs within Trinidad and Tobago.

The desilting, landslip repair, bridge construction and repair and major road paving works are necessary infrastructure demands. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance outlined the country's commitment to achieve by 2030, 30 per cent of our energy needs via renewable energy power generation. They have already identified 25 schools and community centres for installation and an RFP for other solar projects on non-utilized state lands coupled with wind deployment.

Madam Speaker, the digital economy is facilitated by digital literacy of its citizens. The necessary infrastructure exists for the realization of this objective coupled with e-government initiatives, increased online banking and digital communication tools with benefits to the user. For those beneficiaries of welfare grants within the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, government social benefits wallet, as was identified and explained by the Minister when she—when the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services was present in this House to ensure that persons understand clearly the direction that the Ministry will be heading.

Additionally, the hon. Minister of Digital Transformation was also present in this House identifying and explaining the importance of digital

transformation, and with regard to the whole-of-government approach to e-governance as we continue into 2025. These users will be easily able to apply for and monitor the status of benefits from their homes, not necessarily having to go down to the particular Ministry agency on a daily basis or weekly basis as the case may be. The benefits will be to the user and Government where fraud errors, duplication, and wastage will be reduced. Very important as we continue into the digital age in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, CARICOM's target of a reduction in food import bill by 25 per cent that is currently costing us \$7 billion is too high, Madam Speaker, and an indictment on our local even regional sectors. The global threats of a pandemic, climate change, proxy wars put greater pressure on the price of goods and transport costs, Madam Speaker. A focus on forestry development, infrastructure improvements with access roads, lights, water and agro-processing with NAMDEVCO modernizing markets are encouraging as we go forward, Madam Speaker.

Youth programs in the sector like the Agricultural Internship where graduates of ECIAF's associate degree will intern at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, where some synergies will develop are welcomed notable initiatives under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

Madam Speaker, the important slogan, "Our health is our wealth", and we understand that 10,000 of our citizens are living with some form of NCD, cancer, men with prostate and women with breast cancer. The lung cancer clinic has been blustered by a specialized equipment that performs advanced diagnostics and treatment services in a two-phase installation at a

cost of \$27 million. The Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited must be commended for making a general donation of US \$10 million to cancer treatment and equipment distributed throughout the treatment network of Trinidad and Tobago. Public-private partnerships like this are collective efforts to deal with a big problem and we are expectant on future initiatives of other similar interests.

Madam Speaker, non-communicable diseases, NCDs, heart, diabetes, cerebrovascular disease and cancer are the leading cause of deaths globally and locally. The COVID-19 pandemic was a lesson to us on the vulnerability of this group who knew either they had one, or more, or found out at hospitalization seeking treatment. The goal of reducing preventable death due to NCDs is targeted by a 25 per cent reduction according to statistics given by our Minister of Health.

The Gestational Diabetes Management Program is a health strategy to restrict if not eliminate the access to sugary drinks at Government and government-assisted schools. Other initiatives are being promoted including the HEARTS initiative addressing high blood pressure.

**6.40 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, the business chambers and Employers Consultative Association have all signalled their thumbs up to budget 2025. The Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce went on to analyze the lack of crime solutions to the Minister's presentation.

Crime, as we know, Madam Speaker, is a social and economic problem, and our hon. Prime Minister took the lead very early to declare crime as a public health emergency, with CARICOM adopting the label as

admissions of the crime problems in their respective countries. Our hon. Prime Minister spearheaded an initiative, inviting Members from both sides of this House, the Government and the Opposition, led by our hon. Attorney General. We know where that did not go and the people missed a signal opportunity to benefit under mutual partnerships. They, on the other side, prefer to call every day for the firing of persons not even responsible. That is surely not a solution, Madam Speaker.

Many areas of the presentation included solutions to the vulnerable, for example, youth training and development, and youth in agriculture internships. But again, persons are reminded that the police is the body responsible for policing. The Government provides resources, legislation and policies.

Madam Speaker, the Government has financed the police service with over \$26 billion over a 10-year period. We remain committed to enhancing the country's capacity and capability of treating crime and criminality: Greater sharing of information; improvements in technology; advanced equipment procurement; more focused intelligence; social programmes aimed at reducing gang violence; the establishment of a national forensic DNA database; strengthening the justice system; building capacity of the service by an additional 2,000 vehicles in a phased distribution; and specialized training programmes, inclusive of bullet-proof vests and utilities to assist with greater policing in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Government believes that the interests of the people is its responsibility. There is no "party first" on this side, as the

citizens, all from every part of Trinidad and Tobago, are our responsibility for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** Crime and flood are challenges we would prefer not to have, but wishing it away is not a solution. The work required to confront the challenges is ours to carry. We thank the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance for providing the basis of the work for the next year, 2025, and beyond.

Madam Speaker, I will now like to take this time to talk a little on Tunapuna as we continue to remain on board with Forde in 2025.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. E. Forde:** To the Minister of Works and Transport, you know, we always talk about roads being paved. I have a list of about 15 roads here paved, but some of the main ones are: Smart Street, Sellier Street, Tunapuna Road. We can talk about Maingot Road, which was waiting to be paved for many years; lower St. John's Road; Acono Road, recently paved just about a week ago; Green Street; Amethyst Drive, east and west—you know, I can see the residents on Amethyst Drive smiling all now; Persad Street; College Road; all in the El Dorado lower Caura area, they have benefited. We can go to the Caura Valley, Tumbasson Road.

Roads that will be completed before the end of 2024: We have Balthazar Street; we have Warren Street in St. Augustine; and then the road up by Uncle Ped, yeah, Dirt Road in Maracas Valley. Right? So those are some of the roads, and I would like to thank the Minister of Works and Transport for—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** “So dey pave Dirt Road”?

**Mr. E. Forde:** Dirt Road is the name of the road.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** “And dey pave it”?

**Mr. E. Forde:** And we paved it, but it is remaining Dirt Road.

Drainage infrastructure upgrades within the Tunapuna area: As many of us would have realized, the Macoya Priority Bus Route intersection, a major upgrade, which came from—starting in the hospital drain in Tunapuna, which crosses at the Priority Bus Route, major drainage infrastructure took place there. We had major drainage infrastructure taking place on Tumbasson Road, Green Street again, Gordon Street, Fairley Street, Eastern Main Road, Balthazar Street, and Hendrickson Street. Again, to the Minister of Works and Transport, we know—we have some work that is ongoing at Caurita Road.

We also thank the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government for also assisting in ensuring some drainage works are being done within the Tunapuna constituency to ensure—now, Madam Speaker, we need to be clear on this. It is not to say we are going to stop all the flooding, but we are going to minimize the flooding within the Tunapuna constituency. That is important. So I would like to thank those two Ministers for ensuring that work continues within the area.

With regard to the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, HDC housing: One, new HDC housing development construction of over 200 housing units at Caura Road. I think this deserves a desk thump.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** Two hundred. We are supposed to get that finished sometime early in 2025—housing units at Caura Road. Two, the issuance of new housing units, apartments and houses to Tunapuna residents on an ongoing basis. Three, HDC roof repairs to needy recipients within the Tunapuna constituency. Four, Land and Settlement Agency house and roof improvement repairs to Tunapuna constituents. And also, low-cost, basic housing to the less fortunate and qualified constituents under the Housing and Village Improvement Programme, the HVIP.

Again, in Tunapuna, as the Member of Parliament, I take my social responsibilities very important, so I maximize to ensure that the social aspects are well taken care of, Madam Speaker.

As we continue along to the Minister of Sport and Community Development: One, new swimming pool identified and planned construction at El Dorado.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** That will be coming on stream before the end of 2024. Two, new community centre construction for the El Dorado community at lower Caura Road, El Dorado. That is in the heart of my East Indian community in Tunapuna.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** And I am proud to say—

**Hon. Member:** PNM, PNM

**Mr. E. Forde:**—that they have been waiting many years and it is going to come to the lower Caura Road in El Dorado.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. E. Forde:** Yeah. I am leaving that out for now Mr. Minister.

Renovation of the pavilion at Honeymoon ground, El Dorado, that has taken place already; renovation of pavilion and lighting of recreation space at Wharf Trace, Maracas, completed. Five, iChooseSport programme in Tunapuna at El Dorado East Secondary and the Tunapuna Secondary Schools. Again, iChooseSport continues to be part of the caravan coming to Tunapuna and I know they are expected to come sometime again in November, so as the Member of Parliament, I am looking forward to your presence, Madam Minister of Sport and Community Development.

Under the same Minister, Self Help, very important, maxed out in Tunapuna. I would think hundreds of individuals are receiving—are recipients for house repairs under the Self Help commission grants for home improvements.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** Two, community projects under the same Self Help, identified and completed with Self Help funding, but with Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation's labour, and also URP's labour to ensure that accountability and proper engineering practices are taken at these community projects for Self Help.

Madam Speaker, we now go to the Minister of Social Development and Family Services. Social development and welfare services in Trinidad and Tobago: Wheelchairs, Madam Speaker, tick off that box; walkers, box ticked off; walking sticks, put a tick there, delivery to all and many constituents from Maracas to Tacarigua, and again, all under the proper guidelines and procedures. Produce your medical from your certified



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hospital, health centre or a certified doctor, a copy of your ID card and again, wheelchairs delivered as requested.

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

**6.50 p.m.**

Social welfare benefits and grants applications, approvals and receipts, by the less fortunate members of the community that qualify under the social allocation system under the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. I think by now, the Member of Parliament for Lopinot/Bon Air West's ears must be ringing off, the Minister of Public Utilities. Because I think every Member, even on the Government side and also on the Opposition side, have complimented the Minister of Public Utilities—

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** —in this debate in 2025.

**Hon. Member:** Except Moruga/Tableland.

**Mr. E. Forde:** We will start with the Water and Sewage Authority. The WASA community water project came to Tunapuna. Yes, they came to Tunapuna. New water booster stations at Maingot Road village and also at the Wharf Trace community in Maracas, benefiting thousands of residents in the communities with improved water generation, delivery and distribution. Numerous WASA pipelines, water leaks, servicing on a regular basis in the Tunapuna constituency by WASA's technical teams and by approved contractors. Right. We know, with regard to the aging pipelines that we have, I think WASA would be contracted in order to ensure that, listen, we need to get these pipelines fixed and I think in a reasonable time response,

we usually get the work done. So again, I would like to thank WASA via the Minister of Public Utilities.

Water tank distributions. You know about that Member for Pointe-a-Pierre? “Yuh eh know about water tank”? No man, you know that but “yuh doh” enquire.

**Hon. Members:** *[Laughter]*

**Mr. E. Forde:** Many domestic water tank distributions to needy households and families continue on a regular basis. Numerous residents have benefited from this initiative. Again, the water tank delivery distribution system is very simple. There is an application form, you need to provide a copy of your birth certificate and a copy of your ID card, complete the forms and again, be submitted. A technical representative from the Ministry of Public Utilities will visit your premises to ensure that, yes, there is a need, a water tank is needed and you will be provided not only with the water tank, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, but also the necessary plumbing fittings in order to ensure that it is being done. So again, thank you Minister of Public Utilities.

T&TEC: over 20 LED lights installed within and throughout the Tunapuna constituency, from Tacarigua to Maracas. Over 200 street light bulbs have been repaired and along with new installations throughout, again, the length and breadth of the Tunapuna constituency.

Three, new recreational spaces to be illuminated before the end of 2024: La Seiva children’s play park in Maracas, work to be done. The Honeymoon basketball and tennis court, El Dorado, to be done. Recreational space at Green Street and El Dorado Road, Tunapuna, work to

be done. Flamingo's Pan Theater, St. John Road St. Augustine, work to be done.

Again, in advance, I would like to extend thank you to T&TEC and also to the Minister of Public Utilities for these works being carried out in the Tunapuna constituency.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security also plays a role within the Tunapuna constituency. We know we talk a lot about crime but with regard to the Tunapuna constituency, Tunapuna and environs, we have been able to put in place a Citizen Surveillance Network, CCTV footage, in Tunapuna. It is an initiative that came about with regard to our Tunapuna Police Station Community Council, which is headed by constituent Mr. Neil Boodoosingh. Again, it is a team that has been set up of citizens, along with the police sergeant, inspectors and other police officers within Tunapuna. We meet on a regular basis and again, over the years they have been working on getting security along the Eastern Main Road, but now it has been extended to within the community, whereby we have a Citizen Surveillance Network CCTV footage, and again, it is all coordinated through the Tunapuna Police Station. It is termed the "Eagle Eye Project". It consists of cameras being installed at various locations throughout Tunapuna, and the cameras are linked up to a network system at the Tunapuna Police Station and monitored by police officers to ensure that when a situation occurs, any crime, as the case may be, it can be tagged and picked up on this particular surveillance network.

Crime Stoppers also plays a role within the Tunapuna constituency. They are always invited to ensure to be part of any symposium, any meeting,

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any sessions that we may be having in Tunapuna. We also have an app that is set up on your mobile phone in order to ensure correct communication as we go along. Live video footage directly linked to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Station in Tunapuna, with regard to the camera system network, and it is at a minimal cost to the constituents in Tunapuna. Again, I would like to extend sincere thanks to our Tunapuna Police Station Community Council for ensuring—

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

**Mr. E. Forde:**—that this initiative has come on stream. We have—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes of ordinary time left. You have 10 more minutes available to you if you wish, as extended time to complete your contribution.

**Mr. E. Forde:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will be accepting—

**Madam Speaker:** You will avail—please continue.

**Mr. E. Forde:**—yes. Very active police youth groups in Tunapuna, one in El Dorado, one in the Tunapuna area and we also have up in the Maracas communities, very active police youth groups. I would like to, again, extend to the Minister of National Security for ensuring that the funding, though small, we are working with what we have and then we are getting our business community to be part of the programme.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** We have bi-monthly police/resident council meetings throughout, again, the length and breath of the Tunapuna constituency at various locations. So tonight we could be in El Dorado. Tomorrow night, we could be in Auzonville. Next night, we in Honeymoon, we up in

Maracas, we in Acono, we up in Luengo. So we try to incorporate to ensure that persons come out where the police, the senior superintendent, the inspectors, all the police officers are there, and the Crime Stoppers are there and we share information in order to ensure that crime is minimized within the Tunapuna constituency. Again, as MP for Tunapuna, I continue to do my walkabouts to keep in touch with the persons on the ground, very important, Madam Speaker.

Again, we move on to the Minister of Youth Development and National Service. We would have heard him speak today about skills for work, in conjunction with WASA and T&TEC. Employment opportunities to be created based on skills. Plumbers, masons, carpenters, barbers, equipment operators, technical skills and trade. He also spoke about youth for women in agriculture. A series of varied agricultural initiatives for interested persons in farming and agriculture.

Entrepreneurship: We know the importance of that, creating young businessmen to work on their own. The Government cannot provide jobs for everyone, but we could provide the opportunities to make and create young businessmen and businesswomen. Again, the Minister of Youth Development and National Service also spoke about community engagement—visit communities to identify youths that are in need of particular skills, talent, as the case may be. Culinary arts—pastries, makeup, soft skills as the case may be, Madam Speaker.

To the Minister of Education not being left out, again, thank you for the \$1,000 book grant for the less fortunate in Tunapuna.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** I think, when I last checked, there were over 600 families and needy students that would have benefited from that particular programme in Tunapuna, in 2024. Congratulations to all Tunapuna schools who plan, organize and execute anti-crime and anti-violence walks within the community. As the MP for Tunapuna, I appreciate the great and timely initiatives that will go a long way in strengthening the Tunapuna constituency. So again, I thank you all.

To the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, CEPEP Company, I cannot leave here today without complimenting for the great work that CEPEP contractors continue to do in my Tunapuna constituency, that deserve “a thump desk” man.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** CEPEP work very hard and they get the job done and they do a very good service within the Tunapuna constituency.

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

**Mr. E. Forde:** Not forgetting the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, under the new Chairman, Councillor Josiah Austin. The TPRC councillors and I continue to work hand in hand to ensure no one will be left behind in the Tunapuna constituency, in the constituency in the areas of Auzonville, Tunapuna; the El Dorado/Caura/Paradise district, and also the Maracas/Santa Margarita electoral district, we work in tandem.

**7.00 p.m.**

We work in tandem. We have two PNM councillors and we have one UNC councillor. I can tell you Member, for Pointe-a-Pierre—I could say “Prackie” here too. [*Member laughs*]. We work hand-in-hand. We work

together in order to ensure that the constituency benefits, because remember local government is still your first point of contact. So “Mr. Forde, oh God, how could you put me on to the UNC councillor?” I said, “Well, I have to put you on to him, he is your councillor.” That is how I operate. We work together to ensure that we get the job done.

Again, in conclusion, Madam Speaker, my sincere gratitude and thanks to the people and my 27,000-plus Tunapuna constituency, who gave me a seat at the table, where my voice, as one of the 41 constituencies in this honourable place, will be written into the history books. Special mention to my constituency office staff. I must compliment verbally my staff at the constituency office who continue to do yeomen service, excellent work ethics, and excellent service delivery. My office staff continue to perform, on and beyond the call of duty, and I would like to literally thank them here today, Madam Speaker, for the work that they are doing for the last nine years.

Thank you for the continued faith and trust in your Member of Parliament. I remain eternally grateful and humble. And again, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, for also—and the executive—giving me the opportunity to be part of his team for the last nine years. Madam Speaker, I look forward to continue working as a Member of Parliament, and in the end, I will give God all the glory and we staying on board with Forde in 2025. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. Member:** Opposition.

**Madam Speaker:** Do I call Leader of the House?

### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Madam Speaker, may I enquire from the Chief Whip, if they are willing to be engaged in a debate? They have not put anybody for the past four hours, and the Bench has been largely empty. We are here to debate, and we are here to do the people's work. May I ask if they intend to debate?

**Madam Speaker:** Well if nobody is joining the debate, I believe the Minister of Finance is here.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Well then, Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn—

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:**—to Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> of October because they are unwilling to do the people's work. This is a debate. They have not said a word for the past four hours.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2025 at 1.30 p.m.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.03 p.m.*