

**SENATE**

*Tuesday, January 21, 2025*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon and Sen. David Nakhid, both of whom are out of the country.

**SENATORS' APPOINTMENT**

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from her Excellency President Christine Carla Kangaloo ORTT:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

/s/Christine Kangaloo  
President.

TO: MR. NDALE YOUNG

WHEREAS Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago;

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, do hereby appoint you, NDALE

**UNREVISED**

YOUNG to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2025 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the  
President of the Republic of Trinidad  
and Tobago at the Office of the  
President, St. Ann's, this 17<sup>th</sup> day of  
January, 2025.”

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

/s/Christine Kangaloo

President.

TO: MR. DOMINIC SMITH

WHEREAS Senator David Nakhid is incapable of performing his duties by reason of absence his from Trinidad and Tobago;

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, acting in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, do hereby appoint you, DOMINIC SMITH to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2025 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Senator David Nakhid.

**UNREVISED**

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the  
President of the Republic of Trinidad  
and Tobago at the Office of the  
President, St. Ann's, this 21<sup>st</sup> day of  
January, 2025.”

### **OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Sen. Ndale Young and Sen. Dominic Smith took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

### **SESSIONAL SELECT COMMITTEES**

#### **(APPOINTMENT OF)**

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, in accordance with Standing Order 79(2), I have appointed the following Senators to serve on the sessional select committees of the Senate for the Fifth—2024/2025—Session of the Twelfth Parliament.

#### **Standing Orders Committee**

Mr. Nigel de Freitas	Chairman
Mr. Laurence Hislop	Member
Dr. Amery Browne	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Dr. Sharda Patasar	Member

#### **House Committee**

Dr. Amery Browne	Chairman
Ms. Donna Cox	Member
Mr. Ancil Dennis	Member
Ms. Jearlean John	Member
Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy	Member

#### **Committee of Privileges**

Mr. Nigel de Freitas	Chairman
Mr. Reginald Armour SC	Member
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
Ms. Jearlean John	Member
Mr. Deeroop Teemal	Member

### **Statutory Instruments Committee**

Mr. Nigel de Freitas	Chairman
Mr. Rohan Sinanan	Member
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal	Member
Mrs. Jayanti Lutchmedial-Ramdial	Member
Ms. Sunity Maharaj	Member

### **The Business Committee**

Mr. Nigel de Freitas	Chairman
Dr. Amery Browne	Member
Ms. Paula Gopee-Scoon	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Dr. Paul Richards	Member

### **TRIBUTE (MR. RUSSELL GRIFFITH)**

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, please now permit me to bring tributes on the passing of former Clerk of the Senate, Mr. Russell Griffith. Hon. Senators, today I rise to honour the memory of a man whose quiet but mighty contribution to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has left an enduring impact on our nation's history and democracy. I speak of Mr. Russell Griffith, who served as Clerk of the Senate for 12 years and as Assistant Clerk for 10 years. In aggregate, Mr. Griffith, who passed away on December 27<sup>th</sup> 2024, dedicated 38 remarkable years to the public service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Griffith was born on October 11<sup>th</sup>1927 and his early years in Belmont were one of humble beginnings. He grew up in challenging circumstances, yet, his resilience and determination paved the way for a life of accomplishment and legacy. From his education at Belmont Intermediate and St. Mary's College to his professional career, Mr. Griffith exemplified perseverance, integrity, and hard work. His journey in public service began at the San Fernando Post Office in 1958 and continued at the department responsible for public utilities in 1963. At public utilities, Mr. Griffith was appointed as Secretary to the Railway Board, where he was instrumental in managing its transition.

However, it was in 1969, upon joining this Parliament that Mr. Griffith truly found his calling. As Clerk of the Senate, he became a cornerstone of our parliamentary system. His guidance on parliamentary procedures and rules ensured the smooth functioning of this Chamber during a pivotal era in our democracy. He also contributed significantly to the drafting of our Republican Constitution through his role as secretary to the joint select committee chaired by former Speaker Arnold Thomasos.

Mr. Griffith's service extended far beyond our shores, representing Trinidad and Tobago at numerous Commonwealth parliamentary conferences, displaying a keen ability to bridge cultures as a parliamentary officer and a representative of our nation with distinction. Beyond his professional achievements, Mr. Griffith was a man of immense character and diverse interests. He was a devoted husband to his late wife, Reva, and a loving father to Celina, Charisse, Hugh and Peter. His children fondly recall long walks along King's Wharf and the Marabella railway tracks in the 1960s. His love of poetry and music and his fitness and health routine kept him active well into his 90s.

Awarded the Public Service Medal of Merit, Silver, in 1988, Mr. Griffith's

life was a testament to service, discipline, and a commitment to excellence. He was not only a dedicated public servant, but also a man of faith, humour, and wisdom whose presence enriched the lives of all who knew him.

Hon. Senators, I think we are all appreciative of the importance of our Clerks in ensuring the smooth operation of the legislative process and the safeguarding of parliamentary practice and procedure. The work of a Clerk is tireless and their role of an apolitical and impartial adviser is foundational to the functioning of Parliament. It is in this regard, that we pay homage to Mr. Griffith for his unwavering dedication and for laying the foundation upon which we all stand here today. As the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said:

“The heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, but they while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.”

With that sentiment, hon. Senators, on behalf of my family, this august Senate, and the Office of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to extend sincerest condolences to the family of former Clerk of the Senate, Mr. Russell Griffith, during this time of mourning. May his soul rest in peace and may his commitment to the service of Trinidad and Tobago continue to inspire us all. Hon. Senators, I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

*The Senate stood.*

**Mr. President:** May his soul rest in peace. Thank you, hon. Senators. The Clerk will convey to the family of Mr. Russell Griffith the sentiments expressed today.

**1.45 p.m.**

**NATIONAL EMBLEMS OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
(REGULATION) (AMDT.) BILL, 2025**

A Bill to amend the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation)

**UNREVISED**

Act, Chap. 19:04 to provide for a new Coat of Arms and other related matters [*The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts*]; read the first time.

*Motion made:* That the next stage be taken later in the proceedings. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

### **TOBAGO ISLAND GOVERNMENT BILL, 2021**

A Bill to repeal the Tobago House of Assembly Act Chap. 25:03, and to provide for the powers and functions of the Tobago Island Government and the Tobago Legislature and for related matters [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development*]; read the first time.

### **PAPERS LAID**

1. Final Report of the Investigative Team appointed by the Honourable Attorney General to inquire and report into the facts and circumstances surrounding CV2020-01243 Shervon Peters and Ors v The Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC)*]
2. Companies (Amdt.) Regulations, 2024. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC*]
3. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority for the financial year ended September 30, 2024. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan)*]
4. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheets and other Financial Statements of the Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (VMCOTT) for the financial years 2015 and 2016 and follow up on the

- implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee's Second Report, 12<sup>th</sup> Parliament. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan*]
5. Annual Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the year ended December 31, 2023. [*The Vice-President (Dr. Muhammad Yunus Ibrahim)*]
  6. Annual Report of the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation for the fiscal year 2019 - 2020. [*The Minister of Public Administration (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West)*]
  7. Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters (Amendment to Schedule 1) Order, 2024. [*The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne)*]
  8. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) (No.2) Order, 2024. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  9. Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority (Extension of Period) (No. 5) Order, 2024. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  10. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the financial year ended September 30, 2007. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  11. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the financial year ended September 30, 2016. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  12. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  13. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on



- the Financial Statements of the Port of Spain Corporation for the financial year ended September 30, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
14. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2019. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  15. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  16. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited for the year ended December 31, 2022. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  17. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited for the year ended December 31, 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  18. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  19. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended September 30, 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  20. Annual Administrative Report of National Enterprises Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  21. Annual Administrative Report of the National Investment Fund Holding Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  22. Annual Administrative Report of East Port of Spain Development Company

- Limited for the fiscal year 2022 - 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
23. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Fair Trading Commission for the financial year ended September 30, 2020. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  24. Annual Administrative Report of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the fiscal year 2021 - 2022. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  25. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the fiscal year 2021. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  26. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the fiscal year 2022. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  27. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the fiscal year 2023. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  28. Annual Report of the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board for the fiscal year 2022. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  29. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheet and other Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and its Subsidiaries (NP) for the financial years 2018 and 2019 and follow up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee's Sixteenth Report, Eleventh Parliament. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
  30. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheets and other Financial Statements of the National Export Facilitation Organization of Trinidad and Tobago (exporTT) for the financial years 2017 and 2018 and follow-up on

the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee's Twenty-Eighth Report, Eleventh Parliament. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]

31. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the Regulated Industries Commission (RIC) for Financial Years 2014 to 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]

## **JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**(Presentation)**

**Foreign Affairs**

### **Deepening Existing Ties and Facilitating New Linkages between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Co-operative Republic of Guyana**

**Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy:** Mr. President, I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon:

Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Fifth Session (2024/2025), Twelfth Parliament, on an inquiry into deepening existing ties and facilitating new linkages between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

### **Public Administration and Appropriations Committee**

#### **National Carnival Commission's Management of Carnival 2023**

**Sen. Laurence Hislop:** Thank you, Mr. President, I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Order Paper in my name:

Nineteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, Fourth Session (2023/2024), Twelfth Parliament, on an

examination into the role of the National Carnival Commission's management of Carnival 2023 activities and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Public Accounts Committee's Twenty-Seventh Report, Eleventh Parliament.

**Adequacy of Pharmaceutical and Non-Pharmaceutical  
and other supplies by the Ministry of Health**

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

Twentieth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, Fourth Session (2023/2024), Twelfth Parliament, on an examination into the adequacy of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical and other supplies by the Ministry of Health.

**Management and Operations of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation  
and Improvement Company Limited (SRRIC)**

Twenty-First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, Fourth Session (2023/2024), Twelfth Parliament, on a follow-up inquiry on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Seventeenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Management and Operations of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited (SRRIC).

**Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including  
the THA)**

**Operations of the Environmental Management Authority  
(with a Specific Focus on Noise Pollution)**

**Sen. Sunity Maharaj:** Thank you, Mr. President, I have the honour to present the following reports as listed on the Order Paper in my name:

Twelfth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service

Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA), Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament, on an inquiry into the operations of the Environmental Management Authority (with a specific focus on noise pollution).

**Operations of the Adoption Unit of the Children’s Authority  
of Trinidad and Tobago**

Thirteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA), Fourth Session (2023/2024), Twelfth Parliament on an inquiry into the operations of the Adoption Unit of the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago as it relates to the efficiency and effectiveness of the adoption procedures in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne):** Mr. President, there are six questions for oral answer and one question for written response on the Order Paper. The Government is prepared to answer all of these questions today.

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

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

**WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION**

**COP29 Event Held in Baku, Azerbaijan  
(Details of)**

**29. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Planning and Development:  
In relation to the persons who represented the Government of Trinidad and Tobago at the COP29 event held in Baku, Azerbaijan from November 11 – 22, 2024, can the Minister provide the following:

- (i) a list of these persons, including state enterprises and other institutions that they represented; and
- (ii) the cost incurred by the State for each individual?

*Vide end of sitting for written answer.*

### **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper.*

#### **Alternative Border Control Mechanisms (Details of)**

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

Given that the two (2) Austal Cape class patrol vessels and six (6) Damen Stan patrol vessels used by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard are currently out of service, can the Minister indicate what alternative border control mechanisms have been operationalised to maintain safety and security within this country's maritime boundaries?

**Mr. President:** Minister of National Security.

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, border security is a major plank in our security architecture in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government therefore clearly recognizes the need to ensure that the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard maintains presence within its area of responsibility.

Given that this question, and granted that this question is very dated, I am to advise that both our Austal Cape Class Patrol boats, which did not exist in 2020 nor 2015, are actually returned. Both of these vessels have re-entered service and are currently rostered for patrols around Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** The Damen patrol vessels are also being sent for dry docking,

recertification, repairs and maintenance and will all return to active service shortly. Two have actually returned from Suriname and one is in its docking phase right there as we speak.

Tobago is serviced by a smaller vessel, which is used for close in-shore patrols, while the coast guard continues to deploy various smaller craft for similar-type operations in Trinidad. The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard continues to actively support law enforcement operations alongside the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard maintains close collaboration with the police service to conduct ad hoc land and beach patrols in coastal areas as necessary. In these circumstances, the Coastal and Riverine Patrol unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is also joined in these efforts. Mr. President, I thank you.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, could the hon. Minister indicate when did these two Austal vessels return to service in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Mr. President:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** The exact dates are not with me, and I am on parliamentary record so I will not venture them but I can say within recent weeks. Thank you.

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

**Sen. Roberts:** Hon. Minister, you said, rostered, the cutlass vessels are rostered. How long does one session or one roster or one patrol, how many hours per vessel? And how many men, coast guard officers are on the vessel?

**Mr. President:** You asked two questions, Sen. Roberts. We will go with the first one. Minister of National Security, the roster question.

**2.00 p.m.**

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Those matters I consider to be operational issues, matters for the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard. In addition to that, I consider them to bear matters of national security that we could do without in the public domain.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, can the hon. Minister inform this Senate where did these Austal vessels go to be repaired, and what did the repairs cost?

**Mr. President:** One question, Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Where did it go?

**Mr. President:** Where did they go to be repaired, Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Arrangements are made for their docking when necessary, including repairs, and maintenance in the Dominican Republic.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Can the hon. Minister indicate what was the cost to the taxpayers for the repairs of these two Austal vessels in the Dominican Republic?

**Mr. President:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** The answer to that question can quite easily be provided in writing, since it would require specific figures. But I can say, we are more than happy to have those vessels in service, patrolling and taking care of elements of our border security in Trinidad and Tobago, and they are on the job as we speak. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Next question or—

**Mr. President:** You have one more supplemental.

**Sen. Mark:** One more?

**Mr. President:** Yeah.



**Sen. Mark:** Can the hon. Minister state whether in the arrangements for the purchase of these Austal vessels were there in existence, or were there any agreements for a maintenance contract with the agency that actually manufactured this vessel or these vessels, Mr. President?

**Mr. President:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. When these vessels were being procured, the hon. Senator, in person, wrote to the Attorney General of Australia, trying to obstruct, in my view, the operation and the purchase. I would say, he was unsuccessful, and yes, in answer to the other aspect of the question, obviously, a maintenance and repair contract runs alongside the purchase contract. Thank you very much.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Question—I was about to say something—

**Hon. Senator:** Say it.

**Sen. Mark:**—to my colleague but I would not say it.

### **Shutdown of Stork Technical Services T&T Limited**

#### **(Measures Taken to Compensate Employees)**

**4. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Labour:

In light of the decision by Stork Technical Services T&T Limited to shut down its operations, potentially leaving 389 employees without jobs, can the Minister indicate what measures will be taken to ensure employees are adequately compensated in alignment with the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act?

**Mr. President:** Minister of Labour.

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

**The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie):** Thank you, Mr. President. According to the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, Chap 88:13, normally

referred to as the RSBA.

“‘retrenchment’...”— refers to—“...the termination of employment of a worker at the initiative of an employer for the reason of redundancy;”

Where:

“‘redundancy’ means the existence of surplus labour in an undertaking for whatever cause;”

In common terms, retrenchment applies to jobs lost as a result of cost-cutting measures and can occur due to economic downturns or for cost-saving purposes. Retrenchment is at the discretion of the employer and it is a management prerogative to exercise such measures for the operational viability of the company.

However, pursuant to section 4(1) of RSBA:

“Where an employer...”— contemplates the retrenchment—“...of five or more workers for the reason of redundancy...”— that employer is require to—“...give formal notice...in writing to each...”— “...worker...”— to the Ministry of Labour and—“...the recognised majority union...”—if there is one.

- (2) The notice is required to state –
- (a) the names and classifications of the...workers;
  - (b) the length of service and current wage rates...
  - (c) the reasons for the redundancy;
  - (d) the proposed date of the termination...
  - (e) the criteria used in the selection of the workers...
  - (f) any other relevant information.”

In the case of Stork Technical Services Trinidad & Tobago Limited, the company is shutting down its operations as opposed to undertaking a retrenchment exercise. Therefore, this is not expressly governed by the RSBA and presently,

there are no legislative procedures in the Industrial Relation Act or RSBA that require the intervention of the Ministry of Labour in relation to closure of businesses.

However, I wish to add that if the national interest is threatened, the Minister of Labour is empowered to intervene under the provisions of sections 66 and 65 of the Industrial Relations Act. It also should be noted that there is a vigilant recognized majority union attached to the company and in the event of retrenchment, the collective agreement between the parties makes provision for their compensation, which would be superior to the legislative positions of the RSBA.

Further, it is also important to note that non-unionized employees are entitled to the compensation in accordance with the provision of the RSBA and, in the event that these benefits are not received, those employees can directly report their matters to the Minister of Labour pursuant to the section 12 of the RSBA.

I wish to add that according to the information available, consultative talks between the parties to address and resolve the situation have taken place. The parties have been meeting since 2024, in this regard, and the management and union's last meeting was in January 2025. I am also happy to report that 91 per cent of the daily and hourly paid staff have been paid and have left the company.

Additionally, the consultant for the company has advised that a liquidator was appointed and that the remaining staff, who are mainly monthly paid employees and who are responsible for the closing off of administrative matters, are still housed within the company. The consultant further advised that company serviced its last client in November 2024, and is now officially closed.

Mr. President, the Ministry of Labour remains committed to promoting good industrial practice and maintaining industrial peace, and will continue to do all in

its power to effectively achieve this mandate. I thank you.

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

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

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, can the hon. Minister indicate whether he can share with this House what form of payment did the company engage in, as far as you are aware? Was it an ex gratia payment, or into the fact that the company was shut down completely? Could you advise?

**Mr. President:** Minister of Labour.

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** Yes, Mr. President, through you, it was an ex gratia payment.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Can I also ask the hon. Minister whether in light of this loophole in the law that permits companies, when they are shut down, not to pay or to honour payments, especially if there is a recognized majority union in existence, can I ask, through you, Mr. President, whether the Government, through the Ministry of Labour, is contemplating amending or creating new legislation to plug these loopholes that currently exist in our labour laws?

**Mr. President:** Minister of Labour.

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** Yes, Mr. President. The Industrial Relations Act and the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act are both in active consideration at this moment, and although I cannot remember precisely if this has been taken into consideration, definitely, the Stork issue has now raised that and have identified a loophole. Since we do not want our citizens to be left back or be disadvantaged, I will take a personal look at it to ensure that we look at how we could close that loophole, if we have not already considered it.

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, can I ask, through you, to the hon. Minister, given that

the political clock is ticking away quickly and fast, as we rush to August 28, 2025, can you advise this honourable Senate whether those amendments to both the IRA and the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act will be tabled for a debate in this honourable Parliament before the dissolution of the Parliament?

**Mr. President:** Minister of Labour.

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** As you indicated, Sen. Mark, the clock is ticking; tick-tock, tick-tock.

**Mr. Hinds:** Ten years.

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:** And given the statutory requirements for elections, all I will say to you is that I do not think there is enough time to distil those two pieces of legislation and rush them through because we have an election. But on the return of the PNM Government—

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

**Hon. S. Mc Clashie:**—we will certainly put it at the top of our agenda for very early within our new tenure.

**Mr. Hinds:** In the new term. Well said. Well said.

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

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

**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Mark:** I know that my friend is very optimistic, although he would not be part of the new Administration that he is anticipating. But, I want to indicate, through the hon. President, whether the Minister, who has been in office for five years, whether, for instance, he has any intentions of looking specifically at amending the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act before the election, so at least he will leave a reasonable legacy when you depart. Can you tell us if you are going to bring or take the time to look at this question? Because it affects workers.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark, you are going in to more of statement than a question, but even so with the general gist of the question that you are asking, the hon. Minister has answered such question earlier on. So that brings you to the end of this question. Move on to the next question in the Order Paper, Sen Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Thank you. I do not expect the PNM to return, except to hell.

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

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, may I go on to my other question, please?

**Migrant Registration Framework 2019  
(Access to Education for Children Under Age 18)**

**7. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Can the Minister clarify the policy on access to education for children under the age of 18 whose parents did not register with the Ministry of National Security's Migrant Registration Framework in 2019?

**Mr. President:** Leader of the Government Business.

**The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne):** Mr. President, at this stage, children whose parents or legal guardians are not in possession of the Minister's permit under the Ministry of National Security's Migrant Registration Framework, 2019—the MRF—are not eligible to apply for entry into schools. Children whose parents or legal guardians are not in possession of the Minister's permit under the MRF are not eligible to apply for entry into schools at this stage.

The Ministry of Education processes admission of migrant children of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela into schools in Trinidad and Tobago in accordance with the guidelines from the Ministry of National Security, in compliance with the Immigration (Amdt.) (No. 2) Regulations, 2024.

These guidelines apply to Venezuelan nationals under the age of 18 years whose parents or legal guardians are registered with the Ministry of National Security in 2019, and continue to register yearly under the Migrant Registration Framework. For these applications to be considered, the following documents, in the form of one original and one copy, must be submitted in keeping with the Migrant Registration Framework.

**2.15 p.m.**

1. Migrant registration card
2. The birth certificate of the child
3. A certified translation of the birth certificate of the child
4. The immunization record of the child
5. Proof of address, letter from landlord with copy of a recent utility bill as verification of address must be presented

And finally,

6. A passport size photo of the child.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, may I ask, through you, to the hon. Minister, hon. Minister if these criteria that you have outlined have not been satisfied or met, can you inform this House what will happen to those children 18 years and under who are located in Trinidad and Tobago? What efforts, what guidelines, what initiatives will be taken to ensure that these children do not ultimately become a burden? I know what I am talking about, Mr. President, I am speaking about crime that can take place. So I am just asking the hon, Minister if they fail to satisfy these requirements, what do we do with these children 18 years and under?

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, I have described the Ministry of Education's policy in keeping with the Ministry of National Security's regulations and existing framework. There are children within our jurisdiction who fall outside of this framework, and even before these measures were elaborated that entire cohort was not eligible for entry into the nation's formal school system. But, the Member might be aware and certainly the public is aware that there are other modalities and facilities which continue to be mobilized to assist children within Trinidad and Tobago outside of the formal education system. These involve a number of non-governmental organizations, a number of religious groups, retired teachers and other entities that do provide services and education outside of the formal system.

A revolutionary step was achieved in this most recent period, where we are able to identify a category of these migrant children who are able now, to access the formal school system. And, I can tell you the matter is not static, the Ministry of Education, the Cabinet, the Ministry of National Security continue to examine the need and will make modifications and amendments as resources and time permits. So that just give you a broad sweep of this scenario.

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

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. Minister, are you aware that requiring migrant children to have a permit before entering school is a violation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which we have ratified? It is a method of discrimination and we are not allowed to discriminate. All children, once they are within the country, should be treated equally. So we are in violation. We ratified this since 1991. This is something that was raised in the Human Rights Committee, we are fully aware. Thank you.

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



**Mr. President:** Sen. Thompson-Ahye, is there a question in there?

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** I asked him if he is aware that in doing so we are in violation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which we have ratified.

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, this is not a new phenomenon in this country. What is new is the numbers, given the arrivals of Venezuelan migrants. We always had a cohort of children in this country who may have fallen outside of the requirements of the Ministry of Education. As I have indicated very clearly and calmly this is not a static matter and recent progress and advancements have been made. The advocacy continues and the response to that advocacy will continue to unfold. What I can say as a Member of the Government, I am very pleased that some progress has been made on this matter and a significant cohort of the children in need of formal education are now able to access same. So, if there was a question there, I am hoping there was also a response. Thank you, Mr. President.

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

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

**Sen. Mark:** Hon. Minister, through the President, in light of this revelation, can the hon. Minister indicate whether the Government has sought assistance from the relevant committees within the UN family that would address this issue of the rights of the child, and particularly, Mr. President, in light of the fact that we have ratified that convention, can the hon. Minister indicate?

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, if the Member is asking whether the Government works closely with the relevant United Nations' bodies on matters related to children's rights and access to services in Trinidad and Tobago, I can say

without fear of contradiction that this Government works more closely and faithfully with the United Nations system than any administration in the history of this country. We continue to do so to this very day.

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

**Mr. President:** You are still answering?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** I thought so. So, Mr. President, the specific matter under discussion, I once again repeat, has been the subject of a change of government policy. The question seeks to identify whether there is a policy at this time for children who do not fall within the migrant registration framework, and it is not the child who has registration it is the parent, just to clarify, and the answer the question has been responded to. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

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

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** Thank you. Hon. Minister are you aware that what I am saying is that it should not happen at all. It should not be progressing, it should not be tomorrow, it should stop now.

**Mr. President:** Okay, so I would not allow that question, Sen. Thompson-Ahye given how it is framed. Next question Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Hon. Minister, can you indicate whether, as far as the Government is concerned, any reports on this violation of the Rights of the Child Convention has been transmitted to the relevant UN body that oversees and monitors violations and breaches of the convention by Trinidad and Tobago? Whether he is aware, Mr. President, of any such reports being made?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, I am glad for that final supplemental because it demonstrates a complete misunderstanding on the part of Sen. Mark. There is no violation to be reported to the United Nations at this time, so the very premise of the enquiry is misplaced. I hope that is clear enough, Mr.

President.

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

**Alleged Illegal Water Trucking Scheme  
(Sangre Grande Regional Corporation)**

**8. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Can the Minister indicate whether an investigation has been launched into the complaints made by residents within the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation regarding an alleged illegal water trucking scheme involving employees of the Corporation?

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government acts as the oversight and coordinating authority for all municipal corporations and is empowered to commission an investigation into the operations of the commission to ascertain whether any breach of the existing laws or regulations have taken place. In this regard, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government has directed that a special audit investigation into the operations of the water trucking service be undertaken at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, in light of numerous procedural irregularities and concerns raised during the enquiry into the alleged complaint.

The Ministry also notes that similar complaints of illegal water trucking have been unearthed by the Water and Sewerage Authority across various communities in Trinidad and Tobago and that the Minister of Public Utilities has committed to implementing a series of measures aimed at enhanced enforcement

and ensuring compliance with its governing Act. These actions include:

- Legislative review and an increase in fines;
- Enhanced water services in communities without pipe-borne water;
- Enhanced investigations and enforcement;
- Increased engagement with affected communities; and
- Increased monitoring efforts to prevent illegal trucking of water.

These measures form part of a proactive strategy to curb illegal water trucking activities and improve access to services across Trinidad and Tobago. The aim is to deter illegal operations, enhance service delivery, and better address community water needs. This approach will also address any illegal activities unearthed within the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation or any other municipal corporations. In the meantime, the municipal corporations will continue to coordinate with WASA to ensure the effective and reliable delivery of truck borne water in communities that are without access to a pipe-borne water supply. Thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, Could the hon. Minister indicate exactly when the special audit was authorized and by—well he already said by whom, but when was that special audit effected?

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, the date is not before me, but if the Member would file that as a specific question, I am certain the particulars will be responded to by the relevant Ministry. Thank you.

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

**Sen. Mark:** It is Minister aware as to a time frame for the conclusion, even if he might not have the date as to when it took place, does the Minister or is the

Minister in a position to indicate when the report will be concluded, or has the report been concluded? I am not too sure.

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** No, Mr. President. This is an ongoing work, and as the Member would be aware it is very difficult to put parameters of time on an investigation of this nature. It really depends on what is unearthed, and whether there is demonstration that there are matters to be further investigated or enquired upon. So this is an ongoing investigation and we cannot give a close date as of this moment.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, having regard to the fact that this event took place sometime in 2024, is the Minister not concerned that this process seemed not to be given the kind of priority necessary to avert further illegal trucking of water that the population is being called upon to pay through employees of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation? Can the Minister indicate whether this is an issue that ought to be given top priority and not left—

**Mr. President:** I would not allow that question Sen. Mark. Next question.

**2.30 p.m.**

**Sen. Mark:** Do I have a final question? I have a final question.

**Mr. President:** You have a—

**Sen. Mark:** I have another question. I said, I am going to my final question.

**Mr. President:** So you are doing the supplemental or you are moving on to—

**Sen. Mark:** No, I am not going with any supplemental.

**Mr. President:** Okay.

### **2024 Trafficking in Persons Report (Implementation of Recommendations)**

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

Can the Minister indicate whether the Government intends to implement any of the recommendations outlined in the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report published by the United States Department of State?

**Mr. President:** Minister of National Security.

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** I thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** It is the intention of the Government to continue with the implementation of the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to violence and crime, including the crime of trafficking in persons. Our recent and very welcomed upgraded rating by the international rating agency represents an improvement in the assessment of the Government's response to, and its decision to take on board the recommendations of the 2024, and previous reports of the monitoring agency.

Some of the recommendations implemented are in respect of the three Ps, prosecutions, protection and prevention. Some of the recommendations implemented are: The Counter Trafficking Unit, through the prosecution's working group, brought together representatives from the Judiciary, Director of Public Prosecutions, Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and others, in regular working sessions to develop sensitization technology training and develop standard operating procedures in prosecuting matters under the Trafficking in Persons Act. Authorized officers are in continuous training locally, regionally and internationally in continuous development of skills in areas such as: interviewing, victim screening techniques, the collection of evidence, and the presentation of this evidence before the courts with a view to quicken and improve our conviction rates.

There are plans to include a labour inspectorate among the authorized/investigative officers so as to focus attention on this aspect of TIP, labour exploitation, that is, as well as sustained focus on trafficking networks with a view to dismantling them. In the realm of protection, in collaborative effort, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, its international partners, NGOs and civil societies, the shelter stock available to victims of human trafficking is rapidly increasing. Additionally, victim care is now being streamlined towards service providers and specialist care providers with the development of a victim referral map, soon to be launched on a digital platform.

The Counter Trafficking Unit administers a roster of interpreters for the facilitation of victim and investigative services and intends to bring a full time interpreter on board. The Counter Trafficking Unit brought together all partners, stakeholders and supporters in a workshop which culminated in the development of a referral map for all stakeholder partners involved in matters relating to trafficking in persons.

In the realm of prevention, Mr. President, the Counter Trafficking Unit is mandated to conduct a campaign of public awareness aimed at alerting the public about the danger that is trafficking in persons. Through the Ministry of National Security, the Counter Trafficking Unit sponsors, for an example, i95.5 FM, *Eye on Dependency* programme that runs weekly on a Sunday morning and has repurposed and enhanced this public broadcast forum so as to improve and revamp our outreach efforts.

The Counter Trafficking Unit has been to schools, churches, on the television, and units of culture in its public awareness drive. It has partnered with the Financial Investigations Unit, the Bankers Association, and the Chambers of Commerce to sensitize them all and their membership about the dangers of human

trafficking. And, it has become quite common place, right after the news, prime time, on the radio, on the TV, to hear constant ads talking to the public in this sensitization efforts, Mr. President.

Another example, to commemorate the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, recently, the Counter Trafficking Unit executed a Spoken Word Competition among secondary school students across Trinidad and Tobago. The finale of that came at the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts. It has already wrapped, very artistically, PTSC buses and have them going around in a bit of a caravan. The way the Ministry of Youth, Development and National Service has done it, quite successfully, attracting the attention of the younger people and they intend to develop on that going forward.

I had the benefit of attending an art gala where they displayed to those who are interested in art, and the development of art in Trinidad and Tobago, aspects of and matters pertaining to human trafficking as displayed by the artists. All of these and more, Mr. President, are some of our efforts to improve in terms of the aspect of prevention by way of our outreach and sensitization of the public and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

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

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, through you, can the hon. Minister indicate what has been the practical results of those initiatives manifested in a reduction in the scourge of this human trade over the last 24 months? Can the Minister share with us data or statistics?

**Mr. President:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. For one thing, I mentioned in my response a moment ago we have experienced, we have enjoyed, upgraded status. From where we were, we were ranked higher by the rating agency. The



reason for that is because we have improved our techniques in responding to the crime of trafficking in persons. I have just given some examples of that. So in very practical ways we are identifying more and more victims by widened access and screening. We have had many more persons arrested and charged and their matters are making their way through the courts. Therefore, in answer to my friend, in very practical ways, we are headed in the right direction and we assure him and the national community that we propose to continue. Trafficking in persons is an aspect of the burgeoning crime problem that we are experiencing in Trinidad and Tobago, and the region, I dare say, because we share our experiences with others in the region and we continue to fight the business of trafficking in persons in the ways I have just described. I thank you, Mr. President.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Prof. Hutchinson.

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

**Conditions at St. Ann's Hospital  
(Details of)**

**28. Sen. Prof. Gerard Hutchinson** asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Given the increased demand for mental health services and recent complaints by the Trinidad and Tobago National Nursing Association about conditions at the St. Ann's Hospital, can the Minister indicate:

- (i) what are the Government's plans, if any, to decentralise mental health care in this country;
- (ii) what is the timeline for the decentralisation of mental health care services; and
- (iii) what are the Government's plans for the St. Ann's Hospital in the context of the proposed decentralisation?

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

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

Mr. President. Mr. President, in September 2019, the Government approved the National Mental Health Policy 2019—2029, which outlined the plan for the decentralization of mental health services, which involves a progressive approach from institutionalization to community-based care as the cornerstone of the optimum mental health and mental health service delivery. This community-based approach places greater emphasis on self-care, enhanced community care and mental health services in primary care through our network of primary care and community mental health facilities. This would improve access to mental services so that people can receive mental health care closer to home.

In this regard, the current number of psychiatric beds utilized in our general hospitals is 51, including 19 at Eric Williams, 20 at San Fernando and 12 at Scarborough. Further, with the commissioning of our new hospitals, the plan for the decentralization of mental services has been accelerated towards the provision of an additional 50 beds to be operationalized by 2025. This will increase the total complement of beds for psychiatric services in our general hospitals to 101. The details of these additional beds are as follows: 24 at Port of Spain, the new Central Block currently under construction; 10 at the Arima General hospital; 10 at the new Sangre Grande Hospital Campus; and six at the Point Fortin General Hospital.

In September 2019, the decentralization of mental health services was prioritized through the approval of the National Mental Health Policy and is currently being implemented. It is material to note that the decentralization of mental health services is a progressive approach from institutionalization to community-based care. The ongoing process for decentralization is being operationalized with the Government's full recommendation that primary, secondary, and to some degree, tertiary care mental health services at St. Ann's, will continue to be needed for the foreseeable future. With the ongoing expansion

of primary and secondary care mental services, it is expected this effect will gradually reduce the need for and reliance on the St. Ann's Hospital over time. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, the time for question for oral answer has come to an end.

### **STATEMENT BY MINISTER**

#### **Shervon Peters and the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago (Final Report of the Investigative Team)**

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. I have been authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement on the Final Report of the Investigative Team appointed by the hon. Attorney General to enquire and report into the facts and circumstances surrounding *CV 2020-01243 Shervon Peters and The Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago*.

Mr. President, Members of this august Chamber will recall my previous remarks in this very Chamber on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, 2024, when I piloted and wound-up debate on The Miscellaneous Provisions (Judicial and Legal Service) Bill, 2024, which has now passed into law as Act No. 14 of 2024, The Miscellaneous Provisions (Judicial and Legal Service) Act, 2024.

The Act serves:

- a) to enable the fusion of the operations of the Civil Law Department of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs by renaming the legal offices therein;
- b) to provide for a Chambers Manager of the Civil Law Department;
- c) to give formally to the Registrar General's Department the status as a separate department of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs;

- d) to provide for the methodology and standards for recruitment of Children's Attorneys in the Civil Law Department; and
- e) to provide for the Intellectual Property Office created under Section 6 of the Patents Act, to recruit staff on contracts of up to five years (renewable).

The need for this legislative reform had its genesis in the 2006 and 2008 Reports of the Committee to enhance the delivery of legal services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago which made recommendations but were never implemented for the reorganization of the Civil Law Department of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. The more recent impetus for the efforts which promoted the urgent need for this long outstanding reorganization was the 2023 infamous incident of the missing file in *CV 2020- 01243 Shervon Peters & Others v The Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago*. In this matter, a judgment of the High Court delivered on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, 2023, since set aside, awarded damages and costs in excess of \$20,000,000 against the State of Trinidad and Tobago, consequent on the failure of the State to defend a claim of malicious prosecution brought by the claimants.

Mr. President, arising out of this avoidable debacle, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2023, as Attorney General, I formally appointed retired Mr. Justice of Appeal, Stanley John and Mrs. Pamela Schullera-Hinds, retired Head, Special Branch, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, to carry out an investigation within the parameters of prescribed terms of reference and with the mandate to report to me with recommendations within six months. This they did, with an interim report submitted on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2023, and the final report submitted on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2023.

I once again take the opportunity, formally to acknowledge my gratitude to them for their thoroughness and discerning quality of their report and

recommendations. This is the report, “The Investigative Team Report”, or report which I now lay before this Parliament. The investigative report is illuminating and speaks for itself. I therefore need say little about it. Members will understand after they have read the report why, until I had accomplished the passage of what is now Act 14 of 2024, I chose, deliberately, not to make this report public. There are disclosures in there which impact individuals. Flowing from this there emerged legal correspondence with the investigative team, which team had caused the Salmon letter correspondence to be issued.

**2.45 p.m.**

It was my grave concern that, had this report been made public before now, my Office may have become embroiled in litigation with the potential negatively to impact what I considered to be the pre-eminent public interest consideration: That of utilising the Investigative Team Report to introduce an enabling legislated platform for, and from which to commence and to engage, the process of meaningful transformative change which has been recommended since 2008. I was deeply concerned to leave little room for further stymieing that process, which is now enabled with Act No. 14 of 2024.

Mr. President, with the laying of this Investigative Team Report I am happy to acknowledge today that this engagement and change process is already underway. I and my team, under the leadership of the Attorney General’s consultant, Master Christie Ann Morris-Alleyne, retired Court Executive Administrator, in the consultations which have been engaged and which continue with and concerning attorneys and members of staff of the former Chief State Solicitor’s and Solicitor General’s Department now the fused Civil Law Department, with the Registrar General and the Registrar General’s Department, in respect of the addition of the Children’s Attorneys to the Civil Law Department

and, with the Controller of the Intellectual Property Office, greatly assisted by the change managers and interlocutors who were made available to us by the Judicial Education Institute of the Judiciary, the necessary change process, training and commitment to mission and purpose is now already underway.

I can assure you, Mr. President, and, through you, the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago, that the future quality of legal services to be continued to be delivered by the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs is very promising. I thank you.

**NATIONAL EMBLEMS OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (REGULATION)  
(AMDT.) BILL, 2025**

**The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell):** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I beg the move that:

A Bill to amend the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act, Chap. 19:04 to provide for a new Coat of Arms and other related matters, be now read a second time.

Mr. President, allow me at this time to take the opportunity, although late in the month, to wish you, your family, and all my colleagues in here a very happy New Year. Mr. President, this Bill, although short and simple, is a very significant and consequential piece of legislation. The Bill seeks to bring into force Government's position and intention to modify our country's Coat of Arms established in 1962 by replacing the representation of Columbus' ships with our national treasure, our very own national musical instrument, the steelpan.

For the benefit of *Hansard*, it is helpful to describe what a country's Coat of Arms is and its importance. A Coat of Arms is a symbol that represents the identity, history, values and sovereignty of a nation. It serves as an official emblem. It encapsulates the core identity of a country and it seeks to represent the nation's

culture, heritage, and values in a single cohesive image. In summary, a Coat of Arms holds great significance because it represents the soul of a country, weaving together its history, values, sovereignty, and unity in a powerful emblem that communicates pride, strength and identity. It is a cornerstone of national identity, a seal of authority, and its importance goes far beyond the mere decoration. It is a symbol of what the nation is, where it has come from, and where it hopes to go.

Trinidad and Tobago's Coat of Arms, or as it is also known as an achievement of arms, was designed by a committee formed in May of 1962 to select the symbols that would be our own, symbols that were representative of a new independent nation and its people ushering in the dawn of a new era. The committee included the late noteworthy master artist Carlyle Chang and Carnival designer the late George Bailey. In July of 1962, the Coats of Arms was approved by the College of Arms and came into force on Independence Day, August 31, 1962, along with our nation flag. In the words of then Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams in his broadcast to the nation on that day, he described the importance of our new national emblems. He said:

“Our National Flag belongs to all citizens. Our National Coat of Arms, with our National Birds inscribed therein, is the sacred trust of all our citizens. So it is today, please...let it always be so.”

Since the introduction of our national emblems, particularly over the five-year period from 1962—1967, the Cabinet managed and regulated the use and management of the country's national emblems until the coming into force of the parent legislation to this Bill in 1967, the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act. This National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act came into force in 1967 and sought to, among other things, vest the copyright in the national flag and Coat of Arms in the Government and to set

up a committee of standards to manage the use of the emblems, which includes making provisions for the granting and revocation of licences and to penalize the misuse, mutilation or defacing of our national emblems.

There is a Schedule to the Act with three Parts that properly describe the Coat of Arms in Part I, the National Flag in Part II, and the National Flower of Trinidad and Tobago in Part III. Mr. President, our main business here today is primarily to make adjustments to the Coat of Arms as described in Part I of the Schedule to the parent Act. So how did we get here, Mr. President? In August of 2024, hon. Prime Minister announced the Government's position that we would bring to Parliament a proposal to remove the depiction of three ships which represent the Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, on the national Coat of Arms, and to replace them with a depiction of our national musical instrument, the steelpan, along with its iconic playing sticks.

Government's proposals, as espoused by the hon. Prime Minister, were made in direct response to the loud and decades' long clarion call of our citizens clamouring for the removal of painful colonial vestiges of our past. There was and still is a loud cry for those in authority to decolonize national symbols and narratives, not to attempt to completely erase our history, notwithstanding how painful it might be, but to decolonize, to change those national symbols that serve to represent our national identity in this modern day. And what better way to achieve this replacement and renewal by removing and replacing Columbus' ships on our Coat of Arms and with a most important unifying symbol of our excellence, the steelpan. Placing the steelpan on our Coat of Arms can only be seen as a powerful way to honour Trinidad and Tobago's national identity and history.

Not that I have to remind us in this House, but as we know a steelpan is an indigenous invention of Trinidad and Tobago and the only percussive acoustic



musical instrument invented and developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and is a global symbol of our country's contribution to global excellence. While the depiction of Columbus' ships on the other hand reflects our colonial past tied to European exploration, colonization and domination, the depiction of the steelpan shifts our focus to our peoples' achievement, and our own pride as an independent nation. The steelpan is a symbol of the creativity and resilience of Trinbagonians, and of our experience and endeavour in creating beauty and excellence from adversity.

Furthermore, the steelpan is already a globally recognized emblem of Trinidad and Tobago and to include it on our Coat of Arms could only enhance our global brand and image, emphasizing the steelpan's cultural uniqueness, innovation, and its ability to symbolize unity across all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, the steelpan's depiction on the Coat of Arms remains relevant to our nation's present and future identity making it a more authentic representation of our people.

Since the announcement, Mr. President, this proposal has received widespread commentary and support in numerous editorials, articles and public contributions. For example, in an article from the daily *Express* by Khamarie Rodriguez, entitled: "SHIP-SHAPE: Historians welcome move to change coat of arms", on August 20, 2024, Dr. Claudius Fergus, Chairman of the National Committee on Reparations explained that:

"The placement of the Columbus ships was an error from the very beginning; it should never have been placed there,'..."

And:

"Its removal is really long overdue, and I commend the Government for taking action to remove and replace,'..."—it.

In an article by Rhondor Dowlat in the *Trinidad Guardian* on 24 August,

2024, Historian Bridget Brereton articulates that:

“The ships should never have been there in the first place but it was perhaps understandable in 1962. Now, in 2024, it’s clearly inappropriate. Replacing them with the steelpan, our national instrument, is a progressive change reflecting our times,’...”

Additionally, Ms. Marina Salandy-Brown, journalist cultural activist and founder and director of the Bocas Lit Fest explained in a *Newsday* article titled, “The coat of arms debate”, on the 8<sup>th</sup>, September, 2024, that the three ships as we know them today were not the creator’s, Mr. Chang’s, original design:

Mr. Chang originally had—“...a copy of a ship from the Genoese coat of arms (Columbus’s birthplace)...”—but only on registration with—“...the College of Arms in London...”—did they change Chang’s design to the Santa Maria. Thus, there are—“...three Santa Marias, not the Pinta, Nina and Santa Maria.

Swapping that historical inaccuracy out for the pan would be a more correct representation of an idea and much more meaningful, as it turns out, notwithstanding the symbolism of the arrival of the old world in the new.”

Shabaka Kambon, Caribbean Freedom Project Leader, the late historian Brinsley Samaroo, Reginald Dumas and others have long supported the removal of colonialist imagery in Trinidad and Tobago. For example, in 2020, the group petitioned for the removal of colonialist statues and monuments which was submitted to the national committee to review and report on the placement of statues, monuments, and other historical signage in Trinidad and Tobago.

Government’s proposal was formalized and agreed to by Cabinet on August 22, 2024. Cabinet also agreed that the Office of the Prime Minister engage the services of an individual to develop the design and make recommendations for the

consideration of Cabinet. Subsequently, local artist designer and jeweller, Ms. Gillian Bishop, was asked to prepare renderings of the Coat of Arms and to be then considered by the Cabinet and taken to Parliament. Ms. Bishop is a highly acclaimed artist with over 50 years' experience, part of which has been in creating national awards as she notably designed the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Medal for the Development of Women. Following the recommendations and design made by the designer, the consideration and endorsement of the steelpan's world governing body, Pan Trinbago, was sought on the said design and received in November of 2024.

So, Mr. President, I turn now to the Bill. The Bill before us today seeks to provide for a new Coat of Arms. It has five clauses. Clause 1 provides for the short title of the Bill. Clause 2 provides for the commencement of the Bill to be on such date as is fixed by the President by proclamation. So there is a proclamation clause.

**3.00 p.m.**

Clause 3 provides for the interpretation section and importantly introduces an interpretation for the former Coat of Arms, which refers to the present Coat of Arms, as we see above your head, which depicts the Columbus ships and this interpretation helps to give meaning to clause 5(2).

Clause 4 amends Part I of the Schedule of the parent Act to modify the Coat of Arms to remove Columbus' ships and replace them with the steelpan. So Part I is amended:

“...by deleting the words ‘Arms: Per chevron enhanced sable and gules a chevrenel enhanced argent between a chief two Hummingbirds respectant gold and in base three ships of the period of Christopher Columbus also gold the sails set proper.’ and substituting the words ‘Arms: Per chevron

enhanced sable and gules a chevrenel enhanced argent between a chief two Hummingbirds respectant gold and in base a gold Steelpan and its iconic two pan sticks, also gold.’.”

Clause 5 provides for savings and transitional arrangements. Clause 5(1) makes provisions for licences granted under the parent Act that are valid, prior to the commencement of this Bill, to continue once this Bill is approved and proclaimed, and these licences, Mr. President, are granted by the National Emblems Committee of Trinidad and Tobago. Clause 5(2) makes provision for a period of transition once this Bill is passed. It provides for the current Coat of Arms, the Coat of Arms that proceeds the passage of this Bill, to be used until January 01, 2026:

“...or such...date as the Minister may, by Order, prescribe.”

The operation of this clause is important to clarify misconceptions about the effect of this change, in terms of its cost, and that it is not intended or expected that citizens would be disrupted by this change.

So there is a time period to make the change. The Bill has a proclamation section, as stated before. So once this Bill is passed and assented to, what we expect to happen is that between the period of assent and proclamation, government Ministries, departments and agencies will plan and budget for implementing the changes to be made from the old Coat of Arms to the new modified Coat of Arms. Once this amendment Bill is proclaimed, the old Coat of Arms may be used until January 01, 2026, or until such date that the Minister may prescribe by Order. Therefore, on the face of it, the new Coat of Arms will take effect on January 01, 2026, and the Minister—here the Minister of National Security—may prescribe a further date until the old Coat of Arms may be used.

So, Mr. President, in the case, for example, of letterheads or other official

documents that are printed in government offices or by the Government Printery on a frequent basis, such as Cabinet Notes, bills, cheques, et cetera, or in the case of digital reproductions, such as on government websites, these changes can be effected immediately once this Bill is proclaimed, since it is just a matter of changing from the old to the new digital Coat of Arms for reproduction or for printing.

In the case where the Coat of Arms is in the form of a physical installation, such as you would find on the walls of government offices or on stickers, on vehicles, on signs, et cetera, Ministries, Departments and agencies can budget and plan in the coming months to implement the changes that need to be put into effect by January 01, 2026. The appropriate budgetary allocations can be made in the 2026 budget.

In the case of certain documents, such as ID cards, driver's licences, passports and other documents that have illegal effects, and there are issues that subsist for a number of years, these can be dealt with by the Minister of National Security by prescribing a further date, by Order, by which the former Coat of Arms would be valid and legal on those documents. This can be done to minimize any wasted cost or any disruption to citizens having to immediately go to these offices to return and update these documents. Birth certificates as well may continue to validly subsist with an extension of the period for its use as prescribed by Order.

In the case of legal tender, currency notes, et cetera, new notes are introduced into the financial system all the time and old notes are taken out. As the new notes are introduced, they will bear the new Coat of Arms, and the old notes with the old Coat of Arms may continue to be legal tender once such an Order is made under the Act. So to the question of whether there will be a cost to affect to the change to the Coat of Arms, the answer is, yes. There will be a cost to change

physical signage, stickers on vehicles. There will be a cost to issue the physical reproductions of the Coat of Arms, et cetera. But the idea that you would have to immediately change out the entire money supply to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars is simply false. There will be no undue heavy financial burden to the taxpayer once the transition is properly managed, once these measures are accepted and passed. There will be no need for any major disruptions to have citizens lining up in government offices, seeking to have their documents, such as passports and birth certificates, et cetera, changed.

Another criticism, Mr. President, is that the Government should only focus on pressing matters only and that this amendment to modify our Coat of Arms to remove the Columbus ships ought not to be the Government's priority at this time when there are more pressing matters that deserve attention. This is a common fallacious argument that is used in the public space all the time. The argument's premise wrongly presumes that the Government must only treat with pressing matters at any given time and further, that the Government does not have a wide sphere of responsibility that must be addressed all the time. It is true that there are pressing matters but it does not mean that the Government must not get on with other matters under its remit and responsibility, and that is what we are doing here today.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** There is another argument out there accepting that the Columbus ships should be removed, but suggesting that other musical instruments, representing all ethnicities, should also be included, such as the tassa drum. The tassa, like the multitude of African drums, were brought here by our ancestors and, in some cases, adapted and continued to be made and used in Trinidad and Tobago. But to be seduced by this argument would probably result in

all musical instruments brought here from Africa, India, China, the Middle East, et cetera, needing to be placed on the Coat of Arms. It is an argument that I simply cannot accept.

It is also an undisputed fact that the steelpan, the only percussive musical instrument developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was invented and developed here in Trinidad and Tobago and therefore, it is the prime and, in my view, the best symbol that ought to be included on our Coat of Arms.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** So, Mr. President, today is undoubtedly a landmark day for Trinidad and Tobago, a day of renewal and resolve. We have clearly identified where, as a country, we would like to project. So the time is now, in 2025, for us to take a truly proactive, strategic and meaningful measure necessary to enhance our national identity and brand. Given the remarkable strides in achievements we have made as a nation, it is time, and the time is upon us, to reinvigorate, to update the message we communicate, not only to the international community but also to ourselves, with a renewed energy, ingenuity and spirit.

Mr. President, what we are recreating here is a dynamic and powerful symbolism to last for generations of Trinbagonians to come, the continuation of a new national consciousness. With the passing of this amendment Bill, Trinidad and Tobago will imbue itself with a strengthened state dignity, building a stronger, more modern State that is able to secure itself in this modern and ever-changing world. Mr. President, I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

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

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

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. We are happy to participate in this debate that focuses on the Bill:

“...to amend the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act, Chap. 19:04 to provide for a new Coat of Arms and other related matters”.

Now, one of the concerns we have with this piece of legislation, and whilst I would want to say from the outset that, from a policy perspective, we would associate—we, on this side of the House, will identify and we all support the redesign of our Coat of Arms—and as you know, the focus of today’s debate is its insertion, that is, on our Coat of Arms of—as the hon. Minister said—the only high-pitched acoustic, it is very important to recognize that the steelpan, which represents the creativity, the resilience of our nation and population, became the only national musical instrument created in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by the ordinary people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister, in his presentation, paid attention and told us what this Coat of Arms represents, Mr. President. Not only did the Minister indicate that it represents the identity, history, values and sovereignty of our nation, but that it serves as the official emblem of this nation and encapsulates the core identity of this country’s culture, heritage and values in a single image, Mr. President, cohesive image.

**3.15 p.m.**

Mr. President, who can argue against that important depiction and definition of the Coat of Arms? But what we would like to say from the outset is that the Minister quoted the former Prime Minister, the first Prime Minister of our nation, Dr. Eric Williams, when he, in 1962, in a broadcast to the nation, stated and I quote:

The “...National Flag belongs to all our citizens.”

Mr. President, I want to emphasize again:



The "...National Flag belongs to all our citizens."

A-L-L.

"Our National Coat of Arms with the National Birds inscribed therein, is the sacred thrust of...citizens..."

He wanted for us to recognize it and that it should:

"...always be so."

Mr. President, I emphasize this statement to develop a particular perspective. The Coat of Arms belongs to all of the citizens of our nation. It does not belong to a section of our nation. Therefore, when we are going to redesign our Coat of Arms, it should be a process involving all of our citizens. And, therefore, why the rush? Why the haste to the point that last Monday, the Government brought a measure without any advance notice in the other place? We are fortunate that we have had a few days to research and to consult, but others were not that fortunate in the other place.

So, Mr. President, is this a gift at best or is it a trick at worst? What is it? Is it a gift or is it "ah mamaguy"? Is it a gift to the nation at best or is it an attempt to cover up the Government's attempt to grab land belonging to Pan Trinbago? What is it?

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** We are dealing with a very important and sacred matter affecting symbolically, representing the identity, the values of our nation as the Minister indicated earlier.

Mr. President, why would a Government choose to take this initiative but not bring it to the appropriate body to contemplate, to analyse, to engage, to consult with the population before it was in fact finally issued to the population?

You know what is even more interesting? I was looking at CNC3 an evening, I think it was two nights ago, CNC3, and there was a “The People’s Say” segment and they asked the people: Are you satisfied with the design of the new Coat of Arms? And, 100 per cent responded no.

**Sen. Lyder:** What?

**Sen. W. Mark:** No, they are not satisfied with the redesign of the Coat of Arms.

**Sen. Lyder:** No consultation.

**Hon. Senators:** *[Interruption]*

**Sen. W. Mark:** So I am going somewhere with this. I am going somewhere with this. We have the only musical instrument created in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century which we all identify with, we support, we have pride in and we are inserting it on our Coat of Arms. But you know where the announcement was made?

**Sen. Lyder:** Where? Tell us.

**Sen. W. Mark:** On the 18<sup>th</sup> of August at a special PNM convention, the Prime Minister of our nation makes this dramatic announcement at a partisan event. Mr. President, this is the Coat of Arms and it belongs to all of the citizens of our nation.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** But here it is we are going to redesign it, Mr. President. And you know how we know about this thing? The Prime Minister at the end of some conference of the PNM announces to the nation that he is going to get rid of three ships of Columbus. Now is that not a partisan approach? Is that not a partisan approach? That is the kind of conduct and behaviour that emperors and kings are made off.

**Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** It is like the General Council meeting.

**Sen. W. Mark:** It is like the General Council meeting. “Is like de General

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Council meeting, he say I want Stuart so I must have Stuart”.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** “Yuh understand and everybody have to cave in.”

**Hon. Senators:** Yes, yes.

**Sen. W. Mark:** “Yuh understand, Mr. President?” So I am not going there. I am not dealing with PNM business. I am dealing with the national business of Trinidad and Tobago and we are dealing with the Coat of Arms, Mr. President. That does not belong to the Balisier House, it belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** And, Mr. President, if we are going to make any changes to the Coat of Arms, it must have national approval. It must have national involvement. It must have national participation, not an emperor from on high announcing this to the nation “I am going to do this, I am going to do that” and next thing you know his minions are all over the place hustling and we are debating something not coming from the people but coming from the PNM.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** How that could be fair? How that could be right? But you know what? We are still supporting it because we are nationalists, we are patriots.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes, yes.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** And we recognize, Mr. President, the importance of this symbol, this instrument called the pan and where it has come from, where it is and where it is going. We support that.

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

**Sen. Mark:** But we are not surprised. This is the same Prime Minister who imposed himself on the President's House and "snatch ah merit list". Same man, same fella.

So, Mr. President, you know why I am emphasizing this point? I am emphasizing this point because when I looked—and I want you to follow me carefully. When we looked at the Act and this Act that we are amending is called the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act of 1967, amended twice in 1980 and as you recall, Mr. President—you were not in that Chair, you were Vice-President then—we removed the Chaconia flower to the double Chaconia and there was an amendment and that came as a result of an amendment to this Act that we are now debating. So there was a second amendment to this 1967 Act.

But, Mr. President, I would like you to turn to section 4 of this Act because nowhere did the Minister emphasize, he mentioned it, to be fair to him, he mentioned it, but nowhere did he emphasize the importance and significance of the role, functions and duties of the National Emblems Committee of Trinidad and Tobago. And, that Minister, our Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, is supposed to appoint a national emblems committee comprising of a Chairman, a deputy Chairman and members. I ask the Minister in his winding up, Minister, have you ever appointed in your term, the National Emblems Committee? I want to tell you, Mr. President, go to this Act—

**Sen. Mitchell:** Would the Member give way?

**Sen. W. Mark:** No, not now. Mr. President, I am on my legs, I am not wasting time. Section 4 of the Act, go to subsection (5) of the Act and go to item (c). Mr. President, this Government has hijacked the process and have us as slaves seeking

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to follow them. The Government is in breach of the law.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** I will tell you why they are in breach of the law and that is why I emphasize process. It is not to say that we are against inserting the steelpan and the two pan sticks on our Coat of Arms. “Nooo”, we are not against that. What we are against is the Government recklessly breaching the law and hear what the law says in section 4(5)(a)—no, subsection (5)(c) I should say, Mr. President:

“The Committee, with the approval of the Minister, may make such rules governing its proceedings as it...consider appropriate.”

Mr. President, let me ask the hon. Minister, have any regulations been made by this emblems Committee? So what governed the thinking of the Prime Minister when he made this announcement from on high?

**Sen. Lyder:** Elections.

**Sen. W. Mark:** What governed his thinking? Because there are no regulations apart from what the United National Congress in 2014, under the jurisdiction of the Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration, committed to the establishment of a 76-page document on guidelines on the use of our national emblems. We have it here.

**3.30 p.m.**

I cannot display it, but I have it on my desk, 76 pages. It tells you about how you go about using this thing. But the Government has not even mentioned that. But, Mr. President, listen to this in subsection (5); hear the language, Mr. President, hear the language:

“The Committee shall”—not may, you know, shall—“act in an advisory capacity to the Minister on such matters as the Minister may refer to it from

time to time, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing may advise the Minister on all or any of the following matters.”

Mr. President, (c) says:

“Any amendments which may be necessary to this Act or the Regulations made thereunder.”

Let me repeat this. The Minister has a committee. He sets up his Committee. We know the Committee is an advisory committee, Mr. President. But the Committee shall, on the recommendation or some things referred to them by the Minister, meet, deliberate, discuss, consult, and then report back to Minister. The Minister could accept, the Minister can reject the report or the advice. But we are dealing with an amendment to the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act of 1967. And, Mr. President, what do you see? You see in section 4(5)(c), that this Committee must consider, ought to consider:

“any amendments...may be necessary to this Act or the Regulations made thereunder.”

Mr. President, I ask you, through you, to the Minister, hon. President, did the hon. Minister refer this matter of an amendment to the law to the National Emblems Committee or did the Minister simply bypass a nonexistent Committee? Because he never appointed the Committee, and therefore, if he never appointed, that is the hon. Minister, Mr. President, there was no use, there was no need to refer this matter to the Committee. So this is the kind of conduct that we are dealing with today. Is this not in breach of the law? Is this not in breach of the law, when the law says that you must refer any amendments to the act to the National Emblems Committee? If you did, can the Minister produce the report? Where is the report?

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** And, Mr. President, you know why I am saying so? The reason why this thing is generating a lot of interest as we speak today, Mr. President, has to do with the fact that every single day there is raging controversy over this new Coat of Arms. The reason for this controversy is because of the inability and the failure—the manifest and utter failure of this Government to engage in consultation and meaningful participation of the population.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** How can you take all, all of the citizens' Coat of Arms and just not give them the opportunity to say what and how they want it redesigned, Mr. President? This could have been done through the National Emblems Committee of Trinidad and Tobago. And just as we have, Mr. President, the replacement of monuments, statues, and signage organized by a committee going all over the country, having meetings, so that people can come up and say, "Okay I want C.L.R James' monument here, a monument for C.L.R James." "We want a statue of George Padmore, Sylvester Williams," as the case may be. Mr. President, no opportunity for consultation. It was complete unilateralism. It was a one-man show.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** So, right now you have the citizens saying, listen, you see that thing that we redesigned—the Government—they "doh" like it, go back to the drawing board. That was unnecessary.

Now, Mr. President, I have in my hands here the Trinidad *Guardian* of Tuesday January 21<sup>st</sup>. The headline is:

"Graphic designers say go back to the drawing board."

Look it here. You have a “fella” called Darbeau, who is a graphic designer, and he is saying that this thing is not done properly. He is not criticizing. I want to make it very clear. I have the greatest respect for Sister Gillian Bishop, she is a master craft-woman. I have no problem with her. She is just a victim, a candidate of the emperor’s rush job. So she was rushed.

So, here it is, Mr. President, in the *Guardian* page 8, you have statements coming from two important graphic designers saying, “This thing is lazily done.” “It was a cut-and-paste job.” “It ugly.” “It does not represent what was the intention.” Now, I am not saying they are right or they are wrong. All I am saying is that these are the views that are being expressed. They are opinions, but, Mr. President, as they said here, both Mr. Darbeau and a next one called, I think, Mr. Kamron Julien, right? You know what they are saying, Mr. President? Had there been more consultation, had there been more collaboration, had there been more involvement and participation, we would have had a better product today. That is what they are saying.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** So, that is what is happening as we speak. But you know the PNM is on its dying bed, and as they kick to get some more oxygen in the system, Mr. President, they are grasping. They are grasping, Mr. President. So a individual just grasps and says, you know what is happening, “I am removing the three ships this evening,” and that is it. No thought, no process, no consultation, no reference, and everybody had to go along and say, “Ha-ha-ha, the emperor has spoken, let us go.” t hat is what went on, Mr. President.

We are arguing here today that the process that have us here today is flawed. The process is flawed. And that is why, Mr. President, I would not be surprised, in



the coming days and the coming weeks, we are going to have more and more negatives.

You know, Mr. President, pan men, I did my research, and they have been making representations to the PNM Government for over 30 years to place the pan— First they argued, Mr. President, put the pan like Grenada put their nutmeg on the national flag. And they were saying to the then Government, under Patrick Manning, and may his soul rest in peace, place the pan and the two pan sticks, Mr. President, on our national flag. You know what the response we got was?— and based on information we received from the pan men, the then Prime Minister reported, it cannot be done. It is not an easy task to do. He has to refer this to the National Emblems Committee. They have to meet and recommend, and that is why the process could not take place.

**Sen. Roberts:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. W. Mark:** No that was the then Prime Minister, Patrick Manning.

**Sen. Roberts:** “Orrrrrrrrr”

**Sen. W. Mark:** Mr. President, whether it is making our pan the national musical instrument, which we just passed into law a couple of weeks ago, whether it is the United Nations declaring August 11 as World Steelpan Day, whether it is what we are dealing with today; inserting the pan on our Coat of Arms, Mr. President, all these efforts, I am happy that they have arrived, but why they could not come earlier? Why in 1992, why have literature where the hon. Prime Minister then, Patrick Manning, may his soul rest in peace, addressed the nation on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August—and he was the first Prime Minister who declared the pan as the national musical instrument of Trinidad and Tobago; that was in 1992, Mr. President—and it took us, look how many years after, to get that on the Coat of Arms, why? Did

the PNM not recognize—because pan was there before PNM came, you know. Pan came in the 30s and 40s. PNM came in 1956. So they met pan here. They met pan here.

But, Mr. President, nobody never took the opportunity and the time off to give the kind of recognition that the pan deserved in Trinidad and Tobago by putting that instrument either on the flag, Mr. President, or now the Coat of Arms, but as we say, it is better late than never. But I want to say, do not just stop there. Make the pan and the movement more sustainable, more viable, and more financially independent.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** I “doh” want us stop, Mr. President, simply by putting the pan and two sticks on the Coat of Arms. I “doh” know if I heard correctly, and the Minister in his windup could tell us, the building that you are going to put Pan Trinbago in, did you tell this Parliament that Pan Trinbago would not be able to collect rent from this premises for 50 years. Tell me that when you are winding-up.

What I am asking, Mr. President, when the United National Congress occupied the Office from '95 to 2001, and then from 2010 to 2015, we ensured that we took all the necessary measures and initiatives to make sure that the steel band movement, Pan Trinbago, and all these pan men and women in this country, Mr. President, had the capacity and the ability to exercise financial sustainability and independence. And how did we do that, Mr. President, to ensure that pan remains the first national of Trinidad and Tobago? Pan is the first national of Trinidad and Tobago. Henry Harper told us that.

Mr. President, we allow all the major interest groups involved in the national festival called Carnival, whether it is Mas, whether it is pan, or Kaiso, to take

charge of all their gate receipts. That is the first time that ever happened. They had the power to organize the pan. They had the power to organize the Mas and they had the power to organize the Kaiso, and, Mr. President, they had the power to collect their gate receipts. And, over a period of time they have become more independent and as soon as the PNM arrived on the compound, they took away that independence, and they went back, and they took all of the gate receipts.

**3.45 p.m.**

**Sen. Mitchell:** Mr. President, I am sorry to disturb in full flight, but 46(1) please, we are on the Coat of Arms, the amendment Bill.

**Mr. President:** Okay. So, two things. One, Sen. Mark you have five more minutes in your contribution, and two, in that five minutes, I will invite you now to start to wrap up. You have made your points, and you can bring it all together, and summarize.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Mr. President, let me just—before I summarize. Look at the disrespect this Government has for the Parliament. We represent the citizens, you know, in the Parliament, we are appointed, the other House is elected. We could not be here if we were not, and our colleagues were not elected. So, we represent the people.

Mr. President, in this piece of legislation that is before us, the Minister just told us in clause 5(2), he wants the power to prescribe by order whether the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2026 would hold or not, but he wants that without any supervision by this Body called the Parliament. I would like the hon. Minister to consider putting into this possible clause, the order, yes, but subject to an affirmative resolution of the Parliament. So, that the Parliament could have some influence over this process. The Minister does not own Parliament, the Minister does not own the Coat of

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Arms it belongs to all of us, and let us be involved in this exercise. Mr. President, they have already made a fundamental error, do not continue it. Let us all be involved.

So, Mr. President, let me summarize briefly. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has hijacked and grabbed the 12 acres of land belonging to Pan Trinbago, in Trincity—

**Hon. Senator:** They are trying to cover it now.

**Sen. W. Mark:**—that they have a deed for, that they paid for, have the receipt to show they paid \$99 for 99 years in rent, and you know what, they want to put them on Wrightson Road, and they want to house, where? NCC there. Yeah, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. In Trincity where they have 12 acres of land, they have their own gas station, their own hotel and conference centre. They would have had a chrome factory and manufacturing plant to produce pan, and they took all that away. This Government does not like pan, they mamaguy pan.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** If you like pan, you will give the 12 acres of land to Pan Trinbago, and let Pan Trinbago have economic and financial independence. That is what we should be fighting for.

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** So, Mr. President, in a word let me just tighten this summary. All we are saying, Government, get this thing right. You needed to have consultation, you failed to have consultation. You have violated the law that governs national emblems. We want you to apologize to the country for breaching the law, and we want you to go back to the drawing board, and look at this thing carefully. We are

supporting it, you know, we are supporting it, Mr. President, but the Government must get its act right.

So, on behalf of the United National Congress, the incoming Government, let me make it very clear, we are in support of the insertion of our pan with the two pan sticks on our Coat of Arms. We are saying that the Government process is flawed, we are saying that the Government should have some more consultation, and they should meet with the various stakeholders, and the graphic designers, and all these people who are involved in this thing, so that we can have a better product at the end of the day. In closing, if we are talking about decolonization, and we are talking about colonialism, why are you keeping the shield and the helmet of the Queen?

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** You have the Queen on the Coat of Arms shield, and you have the Queen's helmet, but you are telling Trinidad and Tobago you want to decolonize, and you want to get rid of colonialism. I am saying, that is poppycock. They are not serious, they are joking, it is a half-done job just to mamaguy the people because the election must begin by August of 2025.

So, Mr. President, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this matter, and to let the Government know we have offered constructive criticisms. We would, like you, want to promote pan. We, like you, love pan. We, like you, have pride in the national instrument but we say, "get it right". Get it right, and get the people involved in whatever decision-making you are involved in. Thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Paul Richards.

**Sen. Dr. Paul Richards:** Good afternoon colleagues, and happy New Year. It is the first sitting for 2025, so I wish you all the best of health, happiness, safety, and prosperity. It will also be remiss of me not to take a couple of moments to extend, because this is the first sitting of the year, deepest condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of the late MP Lisa Morris-Julian who would have passed away tragically with her two children on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December. That situation really plunged the nation into mourning. So, I want to take the opportunity to extend my condolences to her family, her friends, and her colleagues. In all my interactions with the late MP, she was the personification of love, generosity, and service, and of course, we all continue mourning her loss.

Mr. President, it is not lost on me, I think that this is the first debate of 2025, and it involves a significant Bill. It may seem simple to some but it is not simple at all because as Sen. Mark indicated, it involves, and also, hon. Minister, through you, a significant change to our Coat of Arms, which is a significant piece of iconography in Trinidad and Tobago. It is interesting that while preparing for this debate, eagerly, I must admit, I came across a statement, a line from the author who wrote a book called *My Place Among Them*, and the line states: “History belongs to those who write it”, by J. Stanion. I think it is an important and poignant point to be made because we are at this point in our young Republic in a different phase to where we were in the 1960s, 1950s, and 1970s to where we are today, and where we hope to be. So, I think it is an opportune time for us to start looking at writing our history, a history that represents us more profoundly now, and more appropriately now.

Nothing happens in Trinidad and Tobago this significantly without fervent debate, and that is a good thing, it is not a bad thing. Very often you see people in

social media, in particular, and electronic media, and the newspapers with the letters to the editor with strong debate because as the hon. Minister indicated in his presentation piloting the Bill, and Sen. Mark also, this Coat of Arms, National Flag emblem belongs to all of us. So, we all have passionate views on it, and we should, because that is how we are in Trinidad and Tobago, we are passionate about these things, and it is important that we all understand what it means to us, and that is why we are passionate about it. So, it is much more significant than just removing, to me, three ships, and inserting the national instrument, the steelpan. It is a lot deeper than that for me. I agree with Sen. Mark when he says—because clearly, he indicated his support for the move, that process is also important. Process is also important as in many cases if not all, as outcome, because very often if the process is flawed the outcome can be questioned, and if there is a particular process engaged there is a lot less propensity or potential for the level of remonstrations you may see, in some cases.

Now, it is interesting when I was walking, coming to the Parliament today, and a young journalist stopped me doing her job, and asked me a question. Of course, she clearly did her research, she knew what was being debated today. So, she asked me two questions, the second does not relate to this debate today. The question was quite interestingly phrased. The question was, “Are you underwhelmed by the new Coat of Arms?”

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** So, I paused, I said okay. I said, “I ain’t no lawyer, could be a little bush lawyer sometimes”. I have been in the media for quite a while, and in this profession that is particularly a leading question. The question had inserted in it a sort of pejorative. She did not ask me what I felt about the new Coat of Arms.

She said, “Are you underwhelmed by it?”, which means the story almost had already been written, you know. Be it my fortunate years of media experience, I said, “What do you mean by underwhelmed?” I said, “First of all, I am not underwhelmed at all”. She said, “People have been saying....” I said, “Who people, who are these people you speak about”, and that they thought it should have been X and Y. I said, “Let me tell you something, I am not underwhelmed, it is intended to represent the steelpan, to me it represents the steelpan.” If I look at it I see a steelpan. There will be debate as to whether it would be silver, gold, pink, green, yellow, red, or blue, that is the nature of Trinidad and Tobago but it represents a steelpan, and to me, that is what I was looking for. It is artistic, and art is always going to be received or interpreted subjectively depending on who is viewing it. As they say, “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder”.

So, there is always going to be, some will love it, some will not like it, you understand, and that is why I think Sen. Mark’s point about process is very important. Because, sometimes if the process is done in a particular way it has a tendency to assuage to some effect, the level of remonstrance that could potentially come about. But I, to be very honest, I am very, very happy, and proud to one, wear the pan on my lapel, only subordinate to the national flag. And I would tell you, I went recently to a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in Australia. I had the honour to go and represent the country with the team, and everywhere we went, the delegation, people were begging me for this. Begging me for this, fortunately, I was generously given by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts a lot, about 10 of them, so I had enough to give out but they were so impressed. “What is that?” “That is our national instrument.” I was so proud to say that, and genuinely everywhere we went people were asking



all of us for this symbol, because it so struck them as artistically beautiful. They did not ask if it was supposed to be gold or silver, pink, red or green, they said, “We like how it looks, and we like how it looks on your lapel”. So, to me, it is a striking bit of iconography that we should all be proud of whether people think it should be X and Y, the grooves should be deeper in the emblem, that is for people’s interpretation of art.

So, what is a coat of arms? The concept of coat of arms, the principal part of a system of hereditary symbols dating back to early Medieval Europe used primarily to establish identity in battle. So, the hon. Minister identified that it was a measure of identification. It identified family, identity, descent, adoption, alliance, property ownership, and eventually in some instances, profession or nobility. So, it is a very important bit of symbolism, particularly in those war times when the warring factions were coming from far and they had these hoists. They would see well, that is France, and that is England, to identify the country or identify the family very clearly which it does for Trinidad and Tobago.

So, some of the purists in the national debate on this move to replace the three ships with the national pan were saying well, we are erasing our history, and it was part of our history. Well, I will tell you in my research that there have been examples of coat of arms changes in many different countries. The French did it, the English did it in the Elizabethan era. The Tudor dynasty at the beginning of the English Renaissance, the Coat of Arms during this time often changed motifs to represent changes in family structure in some instances, some family members whose representation with the flag had been demoted, would have been taken off. So, changes to coat of arms are not exclusive to Trinidad and Tobago, nor this century.

Coats of arms were also adapted for the practical purposes of identifying those who were at higher levels in warfare also.

**4.00 p.m.**

So I asked a question for the purists. While the ships at that time—and we have had some quite interesting—I learned quite a bit of history that I did not realize. And that is why I started with a quote from Minister Mitchell's presentation, that Prof. Brereton, Richard Brereton, indicated that we grew up in history classes and social studies—[*Inaudible*—the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria on the Coat of Arms, only to hear that it was just three replicas of the Santa Maria. Bad history. Who wrote it, wrote it for a reason, with their objective. You understand?

So it may have represented to some, who we were then, a colony, but is it a representation of who we are now, and more importantly, how we want the world to see us? Who we want to be in 100 years? To me, those are the important questions. And this is not to diminish Sen. Mark's contribution about process in any way—because I think it is an important point—but I think the bigger picture is about the pan on the Coat of Arms. That is the big picture.

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** That is what this debate, to me, is about. This is what this debate is intending to do for Trinidadians and Tobagonians in the context of the global space. I think this is why this is a red-letter day in Trinidad and Tobago. I think it is also interesting that it is the first debate of 2025, so it tells us a lot about where we may be going in the future. And, as I said before, it has to represent who we are now.

For example, in terms of representation, do you think Lord Harris represents

Trinidad and Tobago better than Brian Lara today?

**Sen. Mitchell:** No.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Do you think Lord Woodford represents Trinidad and Tobago better than Lloyd Best?

**Sen. Mitchell:** No.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Do you think Columbus—Christopher Columbus represents Trinidad and Tobago better than C.L.R. James? The answers are as clear as red, white and black. The answers are no.

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** We have to start to write our history, and for the purists who say, “We are erasing our historical antecedents,” that is not so. What? We are burning the history books? We are deleting the hard drives? We are disconnecting from the cloud? No. The history will always be there. The history is living, and breathing, and evolving. This is just an important part of the evolution of the history of Trinidad and Tobago that we are getting the honour to rewrite now, and that is very pivotal and critical.

We have to understand what this means because we are now inserting a representation of who we are for generations to come for them to feel proud, because the steelpan is a musical instrument, yes, but it is also a representation, a symbol of resilience, because of where it came from, a symbol of creativity and a symbol of innovation that can be used to take us through dark times like from whence it came, to a brighter future, because of what it represents. We may think it is just about music, but it is not, and I will give you an example of why it is not just about music. It means, or should mean, a lot more to Trinidad and Tobago.

I take the time when I say this to commend—because it is a poignant

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example of what the steelpan means to us—when young Joshua Regrello, a couple of weeks ago, used the steelpan in an attempt to break a world record, Guinness World Records, and brought this country together for 30-something hours-plus, forgetting all the murders, forgetting the mayhem, forgetting the uncertainty, and giving us a moment of joy and pride. That is the power of the steelpan.

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** That is the power of how the steelpan can turn the tide, because he is a young man, and that sort of example can translate to other young people and the future of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why this debate and this move is so important. It is not just about changing an icon on a Coat of Arms, it is much bigger than that. We have to understand our responsibility in that because we have to give them hope. The steelpan is a symbol of hope, and change, and upliftment, because there was a time steel band men and women were considered outlaws—

**Hon. Senators:** Outcasts.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:**—outcasts, bandits —

**Sen. Vieira SC:** Renegades and desperadoes.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:**—renegades and desperadoes. Hear the names, named after outlaws in movies.

**Sen. Teemal:** Invaders.

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Invaders. And you could not tell your mother or your father in the 70s you were going to playing a steelpan, “yuh mad?” You want to bring the family to shame? Now look at Panorama. Look at “Saturday gone” with the preliminaries, young people engaged positively, playing music mostly by ear because of their innate talent, recreating any kind of music around the world.

So I make the point to say that this is not just about—only about, I should say, removing one symbol and putting another one. It is a lot more than that when we think about it. And yes, Christopher Columbus has played a significant part in our history, and we will not lose that part because we are doing this, but change is something we have done before. The capital of Trinidad and Tobago was San José of Oruña, now St. Joseph. You know? It was the capital in 1784, and the capital is now Port of Spain. Independence Square was Marine Square. So change is inevitable as a country evolves, is what I am saying.

So I did not intend to be long. What I will add, in closing, is that I think Sen. Mark's point also—and I heard it in the other place—about taking this further is very important, because I still cannot, for the life of me, understand why we have not been able to monetize this on a larger scale, globally; still cannot understand that. It is revered around the world as the invention of the only musical instrument in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is played by a plethora of musical artistes, so much so that we had another controversy about who owns the patent for it. There are countries in the world that have large-scale pan factories and making money from it, but for some reason, we have not been able to turn pan or, even wider, our cultural expressions, into a more sustainable energy sector-type contributor to GDP, when oil and gas are finite, but creativity is not. To me, that is another aspect of this that I hope the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts can address in this winding up. Because, to me, that is where the strategic vision comes in. Yes, you are putting it on a Coat of Arms, but then what next?

I also congratulate Mrs. Beverly Ramsey-Moore for revolutionizing and transforming Pan Trinbago now—

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:**—because it was not always what it is now. Sometimes it takes a woman to do a man's job.

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

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** Yes, Minister West, you are happy with that one—or what some men could not seem to accomplish, because it seems to have now become a stabilized organization, garnering respect of the corporate sector consistently, and it seems to have been growing from strength to strength. I am sure that in a lot of these initiatives, including pan being legally made the national instrument in law, and this move to put the steelpan on the Coat of Arms, have not been without the interactions with Mrs. Ramsey-Moore and her team. So I congratulate them and their continued work in moving the pan—moving forward through Pan Trinbago.

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

**Sen. Dr. P. Richards:** But I think a lot more strategic thinking needs to be done to maximize the pan, in addition to what I have outlined before, in positioning us, Trinidad and Tobago, as the mecca of creativity, and using the pan in a way that is not only sustainable, locally, but becomes a significant contributor to GDP. Because if I sit and try to do a business plan, a million ideas come into my head for the next hundred years. It is not only about a pan factory, it is about taking the pan around the world and establishing it as the preferred instrument for musicians, orchestras around the world, so that that iconography and that representation of Trinidad and Tobago is burnt into the consciousness of the globe, and we can monetize it sustainably.

So, in closing, Mr. President, through you, I congratulate the Government for this move. The pan is the symbol of power, of pride, the power of innovation,

creativity, the power of resilience and innovation, and it is the power of what the future of Trinidad and Tobago can hold for, particularly, the young generations who are in need of hope. So I fully endorse this move, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Vieira.

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

**Sen. Anthony Vieira SC:** Thank you, Mr. President. While I intend to give the subject matter of this debate earnest and responsible consideration, let me say from the outset that in this period of uncertainty, as we face daunting times, it seems to me that the Senate could and should be making better use of the limited parliamentary time we have left. Not to diminish the importance and the value of this debate, but in the grand scheme of things, this legislation strikes me as something nice to have, rather than as something urgent and necessary.

One feels as though we are just rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*, indifferent or oblivious to what lies ahead. I do not agree with the mover of the Bill's characterization. To suggest Government cannot treat with matters which are not pressing is a fallacious argument. A fallacious argument is based on faulty reasoning or is intentionally misleading. No one is saying that Government cannot treat with non-pressing matters, but we are well within our rights to question priorities. I do not want to say "misplaced priorities", but that is the feeling I have. So having gotten that off my chest, let me now turn to the subject at hand.

The Senate is a place of deliberation, and as we weigh the importance and usefulness of the Coat of Arms, I thought it might be helpful to look at the matter through the lens of an intellectual property lawyer, especially in relation to

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trademarks. Now, IP lawyers would tell you that trademarks qualify as among a company's most valuable assets, in that, they offer instant recognition of an organization's identity, value and products. Trademarking words and symbols is an important step for promoting and protecting identity in the commercial sphere, whether locally or internationally. So in a sense, our Coat of Arms, like a trademark, it represents who we are. However, instead of representing a company or a brand, it represents a nation. Similar to trademarks, our Coat of Arms is legally protected from misuse to preserve its integrity and prevent unauthorized exploitation.

Under section 6 of the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act:

“Any person who—”

—does not have:

“(a)...a valid and subsisting licence...under this Act—

(i) uses or displays...

(ii) ...the Coat of Arms, or any arms so nearly resembling...”—it—

“...in connection with the carrying on of any business, trade, profession, or calling...”

—commits an offence and:

“...is liable...”— to—“...conviction...”

Both the Coat of Arms and trademarks serve as instruments of recognition and to convey identity, whether in a legal, commercial or diplomatic context. However, while our Coat of Arms may share some conceptual similarities with trademarks, the Coat of Arms goes even further in terms of significance and



importance, because a country's Coat of Arms holds great symbolic and historical significance, serving as a visual representation of its heritage, its values and its identity.

**4.15 p.m.**

While a trademark is primarily a tool to protect intellectual property and brand identity in the market, our Coat of Arms symbolizes national sovereignty and heritage. So while trademarks are governed by IP laws and can be owned by entities and individuals, the country's Coat of Arms is tied to statehood and governed by the National Emblems Legislation or heraldic laws.

Most importantly, the Coat of Arms carries deep historical and cultural meaning, rooted in traditions, while trademarks are typically modern creations, essentially designed for commerce. So in essence, a country's coat of arms can be likened to a trademark in terms of its function as a symbol of identity and recognition, but the purpose and significance of our Coat of Arms goes far beyond the commercial realm in that it represents—as the hon. Minister said—the soul of the Nation.

Now, before one is accused of waxing sentimental or getting overly excited over what may be deprecated as a relic from a bygone era, or the colonial vestige of certain English or European families, let me point out that whilst its origins are rooted in the medieval heraldry, coats of arms and armorial bearings continue to hold relevance in modern context for several reasons. For one thing, they are a symbol of continuity and heritage. They link the present to a country's history serving as a visual narrative of its evolution.

This continuity is significant in fostering national identity and pride. For example, countries like Canada and South Africa have updated their coats of arms

to reflect inclusive and contemporary values while maintaining ties to the past. And, many of our leading institutions take pride in highlighting their coats of arms and their armorial bearings, for example, UWI.

UWI has a coat of arms, and that is a single image that represents the entire university, the crest having a brown pelican with fishes along the coast of all Caribbean countries. The coat of arms for the Hugh Wooding Law School includes a Magnificent Frigatebird, a man, a woman, a gold disk with star-apple leaves and a wreath of gold and red. Angostura Bitters features the royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom as it has held a royal warrant of appointment since 1912.

There is also the matter of diplomatic and legal significance. Coats of Arms as you have heard, appear on our official Government seals, on our currency, on passports, and other legal documents, underscoring their role in statehood and sovereignty. Coats of arms are often used in international relations.

So for these reasons, I would say that the Coat of Arms can be considered as a public good providing shared benefits to all citizens and playing an essential role in our national identity. And, while it may not be as tangible as other public goods, its symbolic significance makes it a vital and enduring aspect of this country's heritage.

That is why I was so disappointed in the way the public first learned about the proposed change to our Coat of Arms. The announcement did not come as a recommendation from the Trinidad and Tobago National Emblems Committee, constituted under section 45 of the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act. It did not come with the gravitas of an official announcement, emanating from the hallowed walls of this Parliament or from the Prime Minister's

residence and Diplomatic Centre, and it did not come on an occasion of national significance such as Independence Day or Republic Day.

This symbol representing the collective identity of our nation came at a special convention of the PNM when the hon. Prime Minister avowed his intention to make the change. Now I have no issue with the fact that the Government has a positive role to play in the nation's life, and as it is happening now, can make amendments to the National Emblems Legislation, but I agree with Sen. Mark. The manner in which the proposed change to the Coat of Arms was brought to the nation's attention was in my view, clumsy, inappropriate, and disappointing.

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

**Sen. A. Vieira SC:** When the hon. Prime Minister spoke, one got the impression that he had unilaterally made the decision to change the Coat of Arms. It seemed partisan and it came across as high-handed and didactic. For the record, I have no issue replacing the three ships with the steelpan. In fact, I think it is an improvement.

As far as I am concerned, those three vessels are of little value and they occasion no sense of pride. Giving a choice on the one hand between commemorating ships under the command of a navigator who made geographical errors, who vastly underestimated the earth's circumference, who mistakenly identified the Americas as Asia, and who ultimately brought carnage, destruction, disease and genocide to the New World, or on the other hand, celebrating a musical instrument which transcends race, culture, class, religion, and politics; the pan wins hands down.

The steelpan is unique to us; a symbol of who we are as a people, our ingenuity and resilience. The steelpan can be a unifying symbol and source of

pride especially as portrayed by Gillian Bishop, one of the country's finest artists. But, the rationale for the proposed change of the Coat of Arms when the hon. Prime Minister spoke at that PNM special convention, left me uninspired, and was woefully inaccurate in terms of history.

For starters, it was an opportunity to correct a historical error, commonly thought in our schools, on the names of those three ships. Now everybody knows the old ditty that in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue, but he did not get here in 1492, he got here in 1498. Everybody knows that on that first voyage, Columbus commanded three ships: the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. But less well known, however, is that on his third voyage in 1498, when he supposedly discovered Trinidad, he commanded a different fleet using different ships.

I am going to come back with this point but as an aside, I do not like saying that Columbus discovered this island as it was already inhabited when he stumbled on it. In fact, in his logs, Columbus notes the presence of the Arawaks. He describes our First People as:

“...very graceful, in form, tall and lithe in their movements and wear their hair very long and smooth.”

He recorded having exchanged trinkets and tools with them for food and seeing houses on the island, presumably in Carib and Arawak villages, and that this country was as beautiful and as fresh and green as the garden of Valencia in the month of March, and that the islanders told them about a vast land southward. So Columbus did not discover Trinidad. He may have renamed it, but he did not discover as it was already a civilization in residence.

Be that as it may, Columbus departed Spain on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, 1498 with six ships on his third voyage. He then split the fleet, three making for Hispaniola

while aiming the other three southward. When Columbus reached Trinidad on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1498, he was using the Santa Maria de Guia, the Castilla and the Gorda.

Those are the three ships that we should be naming, when we describe the current Coat of Arms. So regrettably, instead of using the opportunity to rectify the error, the hon. Prime Minister compounded it. And, I notice it is also compounded in our explanatory note, our—what they call it?

**Hon. Senator:** Bill Essentials.

**Sen. A. Vieira SC:** The Bill Essentials. Because the Prime Minister said in the *Trinidad Express*, dated 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2024, insisting that:

“...we then over six-month period will replace Columbus’ three ships, The Santa Maria, the Pinta, and the Niña, with the steelpan...”

So that was an opportunity lost.

The other thing I did not care for was the alienating nature of some of the remarks. Now as a backdrop to this comment that I am about to make, let me declare that one of the things that I most love about this country is what many Americans voted against in their last election. As pundits have surmised in that election, there was a groundswell to get rid of undocumented Africans, South and Central Americans, Asians, and West Indian immigrants. As some have categorized it, the purpose of these mass deportations deemed to make America white again, assuming it was ever white to begin with, but I digress.

The point being that one of the things that I most love about this beautiful country of ours is its diversity. The fact that we can share the same space peacefully and gracefully regardless of religion or whether one has European, African, East Indian, Chinese, or Middle Eastern roots. I love the energy and the vibrancy that this diversity brings to our cuisine, our music, and our sports. I love

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the variety of colours, shapes, and faces of our people. Something we often take for granted but which is really special and unique, is that we have national holidays to celebrate Christmas, Easter, Eid, Divali and our own indigenous Spiritual Baptist/Shouter Liberation Day, and First Peoples Day.

These celebrations are not conducted in silos. They encompass the whole national psyche and they enjoy full participation. So as such, it is disappointing to hear that we are on our way to removing the colonial vestiges. All this rhetoric about doing away with the last vestiges of colonialism fails to impress me, while we retain the Privy Council, the most colonial of intuitions.

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

**Sen. A. Vieira SC:** It is like renaming the Beetham Estate or shantytown to Beetham Gardens without actually planting gardens or doing anything for the residents.

**Ms. John:** [*Inaudible*]—Garden.

**Sen. A. Vieira SC:** All this talk about the Coat of Arms doing away with the vestiges of colonialism is Robber Talk. Empty platitudes, cosmetics rather than substantial. Not so much a case of putting old wine in new bottles, but more that like changing the labels on the bottles. There is also a danger when one starts talking and using all this anti-colonial rhetoric. I am confident that when the hon. Prime Minister and the mover of the Bill uttered those words, he never intended to suggest that citizens of English and European descent no longer have relevance or a place in our society. Now that would contradict the notion that here every creed and race has an equal place. Unfortunately, for those who do not know better, those words could give the wrong impression

**4.30 p.m.**

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

I much prefer when Dr. Eric Williams advised that we build the nation of Trinidad and Tobago, bringing in all the races, acknowledging their contributions. In a multi-ethnic and multi-racial society as ours, language is important. Leaders in such societies wield significant influence, and their words can either unify or alienate, and that is why careful and inclusive communication is critical, especially regarding sensitive historical and cultural issues. Statements like “getting rid of the last vestiges of colonialism” may resonate with those who experienced or feel strongly about the harms of colonialism, but they might inadvertently alienate citizens of English and European descent. Such rhetoric can unintentionally create divisions by framing history in terms of us versus them, even if that is not the intent.

As an amalgam of races, religions and cultures, with each and every one making their own special contribution, I would have preferred a focus on shared values, goals and a collective vision for the future, fostering a sense of unity.

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

**Sen. A. Vieira SC:** Now do not get me wrong. Do not get me wrong. I am not for a moment suggesting or trying to rewrite history, or to whitewash history. While addressing historical injustices is essential, framing the conversation in a way that emphasizes healing and mutual respect, I think is a lot more productive than invoking divisive language.

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

**Sen. A. Vieira SC:** To my way of thinking, reconciliation is best achieved through inclusivity rather than exclusionary rhetoric. Suffice to say that besides the inappropriate circumstances, historical errors and clumsy language used when

announcing the proposed change to the country's Coat of Arms, there was a missed opportunity to acknowledge the things that bind us together as a nation, to focus on shared aspirations, such as economic growth, social cohesion or innovation, things that transcend historical divides. There was a missed opportunity to use the proposed change to the Coat of Arms as a vehicle towards instilling pride, unity and shared purpose, to celebrate being together.

Recognizing the impacts of colonialism can be done in a way that invites all citizens to reflect on and to contribute to a better future. For example, one could have said, "We honour the lessons of history, while committing to a future that celebrates the richness of our diversity." That would have been perfect. That would have been the perfect segue for introducing the proposed change to our Coat of Arms, a visual symbol that unifies, that unites rather than divides citizens.

Be that as it may, I am willing to support the proposed changes to the Coat of Arms. As was intimated in my contribution when making the steel pan our national instrument—designating the steel pan as our national instrument helps promote and preserve our cultural heritage and identity as a nation. It is a symbol of national pride, reflecting our history tradition and artistic achievements. So as such, the pan earns a right of place in our Coat of Arms, a mosaic of our old self and new self.

Revision of the law must always be considered through calm discussion. My hope is that this debate will help citizens appreciate the value of our Coat of Arms and the intended benefits by the proposed change. Now you may not see it, but today, I am wearing on my lapel a replica of the current Coat of Arms, soon to be decommissioned.



It is my hope that the powers that be will make the updated, improved version readily available in different mediums, so that citizens can avail themselves of this unifying symbol. My hope is that Parliament's imprimatur will lift the proposed change from poor public relation musings to the status of collective ownership. All of us should take pride in our Coat of Arms as it depicts who we are and what makes us special. Who we but the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. Our Coat of Arms is a visual representation of who we are as a nation. In conclusion, I will support this legislation, there is nothing wrong with it. We should not let poor public relations torpedo a good idea. I thank you.

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

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Hislop.

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

**Sen. Lawrence Hislop:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I deem it a real honour and privilege today to be able to contribute to what I would consider a landmark, groundbreaking, historical piece of legislation, the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) (Amdt.) Bill, 2025.

Mr. Vice-President, I do not intend to be long because this is a piece of legislation that I believe would receive unanimous support in this Chamber today, because to vote otherwise or to vote against a piece of legislation as this is to question your Trinbagonianness, is to question whether this is ours. I want to treat with a couple things that were raised by both Sen. Mark and Sen. Vieira, but I want to compliment Sen. Dr. Paul Richards on a very measured, very sober contribution, one that spoke—

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

**Sen. L. Hislop:** —to why we are here and what this piece of legislation is about. I heard Sen. Mark speaking to the fact that the Prime Minister raised this issue at a PNM special convention. And the reality of that, Mr. Vice-President, is that special convention was an avenue for the membership of the party, who are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, to share their perspective on what was taking place at that time, the revisit or the review of the of the nation's Constitution. It has been customary or historically represented that the People's National Movement has had the ability over the years, to use conventions as an avenue of bringing its policy to the fore, having a conversation with its membership and not only the membership, but a conversation with the nation. And, the history has shown that party policy has shaped government policy, because it is at the party level that the policies that are put forward by the Government are discussed and ventilated and robustly debated as well, and then brought to the population.

So where the Prime Minister made the announcement was not really the issue. The issue was not really an issue where the announcement was made, because wherever the Prime Minister is, is the Prime Minister, is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. And so, whether he stands before a convention of the party, or he stands in the Parliament, or he stands in the Diplomatic Centre, it is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago that is speaking. And so I am challenged by that to say that it was partisan, it was not partisan, but it was at a convention that the conversation was had with citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

You know, there is a saying that goes, "You have to have the ability to walk and chew gum." In this regard, the Government should have the ability to treat with what may be considered pressing matters, or what may be considered crime

and health and all of these things as pressing matters. But I also want to say that engendering a sense of pride in who we are as a people is also a pressing matter.

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

**Sen. L. Hislop:** Because for too long, we have allowed ourselves to be shrouded by negativity and to be covered with a darkness and there is absolutely nothing wrong with putting national pride and engendering that level of who we are as a people, as a matter on the front burner. And so, if this, Mr. Vice-President, is an avenue for the Government to bring something “light” and I use that phrase very guardedly, because it is not a light issue, it is a significant issue, it is a historical issue to have our Coat of Arms change and so, if the Government seeks at this time to bring that issue to the fore, I cannot see why, it may be considered as a light matter and may be not as important as other matters.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to just also treat with a matter that Sen. Mark raised, and that was the work of the Committee, of the Emblems Committee and Sen. Mark read from section 5 of the National Emblems Trinidad and Tobago Regulation and I think he fell short, Mr. Vice-President, of really giving the true picture of what that clause sought to say, or sought to do. Because the Committee, it says in clause:

“(5) The Committee shall act in an advisory capacity to the Minister on such matters as the Minister may refer to it from time to time...”

And so, it says that:

“The Committee shall act in an advisory capacity...”

So there is a definite there that, and there are lawyers on this Bench and so they will guide me if I am going wrong. But the “shall” speaks to something definite. But then it goes on to say:

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“...on such matters as the Minister may refer to it...”

Which says that it is still the discretion of the Minister to refer something to the Committee. Because if the Minister determines that the matters are set out in a, b, c, and d:

“(a) the grant and refusal of licence;

(b) the texture, workmanship and quality of material to be used in the manufacture of the Coat of Arms, the National Flag or any replica of facsimile...”—how do you pronounce that word?—“facsimile thereof;

(c) any amendments which may be necessary to this act or regulations made thereunder;”

I think, Mr. Vice-President, that that is the one Sen. Mark was seeking to zero in on, but even in that one, it has to go back to that “the Minister may refer to it” from—. So even if there is an amendment to be made to the legislation, it does not say that the Minister “shall” refer to the Committee for the amendment. It says that:

“...the Minister may refer...”

The Committee is definite because there must be a committee to advise the Minister, but the Minister may decide whether or not I need the advice of the Committee and so, I leave that right there.

I want to really and truly, Mr. Vice-President—and Sen. Dr. Paul Richards and Sen. Vieira give us a true history lesson on what a Coat of Arms is and all of that so I do not need to go down that road again, but I want to compliment and give kudos to the Prime Minister of this country at this time, Dr. Keith Rowley.

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

**4.45 p.m.**

Because, Sen. Mark spoke to what the Government should have done for pan or what it could have done for pan. And, I had asked Sen. Mark the question “you were part of a Government for—in two incarnations of the UNC. The UNC under Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and the People’s Partnership under the current Opposition Leader, and so, the reality for us, is that when we look at what has been done for the steelpan movement in the last two years, there has been significant movements, significant—what do we call it?—elevation of an instrument that is ours.

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

**Sen. L. Hislop:** I believe, Mr. Vice-President, that this, placing the steelpan on the Coat of Arms is another step in the elevation of an instrument that is ours. An instrument that should speak to who we are. And we may ask the question, why the pan? The reality is that “Pan is we”. “Pan is all ah we.” I listened to Sen. Vieira speaking about the diversity and whether or not better language could have been used and so on. But when you look at—if you identify to me one thing that brings every creed and race together in Trinidad and Tobago, it is the national instrument, the steelpan.

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

**Sen. L. Hislop:** Every creed and race, whether you are of Chinese descent, East Indian decent, European decent, African decent, the one instrument that brings all of Trinidad and Tobago together, is the steelpan. And when I heard Sen. Vieira speak about the visages of colonialism, I had to—he sent me to dictionary, Mr. Vice-President. I had to make sure that I fully understood what the meaning of the word “vestiges” is. I am not sure that what we are seeking to do, is creating more of divide amongst the population, by saying that we are removing the vestiges of

colonialism, because that speaks to buildings and symbols and emblems of a past, of a colonial history, a colonial past. And whilst we understand that we have a colonial history—because that—we ought to be—we are honest with ourselves, we were a colony.

So, while we accept the fact that we have a colonial past, it time for Trinidad and Tobago to identify who we are. And one of the ways that we seek to do that is by changing out our emblems, changing out the names that we have for streets and so on. I look forward to the day, Sen. Vieira, when most of our colonially named streets and parks and so on, could be named after our heroes who have made Trinidad and Tobago what it is. Even Port of Spain, Sen. Dr. Paul Richards. [*Member laughs*] That may even be a conversation. But I think what has happened with this, is that it has really began a bigger conversation about who we are as a people. And for that, there ought to be some level of commendation, that we are at a point as a people, that we are starting to look inward, and say we really need to determine who we are, where we have come from and all of us make Trinidad and Tobago, the beautiful rainbow country as according to Desmond Tutu, the rainbow country that it is.

Pan, 225 registered financial bands in the system; 225. That is the information coming to us from the parent body of pan. The pan movement. And then when you consider that even outside of that 225, you have individuals who do not belong to any steel band, but love the instrument, play the instrument, are ambassadors for the instrument. When we speak to who is in support of this move, and if I read from a *Newsday* article Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>, in a conversation with the President of Pan Trinbago. The president is saying:

“...‘This is a big moment in TT and we need to focus on the positives much more. The media houses and so on need to focus on the positive things that would inspire a nation.’”

The President of Pan Trinbago goes on to say:

“‘In two years’ time, we were able to accomplish so much from an instrument that was born out of resistance, struggle and resilience, that the’—United Nations—“has given us a day that we...”—should—“observe World Steelpan Day, then having pan formally declared in TT and now having it on the coat of arms.’”

The article said:

“‘Ramsey-Moore said it was amazing to see the Government and Opposition uniting to support pan...’”

One instrument that brings us together, you know. One instrument that brings us together.

She goes on to say that:

“‘We need much more of’”—this in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, the change speaks to an evolution to our evolution as a country. I think Sen. Vieira spoke to the fact that—and even Sen. Richards—when the original Coat of Arms was designed, at that point in time it was felt that this is who we are. This represents us as a people.

Mr. Vice-President, we are at a point where we have gone on from three ships and the names were corrected and all of that to the historical account. But we have gone on from three ships to a cursory discovery of an island where people already inhabited. The thing is as Sen. Vieira said, Columbus did not discover Trinidad and Tobago, and so we recognized that steelpan is who we are. Steelpan

should be who we are, and as we continue in this journey as a nation, we ought to recognize that evolution is necessary. Change is necessary. The vision of the Prime Minister, the vision of the Government spoke to moving or speaks to moving Trinidad and Tobago from where it is, to where we want to see it at 100 years, where we want to see 200 years. What story do we tell our children? What stories do we share about Trinidad and Tobago? Do we share a story about a nation that based on an instrument, is a nation built on resilience, a nation built on perseverance, a nation built on being happy? Because the President of Pan Trinbago says:

“Pan is happy music.” Pan is happy music.

Mr. Vice-President, I cannot help but support this piece of legislation, what it will do for—or what it has done for the pan movement, what it will do for a nation, because—yes the conversation is happening about whether the instrument looks good, whether the pan—whether the sticks are in the right place, and all of those things—art interpretation. But the bottom line is, the instrument is there. It speaks to who we are as a people.

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

**Sen. L. Hislop:** So, Mr. Vice-President, this piece of legislation has my fullest support, because pan is who we are. Pan is not just an instrument, but it is about people, it is about an industry, it is about a way of life. So, what more than elevating pan to where it really and truly should be? Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

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

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes.



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

**Sen. Lyder:** Oh, yes.

**Sen. Anil Roberts:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Well, that is the shortest contribution fraught with the greatest amount of contradictions I have ever heard. The hon. Senator finishes off with the “pan is all of us, the pan is Trinidad and Tobago, it unites us” yet says, it is not a problem that it was announced at a PNM convention, only amongst PNM people.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** It is amazing what the PNM thinks about this country.

**Hon. Senators:** So shameful.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** PNM, this is not your country, this is all of our country.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yeah.

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

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** The hon. Senator also—well, he admitted that he is not a legal luminary and he tried to question a senior counsel in the back there, and he said that when defining the words “may” and “shall”, he tried to put forward an argument that it was incumbent upon the Minister to decide arbitrarily what will go to the Emblems Committee that is designed and created with functions, responsibilities and authority, and then stated himself and the hon Minister said that this emblem is the soul of the people, the soul of the nation, the identity of a people, the identity of a diverse nation struggling to move forward. It realizes hope for future generations. The Senator put forward that after all of that, the Minister could say, “Well, I go decide, I doh need the Emblems Committee”. So

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then what do you need the Emblems Committee for? Just for material? Just for paper? Just for design?

**Hon. Senator:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** The hon. Senator just said, “One instrument that brings us together” yet the PNM, in this entire lack of process, has attempted to the hijack the pan. They have attempted to make it a PNM thing. Let me tell you straight. I heard hon. Sen. Paul Richards talking about the history and that pan, you could not tell your mother you want to play pan, because pan was thought as badness and “badjohnism”, as criminal, as something not to be respected. And, he talked about in the 70s. Who was the Government in the 70s, who would have made it illegal and disrespectful, and not wanting to play pan? It was the PNM.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes.

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

**Sen. Lyder:** That is right.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** The pan was invented in 1939. It made its debut in Carnival 1955. The PNM was founded in 1956. The pan did not come on the original Coat of Arms, but now today, I have to sit here and hear the PNM pretend like “is only dem love pan. Dem create pan. Nobody else eh love pan.” The debate is not about pan. All of us love pan.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** All of us could go whole day—

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—on how much we love the pan. I was born into the Desperadoes. My father, Al Roberts is the lawyer for Desperadoes that saved The Hammer—Rudolph Charles—when they had to go to court to fight for the

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opportunity to play. So do not tell me about pan. The issue here is not pan. It is the lack of process, the lack of respect of this Government for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** And let me just say at the onset, I do not know nothing about art. The only subject I ever failed is art, because I cannot draw. Right.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** “I eh fail nothing else.” Okay? But I can tell you, I looked at the picture and in my opinion, I love it. Because, somehow the golden pan reminds me of an Olympic gold medal that I have spent my life trying to get young Trinbagonian athletes to get. “I eh achieve it yet. I achieve ah bronze.” But if it was bronze, I would have been happier, because we got that. But it reminds me of that and some other people said, “It look like doubles”. There is nothing more Trinbagonian than a doubles. “All ah we love ah doubles.” So, I personally love the design. “I for that.” So let us get that out of the way one time.

But the debate is not about the pan. The debate is about us and Trinidad and Tobago. Nobody could tell me about the importance of symbolism. But symbolism must rise on the platform of work, of discipline, of tolerance, of punctuality, of effort, of creativity. You cannot leave out all of that and come with a picture and say, “Aye, we reach, symbolism is it”. One could recall when training for the Olympics in 1996, I had three athletes and they were training by Queen’s Park Hotel, which is where TGI Friday is now—young people would not know they had a little pool there—20-yard pool. And, four o’ clock in the morning these athletes were not doing well. They were not listening. They were giving me headaches. I had an afro then. “I was pulling out meh afro.”

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** But there was a CARIFESTA or Caricom being hosted in the Queen's Park Savannah, just across the road, and four o'clock in the morning, I told these three athletes—one Bajan, who was living in Trinidad and Tobago and training for the Olympics, and two Trinbagonians. I walked them across there, put them in the middle of those 30-something flags and explained to them that they are training and to represent all of these people. Their own flag plus all the other flags, in a sport that historically did not have people that look like us. I explained that to them in the darkness of the early morning. They got back in the pool and they worked hard.

**5.00 p.m.**

I say this to say to the PNM, you cannot have our country in chaos, you cannot have blood flowing on the streets, you cannot have our economy shattered, you cannot have us at the wrong end of global geopolitics against our greatest trading partners, you cannot have us as energy deficient, you cannot have us with people struggling to live, and then come to tell me, "Look ah picture, we proud and we working hard. Well done, PNM." It does not work like that

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Sen. Dr. Paul Richards said he cannot understand, for the life of him, "How come this brilliant, genius invention, from 1939 to now, we have not been able to monetize it? How come it is not and does not produce the level of revenue like the energy sector?" He just could not understand. Well, I am going to help him understand. The answer is right in front of his face. All he has to do is look across there. All he has to do it look across there, because 48 out of the 63 years that we are an independent country, that side, PNM, has been in charge.

Mr. Vice-President, 76.19 per cent of our existence, the PNM has been in charge. So if the pan “eh” monetized, blame the PNM. If the pan “eh” respected, blame the PNM.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Do not let them come here and tell me that they came with a picture, they removed some ships—and I must say at this juncture, I enjoyed thoroughly the brilliant contribution by Sen. Vieira. I do not know if it is the change of the year, I do not know if it is the spirit of Carnival and Christmas intertwined, but I was thoroughly paying attention and it was well delivered, historically great. I ask all the children to go back and look on Channel 11 at Sen. Vieira’s contribution. Excellent.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** After listening to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts’ description of the meaning and the power of symbolism of the Coat of Arms, if that was true, then there is no need for a government, because the description given by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts says that, “Everything we need, everything that makes us great, everything is provided in that symbol, that emblem, that Coat of Arms.”

He talked about the soul of our nation, soul of our people, but yet, our soul is bleeding in the streets during an SOE. He talked about the pride of our institutions, pride of our nation, but every institution in the country is failing to do its duty, to do its job. Pride has to come from work, from discipline, from effort. Our soul and pride and hope of the nation’s future, yet this Government that makes those claims here, and printed on *Hansard*, did not feel the need to consult with the people whose soul the thing represented.

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You did not feel the need to consult with the children from La Brea and Point Fortin, from Matelot and Couva and Barrackpore, the people who this soul, this emblem that they say it represents, but they just talk in PNM convention, come and dictate. They do not tell the Emblems Committee, do not follow any process, they just come and dictate, design and “geh we dat”, and then tell us, “Daiz we soul.” Good thing we are in the Senate. If I was in an Extempo, I would have said something else.

The Prime Minister said:

“...symbolism is important.”

The hon. Prime Minister said:

“...symbolism matters.

It is not a question of either or, we can have it all.”

As he goes off in the sunset, you know:

“...we can have it all.”

We do not know who have it all. Maybe he has it all, but he has left us with nothing.

“It is not a question of either or, we can have it all.

We can have the symbols, we can have jobs, we can have food, but at the end of the day, symbolism matters.”

That statement epitomizes the complete abject failure of this PNM Government for nine years. People do not have food.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Over 30 per cent of the population is below the poverty line. The economy is shattered. It is 6.14 per cent less than in 2019, and 2019 already had four years of PNM’s failure and shrinkage.

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The economy is shattered. The energy sector is shattered. People are suffering. Inflation is high. The purchasing power parity of a dollar has gone down, but they come to tell us after all of that, “Doh worry, symbolism matters.” It may matter, but it cannot matter over and above good governance, policies, increasing the ability of people to live, to be safe and to enjoy their families, then they can feel proud about the symbolism. But if the symbolism marks pain, sufferation, lack of ability to work, to pay bills, stress, higher suicide rates, crime, blood flowing in the streets, no amount of symbolism could overcome and overcompensate for incompetence.

The PNM is symbolism over substance across the board. That has been their way. They take pictures, plenty, plenty pictures, nice pictures; nice, nice pictures. That is all the PNM does. I remember I saw a Minister take a picture—she did not build any house, but she took a picture in front of some mailbox and said it was—

**Sen. Mitchell:** Mr. Vice-President, he is on a frolic, 46(1), please.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, as you are aware, we only have five clauses.

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

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** I do not know if to refer to this or to the next losing candidate for Barataria/San Juan, but—I do not know, Mr. Vice-President, for now. I do not expect the Minister—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, out of respect for the Chair, let us not go there.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** All right. For respect of the Chair, I humbly apologize for

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saying that.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Mr. Vice-President, I do not expect the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, who is fighting up with a gentleman for La Brea now since he got out of San Fernando East, to understand what I am speaking about because the PNM does not seem to listen to one another. They had two contributors and one contradicts the next one. Mr. Vice-President, “nine does vote one way, 11 does vote ah next way, and three days later all vote one way”, so they are very confused.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** But his entire contribution was about symbolism, his Prime Minister’s statement is about symbolism. I am talking about the PNM’s ineffective governance and attention to symbolism by picture rather than performance. That is intrinsically linked to his statement and what they are saying here.

So the PNM, rather than building houses, would take a picture of a mailbox and say, “We did good.” So rather than deal with love and respect for the pan—

**Sen. Lyder:** Tell them what happened to the pan community.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** You see, I would have thought that this hon. Minister, in piloting this Bill, knowing fully well that everybody loves pan, everybody supports the pan, the Coat of Arms on the pan, lovely—

**Sen. Lyder:** He said so.

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—I thought that this Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts would have used his creativity, his power in the Cabinet and come here today and say, “Not only has this Government decided to put our national instrument, our beloved pan on the Coat of Arms, that we have approved a sum of \$131million to



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invest in a pan area, a pan factory, pan creation.”

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** I thought they would have come here today and say, because of the cuts that they made in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 to pan in schools, that they are going to now reverse that, because the symbolism is, “dey love de pan”. But I am saying, “Show the love. Show the love with the money.” But they missed the opportunity and they came here, after cutting pan and cutting everything, trying to pretend that the UNC did not do anything for pan. Well, let me tell “all yuh” something. Number one, it was Basdeo Panday who gave the pan fraternity 12 acres, valued at \$75million. Right now, that somehow has gone somewhere and they are now in a room in some building to be refurbished by the PNM and UDeCOTT.

It was the UNC, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that increased the stipend per pan player in each band to \$1,000, which they cut back down to \$500.

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

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes. Shameful. Shame.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** It was Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia as the Prime Minister, who increased the prize money for pan in Panorama to \$2 million.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** They came in and cut the prize back down—

**Sen. Lyder:** Shame.

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—but coming to tell me about symbolism? Symbolism is disrespect, action is love.

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

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes, well said. Shameful on their behalf; shameful.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** I thought the hon. Minister, when coming to show me the pan and the “doubles” connection in the emblem, in the Coat of Arms, would have told me that they have formed linkages with universities across the globe, in Canada, in the USA—

**Sen. Lyder:** Japan.

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—Oxford and Cambridge, in Japan, in Australia; that we could have some sort of connectivity and exchange in our genius of pan, to spread the pan, while we are manufacturing more pans, much more than NIDCO, making a mass production, small pans, big pans, ceremonial pans, real pans, sweet pans.

I thought they would have come with a business plan to monetize on top of the symbolism, but all the PNM is about is symbolism. They take away actual laptops from children and tell the children, “We will put Internet in your school,” and it “eh” reach yet. They take away funding from sports across the board. They take away funding from football—

**Sen. Mitchell:** Mr. Vice-President, 46(1). He thinks he is clever.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, you were aware that we did a Bill already about making the pan our national instrument. These arguments would have been more profound then. Kindly stick to the Bill at hand, which, as a reminder, is directed towards national emblems, please.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I know that the Member is very nervous, because he knows that he missed out on an opportunity to do something after nine years of being here and around, having done nothing. He has the opportunity here today and now he is sitting, hearing me and going, “Oh goosh, if only I had the cognitive ability to come up with something so good and to bring it to the people.” He is worried right now.

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**Sen. A. Roberts:** But the essence is, and the whole essence of his presentation, and this Bill brought here is that this symbol, this emblem, this Coat of Arms now takes pan from a discarded, unloved, disrespected element to one of respect, and I am showing them that that is not how respect is earned.

Respect is earned through true love. True love means investment, opportunities, putting your money where your mouth is. “Dem PNM love car park more than the pan, because they build two car park at \$131 million each”. That is \$626 million for car park. They refurbished Skinner Park for \$131 million and turned a football field into a sweat. Why you do not give the pan money?

**Sen. Mitchell:** Mr. Vice-President—

**Sen. Lyder:** And nothing for pan.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, you have gone way outside of the realm of the Bill. I took a lot—we listened a lot about your definitions and how you classified things earlier on, which was far. Now you are stepping way outside that boundary now. Pull it back in for me, please.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Well, Mr. Vice-President, I will move on, but I cannot help—I am speaking to that camera and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and they you will understand the connection; whichever camera.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** They will understand that the PNM cannot continue to mamaguy people with superficial symbolism and taking pictures—

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—that a government must be there for the people, by the people, to uplift the people, not mamaguy the people, because they treat pan with disrespect. They cut everything to pan and then come here to pretend that the

PNM loves pan. When they had Desperadoes, Invaders, and all these names, it is because they were running from the PNM. The Minister calls the pan, “a national treasure”, I ask you, Sir, is that how you treat a national treasure? He said there was a decades-long clarion call for the removal of the Columbus ships—

**Sen. Lyder:** That is what he said.

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—yes—and, therefore, he said that is the reason they brought the pan. But you see, he contradicts himself, within himself.

I do not know if the PNM Minister, maybe as an MP that he wants to be now, and a Minister, you need two personalities, but he is arguing with himself, because he said that they love the pan and they want to show us love and respect and hope. But then they come to the ridiculous conclusion that it was because people were calling for the removal of colonial vestiges and the ships that they decided to put the pan. So you are talking about the cart before the horse or the horse before the cart, because if we are to believe them, that they love the pan so much, “The pan is so brilliant, it is so inspirational,” then it would not require 10 years of people talking about ships to make you want to put the pan on the Coat of Arms.

**5.15 p.m.**

You would have come up with that idea on its own, without any need for any juxtaposition of any other perspective. So, they do not even know what they are about and they come in the Senate and they just talk wild and think “Pingy lingy ling, we make sense.”

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** They talked about patriotism; patriotism, yet in Tobago they leave the Dwight Yorke Stadium to rot when the previous Government left \$120

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Sen. Roberts (cont'd)

million there to get down into the guts of the Dwight Yorke Stadium, that is rusting and rotting; the electrical and the plumbing. “Dey just power wash and paint, just like what dey doing here with the Coat of Arms; power wash and paint. Dey not giving de panman anything, dey not creating any industry, dey not encouraging people to pick up de pan and earn ah 10,000 ah month and take care of their families, nothing like that. Just ah setta words and ah picture, dat is PNM and de people are fed up. Dey going to take you and yuh picture and put alyuh right in Balisier House, where yuh han’ing out hamper to the media so dey will write good for alyuh.” Mannie Ramjohn Stadium, Ato Boldon Stadium; totally dilapidated. Our heroes’ names—

**Sen. Hislop:** 46(1), Mr. Vice-President, he is going back to stadiums.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, please. You have about—a lot of time remaining, I will say 18 minutes but you have really been outside of the realm of the entire message—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** —can you kindly come to it more succinctly, please?

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Yeah.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Just bring it in.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Okay, thank you. Mr. Vice-President, I do not know if you were here or in the Chair, but that Senator there, spoke about renaming things after our heroes—

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes.

**Sen. A. Roberts:**—and all of Port of Spain and all the streets and towns—

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** —that is what he spoke about.

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**Sen. Mitchell:** Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. Senators should be courteous and refer to other Senators by their names. You “cah” be pointing at somebody and saying “That Senator there.”

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. The hon. Senator who just got up and a Standing Order to argue with himself about himself, probably did not listen to his own presentation because he said that in this debate, that we need, for national pride, to name things after us, streets and towns and even Port of Spain came up, and so on. I am saying, under this PNM, Dwight Yorke Stadium is a disgrace, Mannie Ramjohn Stadium is a disgrace, Ato Boldon Stadium is a disgrace, Jean Pierre is a disgrace and therefore dey confused.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yeah.

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

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, symbolism and the National Emblem Bill, please, not other matters.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Mr. Vice-President, with all due respect, symbolism is “what dey talk about”; national pride and the soul of the nation. So, I am not sure why all of a sudden everybody wants to do squats and interrupt, but the point of the matter is that you cannot come, when your actions show that you disrespect the nation, you disrespect those—you even said to name roads after people. In Tobago, the number one highway is the Claude Noel Highway. The PNM left Claude Noel to die in poverty, to die without support, to die without—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Mitchell:** Mr. Vice-President—

**Sen. Coxr:** No, no, no, no, no.

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**Sen. Lyder:** “Yuh go lose dem seats.”

**Sen. Mitchell:** Mr. Vice-President—

**Sen. Lyder:** “You are going to lose dem seats.”

**Sen. Mitchell:**—46(1), 46(4) and 53(1)(b).

**Hon. Senator:** Ridiculous.

**Sen. Mitchell:** It is ridiculous.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, this is going to be my last warning to bring it back in. You have gone off the track completely and you are debating something else. Proceed.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Mr. Vice-President, I do not know if you all are following this debate. I sat here and I listened to everything they said. They said that what this is about here today, after they announced it in a PNM convention, had no process, no consultation; they are coming to tell us how much they love “de” pan. I am saying to you, that the PNM historically has disrespected pan. The PNM was there in 1961. They created the Coat of Arms. They left out the pan. The PNM left the panmen as criminals running around, they have not created anything for them. “Now, dey take dey 12 acres that was given to them by Basdeo Panday, dey take it and put dem in ah lil room down in ah postal office to be refurbished and they are coming to say that they love and respect pan.” In their debates they are talking about history and national pride, I am saying, to leave a national hero, to leave a man who fought for Trinidad and Tobago, put his life on the line, won a world championship and in his latter years, to leave him without a pension, without any proposal, without any money, without any health care, without any insurance plan is disrespectful. They disrespect the pan, just like they disrespect our national heroes. Hasely Crawford right now is disrespected—

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**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Roberts, you are making the same point with several explanations and you are continuing to go down the line. I have been very, very lenient, allowing you to go outside of the realm and I am going to ask you to wind up shortly, if it is that you cannot come back to the Bill at hand.

**Sen. A. Roberts:** Mr. Vice-President, with all due respect, I never left the Bill. So, unfortunately, if you would like me to wind up, I have no problem because the people have heard. This symbolism, this superficial change that the PNM is claiming that they love pan, when they have done nothing to support it. They have done nothing to enhance it. They have done nothing to monetize it. They have done nothing no respect it. The people will know. “De emblem; we love de pan, all of us love de pan. De pan; if some people doh like it, it should have been discussed before.” The process was left wanting. The arrogance of the PNM to feel that this is their country. They keep thinking that they could not serve the people and then put a plaster and a picture and take a picture and pretend that they are a Government. The entire country is in chaos, nothing works. Nothing works, no institution. “Even here debating, you cannot debate because dey afraid. Dey talk all ah dey talk and when yuh responding to them, they jump up on Standing Orders, that and all is not the way that a democracy should work.” The Opposition should have their say because the Government will have their way but not under this PNM tyrannical dictatorship that instructs Members of Parliament, who to support for a next PNM Prime Minister.

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

**Sen. A. Roberts:** “Dey must sit down and take dat but de population will not take it.” We will not be bullied. We will not be roughed up in any hotel in Tobago nor in any Balisier House. “De people waiting for alyuh PNM, from Barataria/San



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Juan down to La Brea, de people waiting for alyuh. Call de election.”

**Sen. Lyder:** Yeah.

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

**Sen. Anil Roberts:** Great is the emblem. Great is the Coat of Arms. “De PNM doh love--”

**Sen. Mitchell:** Great is the PNM.

**Sen. Anil Roberts:** They believe—“Yuh see? Ah wanted him to say dat.” Exactly, great is Trinidad and Tobago. Great are the citizens of this country, who will reject PNM straight through, from the middle in Caroni, for licks in St. Augustine, wherever, down to La Brea.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yeah.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

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

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

**Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye:** Mr. President, today I stand as a proud Trinbagonian to speak on a symbol of national pride, the steelpan, our national instrument, as we seek, through the enactment of the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) (Amdt) Bill, 2025, to substitute in our Coat of Arms, a gold steelpan and its iconic two pan sticks, also gold, for Columbus’ ships, the Santa María, the Pinta and the Niña.

“Tell me where pan reach,” sang Cro Cro with his free speech.

So today, we are putting Columbus’ ships aside for an important matter of national pride,

To take up gold steelpan, two pan sticks in gold, too, to beat a new Coat of Arms tune, that is ours, for true.

Mr. Vice-President, few if any persons in this august Chamber have personal experiences of steel band clashes, when one had to run from cover with bottles pelting, weapons swinging, people bawling, blood flowing, feet flying. Lord Blakie sang:

“When the steelbands clash, if you see cutlass, never me again to jump up in a steel band in Port of Spain.”

Most people have never experienced the fear of the “bad johns” from rival bands, who carried weapons cleverly concealed and which, at the least provocation, would be unleashed and mayhem would result. Many have heard and read about the rivalry among the steel bands but are unaware of a time when steelband men were outcast in the society. In his calypso, *The Outcasts*, Sparrow sang:

“If your sister talk to ah steelband man, she family want to break she hand, put she out, lick out every teeth in she mouth, pass yuh Outcast.” Mr. Vice-President, this Bill has evoked many childhood memories and has made me date myself. I recall one night, as a young teenager returning home with my brother, sister and cousin from a house party. A stranger walked past us and to my eternal regret, unmindful that I had a voice that carried, which was all well and good to read the Psalms in the morning assembly at Marian Hall but dangerous on that memorable night. I said to the group, “Look alyuh, ah one-armed man.” The man stopped and said, “Who say dat?” A member of the group identified me by looking at me and saying, “Hazel, why you say dat?” I froze. The man said to me, “You will have to walk from here to the bridge tonight.” My elder sister pleaded, “Mister, leave she, please.” Later, I found out he meant Jumbie Bridge in San Juan. We were in Petit Bourg. In fear and trembling, I had to think quickly. Ignoring the fact that the motto of my school was “Veritas”, I said, “Mister, I was

not talking 'bout you, nah. I was talking about the one-armed man from the Fugitive.” *The Fugitive* was then, a popular television series. Mercifully, to my great relief, the man laughed and went on his way.

Later, someone told me, I cannot say if it is true, that the man was a notorious steel bandsman from San Juan All Stars who had lost his arm during a steel band clash. Long after, I was still looking over my shoulder, fearful that I might encounter that man again. Eventually, I outgrew my fear of steel bandsmen and was among thousands of mourners who flocked to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception to attend the funeral of the steel bandsman, whom David Rudder described as “the man with the hammer”, Rudolph Charles.

Mr. Vice-President, well before Christmas, the hon. Randall Mitchell, the Minister responsible for culture came to the Parliament bearing gifts, among which was a beautiful golden steelpan, with two sticks, a famous quote came to mind: “*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentis* ; I fear the Greeks, even bearing gifts.” Now I know what he wants of us in return. Let me tell him to allay his fears. Let me assure him, there is no need to bribe me, Sir, I fully support this Bill. It is a short Bill that was long in coming.

I have read and I have heard the arguments against replacing Columbus’ ships with our national instrument and our Coat of Arms. One was of the expected astronomical cost resultant on the change. The hon. Prime Minister dealt effectively with that. He explained that the required changes will be done on a phased basis. As documents with the Coat of Arms expires or supplies are depleted, replacements will bear the new Coat of Arms. The period for completion is January 01, 2026, or such later date as is fixed by the President by Proclamation.

Another argument advanced is that we cannot erase history. Mr.

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Vice-President, in May 2022, I attended an Executive Committee Meeting of the International Society of Family Law at the Coimbra University in Portugal. I went to persuade the Council to allow me to convene a regional family law conference in Tobago. They were concerned because they had this travel advisory based on reports of so much crime in Trinidad, that they were reluctant to allow me to do this. Fortunately, I was successful. After a sumptuous dinner—and when I sat at the university, I said, “Lord, I do not know if they were in Trinidad, if we could have entertained them like they did.” We began to talk about their culture and our culture and I spoke about their countryman, Columbus and the part he had played in our history, when I was informed that Columbus was not a native of Portugal. The history I had learned in school was wrong. So, we have, at times, to rewrite history.

Another argument raised against the pan, was that pan was not identifiable with or representative of all the races in Trinidad but was confined to persons of African descent. That is a myth. One of the best pan arrangers in Trinidad was a man of East Indian descent, Jit Samaroo from Renegades. Selwyn Mohammed, recently deceased, must be turning in his grave and Selwyn’s brother, Bobby, must be quite upset that their contribution to pan could go unrecognized. Who can forget that much-celebrated Guinness Cavaliers, which was a force to be reckoned with?

**5.30 p.m.**

Another boss man arranger of East-Indian descent, Steve Achaiba, has written his name into the annals of pan history. He led Hatters Steel Orchestra to win Panorama in '75 and Naparima Girls to victory in Junior Panorama that same year. He was arranger for several steel bands including Invaders. His daughter

Adrianna, who runs a music school, continues in his fine tradition and you may remember her sterling performance on the steel pan at the funeral of former Prime Minister Basdeo Panday, just in January '24.

The founders of Silver Stars from New Town, the Young brothers, were not of African descent but of Chinese extraction. So too, was Hue Loy from Harmonites Steel Orchestra. On the day that this Bill was passed in the House a disciple of Hue Loy sent me a WhatsApp message ordering me to join his board of directors. He has a steel band school, which he has established to save the disadvantaged youths in his community and in children's homes from being lured and falling into the pitfall of crime.

The Pouchet family crew, Edwin Junior and Edward, Curtis Pierre, Ferreiras from Dixieland in Belmont would not countenance being referred to as being of African descent? They identify with Portuguese and other European races.

Former Senator, Martin Daly, one of the persons I consulted when tracing the history of pan, is very passionate about pan and frequently writes on the subject. The last time I checked, Martin Daly did not look like a poor man of African descent when he warmly greeted me at the Panorama finals at the savannah last year.

Another argument raised against pan being placed in our Coat of Arms is that there is not sufficient consultation. I do not agree. From the time the Prime Minister spoke of his plan, the opportunity arose for members of the public to express their views and many did. I do not for one moment believe that the Prime Minister is infallible, that quality is reserved only for God. Sometimes I think our Prime Minister is too human and that is why I was taught to pray for priests and our leaders—I pray for you as well—so that they may fulfil their very important

divine purpose. There are some things so obviously right that they should need no persuasion. Should we consult on whether or not public servants should be ordered to work on Carnival Monday and Tuesday since they are not national holidays? We assume that logically some things are a given. Pan is our national instrument and as part of our Coat of Arms as well is the CCJ as our final court which is another, “One day that too will come.”

The unspoken reality is that the steel pan was not created or developed by the intelligentsia or the privileged in our society, but mainly, though not exclusively, by persons of the lower class. Implicit in the seeming rejection by some of pan as our national instrument, is the scepticism that talent, creativity, and I dare say, greatness, can emanate from the poor and disadvantaged. What is being played out in this modern-day version of the biblical question:

“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Well, the greatest man who was born, was born there and the greatest musical invention of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was born here. Pan is the brainchild and a painstaking creation of a man from the lowest class. Identified by Lord Kitchener as Winston ‘Spree’ Simon. May he rest in peace.

The steel pan was refined and further developed by other earlier pioneers, Ellie Mannette, Anthony Williams, Bertie Marshall among others. Some other legends in the pan movement are Len Boogie Sharpe, Ray Holman, and Earl Rodney. We are justly proud of them and excited and thrilled by the amazing talent of the new generation including Liam Teague and Joshua Regrello, the latter who recently sought to enter the *Guinness World Records* by playing pan non-stop for 31 hours.

We do not all have love the pan but must accept it as being indigenous to our

country. Like it or not, our country, Trinidad and Tobago, is synonymous with pan. Like doubles which was created here also in the 1930s, it is famously ours and we should take pride in it.

While traveling to Argentina last year, I was surprised when the air hostess, a native from that country approached me, asking me if I was indeed from Trinidad. When I confirmed that I was, she asked me if I had any doubles in my suitcase. [*Member laughs*] She was very disappointed that I had none and told me how much she loved doubles. When I pay my annual visit to the Bahamas I am asked the same question, “Yuh bring doubles, girl?” I always have frozen buss up shot, though, which I cook with curried chicken, potato and channa for the staff the day before I leave. Unlike other family members, I am not a lover of doubles, but take pride in the fact that it is a popular food that was created here.

I confess to feeling perturbed when I landed at an airport in the eastern Caribbean to conduct training and was welcomed by a pan man who was not from Trinidad and Tobago. Again, at a welcome cocktail reception organized in my honour by former Chief Justice of Belize, Kenneth Benjamin as he then was. When I was invited to train his judiciary in child justice, a steel bandsman was one of the entertainers and he was not a Trinidadian. I wondered if that would have occurred at home and became worried that pan may be in danger of being stolen by our Caribbean neighbours. I jealously guard pan as belonging to ours but I wonder sometimes, you know, if I am not being selfish and to let pan grow all over the world.

In 1991, I went to Switzerland with my sister to bring back the ashes of my teenage nephew and godson who played tenor pan with Starlift. He had been invited to Switzerland by Casablanca Steel Orchestra as they needed someone who

could play the tenor pan well. Sadly, he drowned in the river the day after he arrived. Like the Japanese girl who came here to play pan and was killed in the savannah during Carnival, my nephew died because his love for pan. One happy memory, though, is when we drove with the local band in their bus and they took us to various places like the crematorium and so on. People would look through their window and they would be cheering us on, they were so happy because there was a sign that spoke about steel bands and they were all excited about the steel band and I wonder, you know, if Switzerland would take over from us.

One day I accompanied our Honorary Consul in Berne, Switzerland, to pick up his daughter from school and I saw dozens of shiny chrome pans in the school garage. He said his daughter was learning to play pan in school, a boast that, sad to say, many parents here cannot make. Why do we not have pan in all the schools, we are waiting for that. My heart was filled with pride when at the ISFL Regional Conference I organised with Hilton last November, the boys from St. Margaret's Boys Anglican Primary School in Belmont, who had won Junior Panorama ten times, played at the opening ceremony to the great delight of our conference attendees.

If we can keep our youths who are not academically inclined occupied not only with trades but also in cultural and sporting pursuits which showcase their God-given talents and which help to build their self-esteem and even can provide them with an income, I dare say, there would be fewer of our youths turning to crime in our society. Pan is ours, that is a fact that should be celebrated. Pan is known and enjoyed in concert halls like Carnegie in many parts of the world where our talented steelband players have performed to resounding applause.

This Bill is the culmination of the celebration of pan. In July 2023, the



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United Nations General Assembly was moved by our indefatigable Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, Dr. Amery Browne, to officially declare August 11<sup>th</sup> as World Steelpan Day. And, in July 2024, on the passage of the National Musical Instrument Bill, 2024, pan was declared our national instrument. Now the icing is on the cake, before us today, is historic this Bill. The Prime Minister sometimes gets it right, this is one of those times.

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

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:** It is no accident that pan is in ascendancy under the leadership of Beverley Ramsey Moore. Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of England famously said:

“If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman.”

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

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:** Thank you, Madam Ramsey Moore, for all that you are doing for pan and will continue to do. May God give you the health and strength.

Today, we have bands like Desperadoes and Renegades, and All Stars that have their own concert walls which are in use and do use to produce an income. I have heard the argument about the process that was raised, and yes, and whether or not the “shall” is in fact the same as the “may.” And I agree with the Senator across there who raised it, it is a long time that I sat in the class of Bhagoutie and F.O.C Harris to do interpretational statutes, but one thing I learned is that “may” is sometimes “shall” and one is to look to see the circumstances and the wording. And it says in section 4 that:

“...the Minister may from time to time appoint in writing”

The committee. So when it says “may appoint” and it says:

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“The Committee shall consist a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman”

It seems to me that the “shall” is mandatory and the “may” is optional and:

“The Committee, with the approval of the Minister may make such Rules governing its proceedings as it may consider appropriate.”

But:

“The Committee shall act in an advisory capacity to the Minister on such matters as the Minister may refer to it from time to time.”

So it appears to me to me that the Minister does have a discretion and it is not mandatory that he must do certain things at all times. As I said before, this Bill is a short Bill, a mere five clauses. Short in length, long in coming and weighty in its implications for our independence and sovereignty.

Clause 1, is the short title:

“...the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) (Amdt.)  
Act 2025.”

Clause 2, provides for its commencement namely:

“...on such date as is fixed by the President by Proclamation.”

Clause 3, is the interpretation section giving the meaning of the words:

“former Coat of Arms” and “the Act”

“Clause 4 ... amends Part I of the Schedule to the  
National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) Act...by deleting  
the”—words and—“...in the base...‘three ships of the period of Christopher  
Columbus also gold the sails set proper”

What convoluted language? It does not even sound like English. So we substitute the words for that:

“...a gold Steelpan and its iconic two pan sticks, also Gold.”

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Sen. Thompson-Ahye (cont'd)

What is the objection to using modern language such as, “A gold steelpan with two golden pan sticks,” yeah? Clause 5, is very straight forward and provides for savings and transitional matters.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for allowing me to speak on this very short but important Bill which seeks to serve as a reminder that we are an independent nation and must chart our own destiny in our very own land.

“Where every creed and race finds an equal place.”

Where we are united in love and bolstered hope. May God bless our beloved nation. Thank you.

**5.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Dr. Sharda Patasar.

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

**Sen. Dr. Sharda Patasar:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Sen. Dr. Richards started with some of the points that I had to make, so I will build on that because I was going to begin with a definition of the Coat of Arms.

I am primarily concerned with the idea of stories and how we tell those stories and something as visual as the Coat of Arms gives us a sense of our story, our history, of our purpose. So when I look at the historical development of what a coat of arms really represents from primarily being used to establish identity in battle, to eventually being used over time to denote family descent, property ownership, professions, institutions, at the heart of all of this is the issue of belonging.

So, one can say now that a coat of arms is a global language aimed at establishing a sense of identity, a sense of belonging to something, to somewhere.

The Trinidad and Tobago Coat of Arms therefore comes to us as a representation of our history and for our common purpose. Because of that meaning therefore, I was initially more concerned about what I might have called a very casual nature to the crafting of the sense of belonging, the lifting off of the ships, to my mind, which represented the genesis of Trinidad itself, to replace it with a pan, while I am not in disagreement, seemed hurriedly done. And I would want to agree with Senators Vieira and Mark that the announcement of the proposed change fed into that feeling of hurriedness and a sort of casual approach. The hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts indicated in his presentation that this is an answer to the call from some citizens to eliminate symbols of a painful colonial past which I find to be a bit problematic because when I look at the Coat of Arms in its present edition there are parts of it that are reminders of a painful colonial past, and I wonder how much of that is so psychologically entrenched that we have not noticed them or if we have noticed them, are they so entrenched in our sense of identity that we have not seen them as important to consider. Because I am looking at the helmet at the top of the Coat of Arms which represents the Queen, the palm that was central to the seals of colonial Tobago. It brings to mind, what story are we telling? It really is asking whether we are thinking it through thoroughly.

So to leave the helmet at the top serves not only as a representation, while it is a representation of an inherited tradition of governance, for instance, it represents to me oppression, commerce, service to empires, desire for conquest and power. So while Columbus's appearance may have put things into motion, the empire had the choice to stop and they did not. So what we are today as a nation is a direct result of an empire that having used the land and its people gave us our

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freedom, not an account of humanity as Dr. Eric Williams noted in his *Capitalism and Slavery*, but because we had ceased to be financially useful. Yet we have retained the symbol of a Queen on the Coat of Arms.

So ultimately, we are all going to agree to go forward with it. I agree, but I believe that it is necessary to think seriously about the emblem that is going to symbolize our story. Keeping some parts of the Coat of Arms, removing one image tells me that there are parts of the history that we choose to keep, parts that we choose to erase. And my question has to do with, how do we come to these decisions? How do we choose what to keep? How do we choose what to erase? So my question circles back to the reading of the Coat of Arms, what is the new story that we are trying to tell? Which history is being kept? Why? And to what end?

At its core the Coat of Arms is about unity, to my mind. So it is a unity of purpose, a representation of lineage, and I see the nation itself as a result—as a lineage. It is a symbol of purpose, of actions to be taken towards crafting a national image. So if this is all something that we could point to on our passports, the image of the pan to say that this is ours, we agree. But if the geopolitical is nationalistic and aimed at building nation, if it is aimed at inclusively, then we need a little more than a partially thought out coat of arms. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Amery Browne. No? Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox.

**Hon. Senator:** Yes.

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

**The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox):** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I thank you for the

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opportunity to contribute to this ground-breaking Bill which, when assented to, will embed and once and for all what I believe is the most single recognizable feature of what Trinbagonian is, on that iconic symbol which represents all of us, the national Coat of Arms.

But, Mr. Vice-President, you know, I want to briefly touch on some of the contribution of Sen. Roberts, because at some point I thought that the Bill was about bashing the PNM and not about the amendment to the Coat of Arms. Sen. Roberts spoke about the PNM treated pan badly and so on, but I think Sen. Roberts had selective memory.

**Sen. Mitchell:** True.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Cox:** Sen. Roberts, go back into history and see all that the PNM has done.

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

**Sen. The Hon. D. Cox:** Even as recent as August 11<sup>th</sup> being declared by the UN, you know, pan being declared—you understand?—even the national instrument. I do not want to go into detail because of the fact that, you know, I just want to make a short intervention, but you need to go back and be honest with yourself.

**Hon. Senator:** He “cyah” do that.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Cox:** Alright? So, I also want to also speak about the fact that you even tried to blame the PNM because of the culture of the day with regard to pan, you know. If at the time if you look back at the history of Trinidad and Tobago, you look at the history of pan, you will recognize that even the culture of the day with parents. Some parents would have tried to stop their children from being involved in pan and so on because of the stigma attached, so how can you blame the PNM for that? So, I want you to be honest in your contribution.

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**Hon. Senator:** He “cyah” do that.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Cox:** Mr. Vice-President, Almighty God has blessed me with many gifts and as such is my pride today that I would have loved to belt out a verse of the Mighty Sniper’s “Portrait of Trinidad”, and I would have encouraged my friend from across the aisle, Sen. Francis, to bring out his guitar so that we could sing in unison. I want to quote:

“Trinidad is my land and of it I am proud and glad but I cannot understand why some people does talk it bad. Some of them who running their mouth don’t know what they talking about, but they could paint here black everyday but the right thing they will never say.”

**Hon. Senator:** The UNC.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Cox:** So, Mr. Vice-President, among the right things that they will never say is that the steelpan has been one of the single most unifying forces in this country.

**Sen. Mitchell:** Correct.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Cox:** The history of the steelpan reflects a symbol of resilience, resistance and, of course, boundless creativity that abides in our country. This history of our beloved instrument is intricately woven and speaks to the presence and involvement of Trinidad and Tobago nationals of all races and colours from its birthplace behind the bridge to even the hallowed halls of Carnegie and Buckingham Palace. David Rudder could not have been more correct when he sang:

“Out of a muddy pond ten thousand flowers bloom.”

From a perfect song of praise to our dedicated panists. The steelpan has captivated the world’s imagination proving that innovation knows no boundaries, and it is not

only a symbol of Trinidad and Tobago's prowess, but also a representation of resilience and creativity. The steelpan is the heartbeat of Trinidad and Tobago transforming struggle into song and oppression into opportunity. It emerged principally from the ingenuity of persons who transformed discarded oil drums into a new musical instrument that has since achieved international acclaim. In fact, it cannot be denied that in this cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic country, all our communities have played a part, whether major or minor, in the development of this instrument.

As we celebrate the steelpan's global acclaim, it is worth recognizing the achievement. And somebody mentioned it, I believe two persons mentioned the achievement of Joshua Regrello whose artistry and dedication is taking our national pride to new heights and it is worth mention. His recent ambitious attempt to secure a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records* underscores the boundless talent of our people serving as an inspiration for future generations to reach for greatness. This same spirit is what prompted an entire community, as it were, to ensure that the steelpan is as developed as an instrument as it is today.

This brings into remembrance great panmen, arrangers and innovators, some of whom are sadly no longer with us today and others continue to mesmerize us with their talents. I am sure that many of them who have passed on and if they were alive today would have been very happy. I am sure that they would not have been thinking that we would have reached this today where we could put the steelpan on the Coat of Arms and they would be grateful. Some of them would have included, some who are still alive, some who are not here, Robert Greenidge, Ellie Mannette, Liam Teague, Ray Holman, Winston "Spree" Simon, Tony Slater, Vanessa Headley, Jit Samaroo, Kareem Brown, Keisha Codrington, Bobby



Mohammed, Bertie Marshall, Len “Boogise” Sharpe, Pelham Goddard, Alwin Chow Lin On. He was one of the founders of Cordettes Steel Orchestra which was formed in the backyard of his home in Sangre Grande. He was also a former president, I understand, of Pan Trinbago.

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

We have Duvone Stewart, Avis Bruce, Annise Hadeed, Clive Bradley, Michelle Huggins Watts, Othello Molineaux, Steve Achaiba, Pat Bishop, Ken “Proffessor” Philmore, Amrit Samaroo, Kim Loy Wong, and he was one of the persons who started Highlanders Steel Orchestra.

So at a cursory glance, and this is just some of the persons that I could mention here today. And a cursory glance to the multitudes now on pilgrimage from panyard to panyard for the Panorama judging of the single and small-band categories would reveal the true essence of the steelpan as a unifying force. Persons from every creed, race and socioeconomic background stand side by side as they listen to the magical notes being played on those instruments by an equally diverse array of players and musicians. There is no atmosphere as exciting and as exhilarating as on Carnival Saturday night when the Panorama final is held. Magic, artistry, camaraderie and old rivalries interweave as the best of Trinidad and Tobago is on display between the equally iconic North and Grand Stand.

So, Mr. President, I have had the distinct privilege of representing the constituency Laventille East/Morvant from where a number of our country’s most famous steelbands emerge and actually I grew up in Laventille. So I know that Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye spoke about, you know, she quoted the *Bible* about, could anything good come from Nazareth. Well, we can say, can anything good come from Laventille, because we are talking about the steelpan here. Alright?

**6.00 p.m.**

So I want to speak about bands that I knew of, bands like Solo Harmonites, for example, which, for years, made their home in that constituency, providing both a meeting ground and melting pot, where all could gather regardless of race, religion, age, gender, class or political affiliation. Not forgetting also from Laventille, Success Village that is, Uni Stars Steel Orchestra, Ebonites from Morvant, then there is Royal Stars, Highlanders, Laventille Pashphonics, Laventille Serenaders, Courts Sound Specialists. There were earlier bands, some of them I only found out recently because I did not know the names. I knew one, Chase Manhattan Savoy's, I heard about them, but there are also two others, Armed Forces and Kentuckians. So persons who would have been older than me and have been involved in the pan fraternity will know about these bands.

So the Coat of Arms of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has long been a symbol of the nation's identity, reflecting its rich history and cultural heritage. This change, in its depiction at clause 4 of the Bill, with the removal of the three ships, not only represents a shift in national pride, but also a broader movement towards decolonization and cultural affirmation. Now, I know that Sen. Vieira spoke about the decolonization, but what we are speaking about here, of course, is the negative aspect. At no time I think that there was a plan to speak negative, totally, about colonization, but I think it is mainly the negative aspects, and there is where the ships come in.

I hasten to add that this decision taken by a courageous Government, led by an even more intrepid Prime Minister, is also a sign of our own growth in maturity and the development of a stronger sense of our own identity, and that is how I think it should be viewed.

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

**Sen. The Hon. D. Cox:** Make no mistake that this inclusion of the steelpan on our country's Coat of Arms is emblematic of a reclaiming of our national identity and pride. With this amendment, we replace symbols of colonial conquest with an emblem of cultural resistance, ensuring that our Coat of Arms truly reflects the soul of our nation. The change aligns well enough with a global movement towards decolonization, where former colonies, like ours, are re-evaluating and often rejecting, and the word is, "negative symbols" of their colonial past. It is not a matter of just rejecting symbols and everything, but it is about negative symbols of our colonial past, in favour of those that represent their own histories, achievements and aspirations.

Mr. President, if I may return to the lyrics of the Mighty Sniper:

I will undoubtedly discover several other writings, they will never say.

And one of those is that we are replacing three ships that accidentally landed here, and this was made clear by some of the speakers on the other side as well, with something that is truly indigenous, which is the steelpan. This represents another significant and tangible demonstration of this Government being true to its word, in its commitment to correcting any injustices done to the indigenous people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because that is one of areas that we need to remember, the indigenous people.

I am certain that this country will recall that it was this Government which, in October 2017, granted the first official national public holiday to the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago. It was also this Government, which almost one year later, in August 2018, took another significant step and granted a deed of 25 acres of land to the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community for the construction of

the First Peoples Heritage and Living Museum. The deed was handed over to the Chief, Ricardo Barrett, proclaiming for all to see that the delivery beats the old talk of promises made to that community in 2013, by the Administration we replaced.

As we take another step towards decolonization, let us unite in celebrating our shared identity, ensuring that the steelpan continues to inspire future generations as a symbol of our strength, of our patriotism and, of course, our boundless creativity. I see that—you know, I have been reading as well, and I saw that some persons have been criticizing almost everything concerning the amendment to this Coat of Arms; a lot of criticisms, people we were just talking and, of course, there are those who are positive as well because—I would not quote again, but I saw that President of Pan Trinbago was very positive about it. I saw that Prof. Bridget Brereton of the History Department—actually, she was one of my lecturers at UWI, and she was very positive about this move. Mr. Kambon also said that it was long overdue, and there are many others. But then it seems as though you are hearing people talking and it comes across as if the only comments about this are negative comments, and that is not the case at all.

As we take another step, let us unite in celebrating our identity and ensure that the steelpan continues to inspire our future generation. I will close simply by stating that the replacement of the three ships with the steelpan on the Coat of Arms is a powerful statement of this country's cultural affirmation. This move is indicative of the country's journey towards embracing our own identity, and honouring the creativity, the resilience and the exemplary togetherness of our people. As we continue our evolution as a nation, the steelpan today stands as a proud symbol of our rich cultural heritage, and a commitment to forging a future that is true to our own values and history. There is no better place for it to be

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displayed than in our own Coat of Arms. For those who may still have difficulty with this particular decision, I urge them to simply pay heed to the advice contained in the lyrics of our own Senator, Sen Helon Francis' song, "Doh dis we country". I thank you. May God bless you.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Smith.

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

**Sen. Dominic Smith:** Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to what I consider a very monumental amendment to the Bill. Mr. President, there is a book entitled *The Adventures of the Magic Steelpan* by Leeana William. If I were to take an excerpt from that book, it reads:

Grandpa always said the steelpan had a heart and with every strike, it told a story of where we have been and where we are going.

So, Mr. President, on the backdrop of where we have found ourselves as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, it is indeed poetic that we find ourselves looking deeply into a symbol that certainly told a painful story of where we and our ancestors have been, and certainly, an expression of a hope laid so long ago. Mr. President, I ask you: Have we realized that hope expressed by the protagonist in this book, in this fictional work? Can we say that as we seek to replace one emblem, and in so doing revisit our past, that we have indeed utilized the magic of our steelpan and, by extension, the resource of our people beyond mere rhetoric?

Today, I rise to lend support. I want to be clear on that. I rise to lend support to National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) (Amdt.) Bill, 2025. But while, in principle, we endorse to proposal to replace the depiction of the ships—and today, I was indeed educated by Sen. Anthony Vieira, the Niña, the

Pinta and the Santa Maria. I myself was still in the darkness as it relates to that. So, Mr. President, while, in principal, we endorse the proposed replacement, it is incumbent on us to reflect upon the deeper, broader implications of this symbolic change. This moment presents us as a nation the opportunity to explore, not just the past and present of our nation, but chart a course for a more promising future.

I want to take this time to, for the viewing public, engage in a bit of historical backdrop of Trinidad and Tobago's colonial past, because to truly appreciate the significance of our national emblems, we must first confront the history they encapsulate. Many of said here that our Coat of Arms was crafted in 1962, at the dawn of our very independence, and has long been a symbolic representation of our identity. However, it is the elements, in particular the ships, that draw direction or draw the direct line to our colonial past, and the horrors, I dare say, of slavery and indentureship that have shaped Trinidad and Tobago and quite, in fact, the world at large.

In the words of Dr. Eric Williams, in his seminal work, *Capitalism and Slavery*, he said that:

The wealth of the West was built on the backs of enslaved Africans.  
The ships of the Coat of Arms embodied that very history of exploitation.

I think to words of Marcus Garvey, when he said that

“...people without knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.”

And so I am happy that we, as citizens, are now embarking upon this sort of legislation, which is important. As Derek Walcott, the noble laureate, said, “The Sea is History”.

So on one sense, we are looking to move way from these ships that, no

doubt, created our present, but, Mr. President, this is not an abstract procession that we are engaged in. It is a lived reality of our generations, as Trinidadians and Tobagonians, whose ancestors endured unimaginable suffering under the colonial yoke. I want to speak to the steelpan, which was born in Laventille in particular, and the conditions upon which it was born was amidst poverty, resilience, ingenuity, and it is indeed an emblem of triumph over adversity. It is ascension to the Coat of Arms is, undoubtedly, a step towards reclaiming our narrative. However, symbolism alone cannot suffice in addressing a legacy of colonialism, and so I think it is important, as we amend, this Bill that we break down the emblems in its essence.

When we look at the humming birds, for example, it represents the beauty and vibrancy of our land. The shield, with its red, black and white coloration, reflects the strength, dedication and purity of our people. When we now seek to add the steelpan, this latest addition, it symbolizes innovation, cultural identity, I will even go as far as global recognition. Yet, Mr. President, beyond this aesthetic, we, as a people, must ask ourselves: What these symbols do to foster tangible change within a society? More importantly, Mr. President, we must ask the question: Have these symbols fostered deep change within our society?

**6.15 p.m.**

Hilary Beckles said:

Symbols are powerful but they are not substitutes for action.

And so as we contemplate these changes I want us not to think about, merely, as my colleague would have said, a changing of a picture, a changing of a symbol, but how do these symbols resonate with the Trinidad and Tobago of the future, of the Trinidad and Tobago that we want for our kids. And so, Mr.

President, as we look at the amendment on clause 4, this marks a significant shift in how we choose to represent ourselves by removing a tainted history and now replacing with what we call “a magical symbol of hope”. And so, Mr. President, it is important, therefore, that we consider, have we realized the hope of this symbolism. One of the items I mentioned earlier was innovation and innovative people, that is what the steelpan, one of the attributes, it is meant to suggest to us

But, Mr. President, I want us to consider a document by the OECD, which published an article on “Innovation policies in a digital age”, and in the abstract it speaks to digital transformation, it speaks to a wide range of transformational activities, it speaks to innovation policy required in a digital age. It speaks to innovation policy as it relates to data and access to data. It speaks to agility of our systems and our regulations and the way in which we govern our society. And as we look to consider the steelpan, I ask you have we been innovative in Trinidad and Tobago? Well I want to tell you something, Mr. President, and bring it to the attention of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, do you know that we scrapped our innovation policy in 2020? And so, we are suggesting that we replace our colonial past with an innovative symbol, but we have no spin in the game in our innovation policy, we have to really realise proof that we are forging a path to innovation in Trinidad and Tobago

And so, the Government cannot question why persons on this side, and even the Independent Bench, have seen some of their amendments to these important Bills as merely cosmetic, because to many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago it feels that way. Are you truly serious about the symbolism behind the steelpan and innovation? Let us think about another attribute that the steelpan typically would resonate with. And as I speak on the item of cultivating a culture of innovation



sparked by this symbolism of the steelpan, it does not bring me pleasure to see that Trinidad and Tobago—in fact, over the last 10 years or so—has declined in the indices as it relates to innovation. In fact, in an article in the *Newsday*—

**Mr. President:** Senator, so I think you are veering off a “lil bit” too far outside the parameters of what we are discussing here today. I would ask you to bring it back to what is in the Bill. Clause 4, clause 5 which is the meat of what is before us.

**Sen. D. Smith:** Mr. President, I am guided by your instruction. And the point I was making, Mr. President, is that we are dealing with a Bill, and we are treating with an amendment to a Bill, that replaces something that we can all agree has a scarring effect on our current generation. Because it represents a history that we no longer wish to identify with, but then we are replacing this symbolism with one that we can all see a shared sense of pride for. And I am saying to this Parliament, this honourable Senate that it cannot simply be a measure of words that we must take it a step further where symbols represents action, and I am suggesting, Mr. President, in terms of where we are going it is not indicative of that, and that is something we need to pay attention to, because intention is important, and the intention must be followed by action, Mr. President. If I am to look again at the cultural significance of the steelpan, how have we been as a country and as a Government mapping out our rich cultural heritage? How are we using, again, the symbolism to craft a cultural identity for Trinidad and Tobago? In the *Guardian* newspaper there is an article saying, “Mapping T&T’s rich cultural heritage”—

**Mr. President:** Date of the article?

**Sen. D. Smith:** January 20, 2025, Mr. President. And I will take a small excerpt from the article. It says,

“What T&T may lack in tourism infrastructure...”

That struck me that the beginning or the preface to this article speaking about cultural identity is prefaced with what I would very negative sentiment, that “what Trinidad and Tobago may lack in tourism infrastructure...” And so, Mr. President, when we look at that in the context of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, which no doubt played a part in this propagated symbolic change, we have to really appreciate, do the numbers suggest a movement in the right direction?

**Sen. Dr. Browne:** Mr. President, I have been trying but I have to move Standing Order 53(1)(b) at this point and 46(1). It is a lot of repetition and I am not clear on the relevance.

**Mr. President:** So the Standing Order raised is in relation to tedious repetition. What we have heard predominantly throughout the majority of the contributions today thus far has been the historical context in relation to Coat of Arms, in relation to the three ships, in relation to the steelpan, are the debates itself have taken on, for context purposes, you know, a conversations centred around steelpan. That being said, and now knowing that coming in at number 10, in terms of the debate, tedious repetition will come into play. And also be very mindful, because this is a five-clause Bill where clause 4 and clause 5 forms the meat of the Bill that it becomes extremely difficult to expand upon that for a 40-minute conversation in a debate. So you would have to be very careful that you are going outside of the parameters.

It is a Coat of Arms, very specific to replacing one thing with another, so you do not have a wide width to expand upon that action in and of itself as contained in the Bill. Understood?

**Sen. D. Smith:** Mr. President, thank you for your guidance. Mr. President, while

sitting across here on this side of the Senate I must say there was a wide range of topics expressed as it relates to the Bill. And in my respectful view it transitions many areas as it relates to the Bill at hand, it dealt with many issues across a wide spectrum, and so if I am falling out of that spectrum, I certainly would not like to encroach upon the honourable Senate. But save to say, Mr. President, I want to build some context as we are exploring the symbolism and the replacement. One of the ways in which I am doing so is I am reflecting on, what are the notes, what are the palettes of this change, and I have said to this Senate, steelpan represents innovation, and I am drawing a contrast, Mr. President, for the viewing public. But it represents innovation, but there needs to be substance behind the symbolism. I am drawing reference to cultural identity, which the steelpan resonates with, but again it must be backed moving forward with an investment in culture.

**Hon. Senator:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. D. Smith:** That is not tedious repetition, Ma'am. That is not tedious repetition.

**Sen. Lyder:** “Doh answer dem. Doh answer dem, nah”.

**Sen. D. Smith:** That is quite clearly a connection—

**Sen. Lyder:** No, you ignore them. You just ignore them. You just continue man. Do not listen to them.

**Sen. Roberts:**—[*Inaudible*]—the PNM and the people do ignore them.

**Hon. Senator:** [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Lyder:** Listen to the President, and “doh” listen to anybody on that side.

**Mr. President:** So Sen. Smith, regardless of crosstalk we do not respond in that particular manner in which you just responded, that is one. Two, you are the tenth speaker in this debate, context would have been created on all sides, to my left and

to my right in relation to what you are referring to now, which would put you in breach of the Standing Orders in relation to tedious repetition. Not that it was not said before, is the fact that where you are coming in and it being repeated, that is why it is in breach of tedious repetition. If you had come in earlier then you would have formed part of the context being created.

**Sen. D. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. President, I am guided by your comments. Apologies for my outburst, and to the hon. Senator.

**Sen. Lyder:** “Doh say nutten to dem boy. Doh say nutten to dem. You doh owe dem no apology”.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder, please allow Sen. Smith to contribute. He does not require any assistance. Sen. Smith.

**Sen. D. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I do not want to belabour the House, as you said. I am the tenth speaker, I am certainly not the last. I do not think so. But the comparison is very clear, Mr. President, there is an attribute of innovation, there is an attribute in the steelpan, in my view, cultural identity, and I dare say there is an attribute of global recognition. These three things speak to what this Bill is about, we are transitioning from the past and we are moving into a more prosperous, we hope, future. And so, the connection I am trying to make, Mr. President, clearly is not so clear, is that in order for us to amend this Bill, in order for us to really bring the fruits of what this Bill seeks to provide, is if we confront not only the historical colonial past, but we also take a look at what has been happening in our country and what needs to change, in order to be great representations of this symbolic change. And so, that is the connection I am trying to suggest, Mr. President.

In particular, as it relates to the cultural piece, there is a need for Trinidad and the

Government to invest more heavily in things related to tourism and culture, and if I was to draw for a data reference, our MTCA allocation is around 0.72 per cent of the national budget. The comparison to GDP is 0.24 per cent. And so there is a need for us as we engage in this symbolic change that we also attribute and allocate resources that are quite significant as well in as much as there is a colonial removal, in as much as there is a forward progressive amendment, there must also be action behind this amendment, so that is all I want to say on that, Mr. President.

The good Sen. Vieira he mentioned in his contribution, a piece that I felt resonated with me, and that relates to the intellectual property conversation, which I think is an important one. Because, yes, years later we are in this process of re-identifying who we are, but there must be a strategic and sensible, and to use the words of Donald Trump, a common-sense approach to the way we engage in these types of activities. And, I read an article in preparation for this debate on intellectual property, which is a subject I am not familiar with. But as a student and wanting to give as much value as possible to a contribution in the Senate, in such an august Chamber, I read an article by Grace Bhagwandeem, and a gentleman, who I in fact went to school with, Dr. Justin Koo, who is now, as I see it, becoming a person contributing regularly. I see Sen. Vieira nodding in approval, I do recognize and respect him.

**6.30 p.m.**

One of the things that he said in this particular article is that, and I just want to read a small excerpt with your permission, Mr. President. He said:

Although the steelpan first originated in Trinidad and Tobago, it symbolizes the very essence of Caribbean music and the entire region has been involved in the struggle to recognize the steelpan as its home.

Now, he goes on to quote a particular patent which was granted to, I believe, a gentleman called George Whitmyre and Harvey Price. That essentially allowed for an innovation outside of our typical understanding of the steelpan. I say this to say this, I take this quote to suggest to our Government and to stakeholders involved in an instrument that is so vital and important to our national identity, but also in the context of revenue generation, we as a people must take our cultural identity and our performances, as it relates to this, very important because it is valuable. .

External entities have always had to validate our grandeur in many respects, and this in fact is a result of our colonization or historical colonization, sort of a brainwash that we as Caribbean people and we as Trinidadians are not enough. And, when I saw that this particular article, which spoke essentially to the fact that we had lost the opportunity to patent, something that was home to us, it brought a great sense of sadness to me. Because, we had an opportunity for so long, the steelpan created, as many would have said here, in the 1940s, and now years later we have not been able to reap the rewards of such a great innovation of such a pride of Trinidad and Tobago.

I know in my heart that Trinidad is capable of producing many more unique and innovative items, and I want to challenge this Government to look very closely in the way in which we assess the value of things that are very homegrown and pay attention to it. Just as we have industries that have seemed to have given a buffer, like the oil and gas industry which we were happy for and we are very appreciative of, there are other avenues of diversification like the steelpan, like items in culture, like the arts that have been too neglected and I want to stick a point there. That, yes, we are moving away from colonization, we are moving away from vestiges that some speakers here have suggested, but let us really, really, mean it this time.

Let us really invest in the things that are unique to Trinidad, that are unique to the Caribbean territories and that we can take advantage of financially, because God knows we need something, we need these buffers, we need these alternative streams of potential revenue.

So, Mr. President, the question that we need to ask ourselves, are we better off or worse off post this change? Many have quoted here lyrics as it relates to artistes, and one in particular that struck me as it relates to the story telling of the steelpan was in the Lord Kitchener's rendition, "*Is De Pan In Me*". If I were to take a few words from the late Kitchener he states in this song:

I started to beat pan at the age of six

I could tell yuh as man ah get plenty licks

Meh grandmother tell me yuh such a disgrace, why yuh always beating pan  
all over the place

It is true we are poor but we have dignity

Ohhh I doh want this thing in our family

I done tell you Aldwin ah fedup with your tricks

Before I say yes, granny hang me with licks.

Later on, in this rendition, Kitchener is painting a story of what I consider potential. And, in the stubbornness of the youth, he paints this picture of a child that loves to go to school but also loves the panyard more. He wants to be attentive but he wants to fuel his passion for pan even more. So as an adult he can look back in his contribution to society and he said:

I would not give up my pan for nothing in this world, oh, how I love this  
thing with my heart and soul.

When I considered this musical piece I said to myself, pan, and indeed many

aspects of our society are really transformative tools that we have, unfortunately, not been able to really harness the potential.

So, Mr. President, if we were able to use the pan to engage our youth and to show the promise of utilizing our own resources and our own resilience and our own ingenuity, Mr. President, we could have given our youth of yesterday a much brighter future. Like the protagonist, they too are uninterested in school, they too are disenchanted, sometimes with their future, but instead of opportunity, unfortunately, we have given them as a government and as a people a culture that now, unfortunately, is about “gangsterism” and gangs.

So, Mr. President, we have missed the opportunity that we had. Instead of ships, Mr. President, we have given them the opportunity to partake in guns. Instead of the Santa Maria, which was misquoted, Mr. President—

**Mr. President:** Senator.

**Sen. D. Smith:**—we have allowed them to dive into—

**Mr. President:** Senator, I get it. The pan is going on the Coat of Arms, but you are going so deeply into pan and what it means, you are answering a question as to why we are putting the pan on the Coat of Arms, which everybody has spoken to and answered. There is no need to broaden it in trying to answer that question. By doing what you are doing right now because you are going to be in breach of 46(1) in doing so. So I will ask again, skip out all of that. If you have already addressed why the pan is going in the Coat of Arms, which you have done, as far as I am concerned, why the ships have come off, which again you have done, then unless it is something absolutely new in terms of what has been said before then I would invite you to wrap up now.

**Sen. D. Smith:** Thank you for your intervention. Can I ask you how much more



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time I have?

**Mr. President:** You end at 6.47 p.m..

**Sen. D. Smith:** 6.47 p.m. Around nine minutes?

**Mr. President:** Yeah.

**Sen. D. Smith:** With your guidance and your grace, I would like to use most of my time and I will try to, again, keep within the confines of the—

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

**Mr. President:** You could use as much time as you want but it has to be relevant. Understood?

**Sen. D. Smith:** Understood. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the reason why I am so, I guess, passionate about the representation of pan in this context is because we on this side, Mr. President, appreciate that pan is a transformational tool. And even if we have not in the past been able to fully utilize or harness its potential in the past, the past is the past, just like the ships, the past is the past, but the future can be so bright—

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. Browne:** Mr. President, point of order. Standing Order 53(1) (b), I think the point has been well made, emphatically so and it is being—

**Mr. President:** Senator we have spoken to that just recently. I will allow you to continue on that basis that you understood what is being raised.

**Sen. D. Smith:** Yes, Mr. President. So—

**Sen. Roberts:** Hans Des Vignes play the pan?

**Sen. D. Smith:** Thank you, thank you again and I appreciate, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Browne, the attention to duty as it relates to the Standing Orders.

**Mr. President:** Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs.

**Sen. D. Smith:** Yes, Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, yes. Mr.

President, the reason why again I am so passionate about this is because I believe there is a lot of opportunity for the pan as a transformative tool in the way in which our current society is heading. And I will leave it as that, I will leave it as that and let the ship sail on that particular point, right, if “yuh doh mind the pun”.

So, Mr. President, there are many areas of this particular amendment which are important. There is obviously the historical significance, there is the appropriateness of the symbol as it relates to a shared uniqueness that we all love, the steelpan and its innovation, but there is also an economic piece about it which I would like the Minister in his wrap up to more clearly identify and to clarify in terms of the spend. Because in his contribution, if I were to speak to, what he says, it is relevant based on the fact that he mentioned it, and in wrapping up I just want to quickly speak to it.

He said that essentially this amendment does not or will not encumber the citizenry in terms of the taxpaying dollars. So I want him to clarify, if he can, for the record the amount that this change will impact upon the citizens and it will be the taxpayers who eventually have to pay for this. And in terms of the date, you mentioned that some of this activity would roll out into 2026, of January, so if you can clarify that piece in the wrap up.

I also want to take note of what I thought was quite nonsensical in my view of the contribution by Sen. Hislop where he mentioned that the context of something is not important in terms of where this statement was made by the hon. Prime Minister. That it did not matter if it happened in a grocery store, it did not matter if it happened in the bush, it was the fact that he is Prime Minister that he can say and suggest wherever he please. And so, I would ask him, so what is the significance of public buildings? Why are we sitting in this august Chamber and

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having a respectful deliberation with each other—

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

**Sen. D. Smith:**—if it matters not where we sit? I mean, that to me was mind-boggling, right, in terms of not aligning something of significance with a place and the grandeur that it needs. I want to take Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox as well. She—

**Mr. President:** The Minister of Social Development and Family Services.

**Sen. D. Smith:** The Minister of Social Development and Family Services. I want to take her comment as well. In her contribution, she mentioned quite a bit of stalwarts of pan. I want to encourage the Government not only to create this symbolic gesture but why have we not honoured these numerous people?

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

**Sen. D. Smith:** There was a list of people, more than 10 listed by her, another amount listed by Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye, and I myself had not understood the depth of contributions made to pan. To put it to the Government, we must honour all persons who have contributed to the pan. All.

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

**Sen. D. Smith:** All, leave none out. Because it is important that we have these symbols, it is also important that we honour the people who have contributed to the fact that we even considering this as a symbol.

**6.45 p.m.**

So, Mr. President, I appreciate your patience with me as I develop my points, and as I begin to wrap there is a quote by Lloyd Best and he said:

The future of the Caribbean lies in the creative application of its resources both human and material.

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And so, Mr. President, the amendment to the Coat of Arms is not without merit. I want to say that and make that abundantly clear, the position of the UNC is that it is not without merit, but merit must have substance and action behind it.

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

**Sen. D. Smith:** So, Mr. President, as we clear, we stand at what I consider a threshold of symbolic change. I implore the Government to take stock of what truly matters to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and while the inclusion of the steelpan on the Coat of Arms is meaningful and is a meaningful acknowledgement of our cultural identity, our resilience, it cannot substitute for substantive, transformative action. This amendment, Mr. President, must be more than a cosmetic gesture. It must also harness the potential of economies of scale and economics to broaden our national holds of this cultural icon, this cultural symbol. Building a prosperous Trinidad and Tobago, an equitable and forward-thinking country, this is what this symbol should be pushing us in the direction of.

I want to say Trinidad and Tobago has all the ingredients to be a leader in the Caribbean and beyond with our rich cultural heritage, our abundance of resources and our resilient innovative citizens, yet these advantages will mean nothing without a visionary Government, a visionary leadership, and a commitment to transformative change. It is my view that the United National Congress has the vision for what this symbol will eventually enshrine—

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

**Hon. Senator:** Very well said.

**Sen. D. Smith:** And so, Mr. President, I urge the Government to rise to the occasion but, quite frankly, they have not done so in the last 10 years. I honour the legacy of the steelpan not just with its symbols, but with actions that inspire pride,

foster unity, deliver progress to our people. Let us make Trinidad and Tobago a nation worthy of this transition and this change, and worthy of its people's boundless potential. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you.

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

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

**Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy:** Thank you, Mr. President. As this is our first Sitting for this New Year, I would just like to wish you and all Members of this House and our nation the best for 2025. 2024 has gone and it was a very, I think a year with mixed—I would call it mixed sentiments, a lot of it very negative, but as we embark on this new journey of 2025, I sincerely pray that God would bless us individually and collectively as a people with good health, unity, progress and prosperity. In my reflection for the New Year I noted a passage from the Book of Nehemiah 2, verse 17 that talks and it says:

“But now I said to them...”—this is Nehemiah saying to them—“...You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!”

There are many things in our nation that need rebuilding and I am confident that together with God's help, just as God helped with the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, so too we can rise and build back our nation.

Mr. President, I know many of my colleagues would like to say that it depends on one particular party doing this. Our nation will not rise and build, we will not rise and build unless we all do it. It is not dependent on a political party. It is dependent on us as a people deciding that we have to go and do better than we are doing right here now, and I am confident that we can. We are talking here

about a Bill that we are honouring, our steelpan, and putting the steelpan on our national emblem, the Coat of Arms; steelpan a symbol of resilience and creativity which is exactly what I think we need to be exercising right now in our nation as a people regardless of which side of the fence you are on and I am confident that we can do it.

Before us is the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) (Amdt.) Bill, 2025, a Bill that seeks to amend and I quote:

“...the description of the Coat of Arms of Trinidad and Tobago by deleting the reference in the base of the Arms to ‘three ships of the period of Christopher Columbus also gold and sails set proper’ and substituting that the base of the Arms which now will contain ‘a gold Steelpan and its iconic two pan sticks also gold.’”

Mr. President, I will not be caught being told of tedious repetition because many of the points that I wanted to make have already been made, but I would specifically deal with that part of what we are talking about in terms of the resilience of our people. I am saying that the steelpan, it has already been mentioned how important it was, and where it has come from, and what it has come to, all indigenously created by people who were considered outcasts and I think that is something that is very important for us as a people as we go forward in 2025.

Sen. Richards would have mentioned a lot about what the Coat of Arms symbolized. I am not going to go there again. The specific point I want to make was already made about the cost of this change, and it was mentioned by Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts that the change was going to take over a period of time and I do appreciate that but it is still a change and it is still a cost. And

specifically, as it relates to costs, like the things that you do not change, like a birth certificate that you have for life, unlike things like the passports that you mentioned that would change with a specific time and you can have a time for changing that, what happens to items like a birth certificate where you do not normally come to change that and it has that old emblem on it? What are we going to do about that because that is something that I think is important.

Mr. President, I would say two things, one, that I do endorse the change that is being presented here by the Government, and in spite of all the issues that we have mentioned as to when it is happening and why it is happening, I too was concerned about the fact that there was not a discussion as getting the committee. I too was looking at that as being an important point, but I heard that it is a discretion of the Minister. Even though it may be discretionary for something as important as this, I would have thought that the buy-in would have been better and deeper if a committee was charged with at least getting more persons involved in terms of making decisions. But, I do understand the need to make the change and I too would have wondered about other changes.

For instance, from Tobago, I know there is a concern about the Cocrico being on the Coat of Arms. Many people do not think that it should be there particularly given what we experience right now from the Cocrico. So there are many things that I would have preferred if we had had further discussion on it, but I must say that, one, I do and will support the change. The other area is that we really should look not just at the short-term cost, but also long-term cost that this change would have made, knowing that we are going to benefit as a people as a result of it. Mr. President, I thank you.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Maharaj.

**Sen. Sunity Maharaj:** Mr. President, let me join everyone in wishing all Members a very productive, peaceful, safe and happy 2025. I am struck in this debate both inside this Chamber and in the wider society by the ironies in this conversation in the national discussion around the Coat of Arms. The first thing that is so surprising is the word that is being thrown about all the time, “decolonization”, yet who was more decolonized than those teenagers who invented the pan and that was 80-something years ago. Those are young people who completely trusted their confidence, used their resources they found around them and made music out of dustbin covers. There was no piece of steel or metal that was safe from them. They got it all and they made pan. That was the decolonized mind probably having escaped the school system. They invented pan and they worked all the problems that they encountered in the different kinds of metal to move from just rhythm to actual music creation, and that is the first thing. The other thing is that these debates—the debate mostly in the wider society is so full of differences, anger in some cases, around an instrument that is so universally unifying in this country. There is nobody who does not accept that the steelpan is the national instrument. Even when they argue for space for some other instrument, nobody says not the pan. They say they want a space too. Pan is the sound of home for all of us wherever we are in the world. We hear it, we move towards it. So we have this instrument, that from its very birth was the expression of the decolonized mind and decolonization that unifies us and it is absolutely innovative and I want to come to that point of innovation. In fact, I think I will hold that point for now because I think there are some things that we need to understand about pan.



Pan was never the creation of the State, whether it was the colonial State or the post independent State. Pan has fought to the State every inch of the way, and even in this case let us remember how we came to World Steelpan Day. It was a group of ordinary people who got together and started something called the World Steelpan Day thrust of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Bertel Gittens Jr. and other people, and also the pan turners association of the country, they got together in 2019 and they got buy-in from Pan Trinbago, but they were starting their thing. They had their first meeting in Pan Trinbago's car park. They weathered the COVID period by meeting every year on August 11<sup>th</sup>. I think it was in 2022 when they were forced to have a virtual meeting and I think the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts logged on and very happily and for the value of all of us, took the idea, and when that organization, that group of people, of Trinidadians, wanted to approach UNESCO then the Cabinet authorized the National Commission of UNESCO to take it forward.

Subsequently, we know that the Minister went and he made the presentation to the UNGA, the General Assembly, and I think about 80-something countries supported it.

**7.00 p.m.**

So, once again, it was citizens pushing this idea and we must always remember that to this day, nobody can say who invented the pan because it was genuinely something that came out of people. And so this, I think, is at the heart of one of the contentions that we are hearing. Some of it is reflected here but most of it is still ongoing. It is an ongoing debate in the wider society because people feel so involved and invested in the steelpan, and this is where, I think, we have to talk—well, it has been spoken about already—about the process by which we have

come to this point of trying to give the pan a place, a symbolic representation of the value that we place on the pan.

It is a low-hanging fruit because the fruits that are not so low-hanging for pan are the things that we have to do to infuse all the strength of the pan, all the approaches, the decolonization that lies in the pan, it is how do we infuse that into the rest of the society, in terms of the economy, in terms of the education system, in terms of the viability of that community, community building, or how do we get pan—how do we investigate what is in pan, that has held and has sustained itself for the majority of its existence without state support—and it is only now we are coming—you know, the whole world has acknowledged it so we are very happy to give it everything. Within the space of a few months, we have moved from—within a year, from World Steelpan Day, to a national instrument, and now it is on the Coat of Arms. So it is the easy ride. This is the low-hanging fruit and we should not have to be arguing about it.

The reason we are arguing about it, and so many of us support—well, we support the steelpan. So do not let us get caught up in challenging anybody's love for the pan and respect for the pan, with a difference of opinion on how the Government has gone around bringing it into the Coat of Arms. Do not capture people in that argument. That is not is not the argument. The argument is, if you are going to refresh our national symbols and to use a symbol that is already invested with power by the people of the population—pan is already invested in power. We do not have to sell pan to people—why have we not gone about it in a way that took the people into consideration first, as opposed to the edict-like way in which we have gone about it?

I heard the Senator talk about the context and I think that has been

mentioned. I will not belabour the point, except my reading of the report of that event was that it was an announcement, not a conversation, not discussion, not a debate. It was an announcement, and from that announcement followed the proposal being taken to Cabinet and now we are here today. So we skipped a major—and I think we underestimate the people of this country by our fear to engage them in discussion and debate. We believe that everybody will have a different opinion, that the thing will never happen because—you know what? That is democracy. And why do we not have the confidence to believe that we can persuade people by our arguments?

If we go and we say, “This is what we want to do”—in fact, I am pretty sure if you gave pan people the assignment to come up with a symbolic representation using the pan, they might even throw out the idea of a coat of arms which, of course, is a medieval construct. The last thing we need is anything with arms in it in this country, and it has to do with knights and battle and fighting. We need a symbol. Who says the symbol has to look like a coat of arms, and who says the pan has to be at the bottom rather than the top, or the pan could not itself be the Coat of Arms? The point is that we have to be willing to open up our minds, and open up and expect that this country, that produced the pan, has the ingenuity, it has the capacity for creative thought to deliver something startling, an image that represents the country that startles us, and I think this is why so many people are upset about what they see with the design, and words like “underwhelmed” and so on. It does not strike, it does not hit.

I, personally, would be happy with anything that the mass of the population felt, they loved it, because I think it is a matter—what we are missing here, we are missing the opportunity to invest in a national symbol with the power that makes

all of us feel like it belongs to us. We know the pan belongs to us. If we are going to have a national symbol that we are going to put on correspondence and on official buildings and so on, we want something that people feel invested in. I do not think people feel invested in the Coat of Arms that exists now, because all the time you have to tell people what is in the Coat of Arms because it did not come out of them. But this is 67 years after independence, we know when it was done by Carlisle Chang and his team. It was done—we were hustling—having quickly abandoned the Federation, we decided to move to independence and they had three months, and they had to work night and day, and they did the best they could. I recalled reading Carlisle Chang saying, he had to send it to the Prime Minister and the one change Dr. Williams made is that he wanted Tobago represented on it, and that is where the coconut trees—the palm trees came at the top. I do not know why that represented Tobago, but that is what he took. And when they took it—of course, somebody said when it went to England, it was further modified, right.

But you know, they had to get these things done. We do not have that rush. We had the opportunity, at this time, to carry that pan, open it up to the country. I would have so much preferred to have our artists involved in this process, for them to come with the—complete—and it and not saying a competition, but pit their wits against each other, have a conversation and a discussion of this that would enrich all of us, and then we get to a place where we understand how we got there. It will happen. The votes are there. It will pass. Nobody is against—nobody is against pan. What people have a—what I have a problem, certainly, with is the lost opportunity. We are trying to have a coat of arms that has a piece of this culture and a piece of that culture when, in my view, if you just had the pan, everybody is represented in that but that is just my opinion. I am open to changing

my opinion if I see something better.

So if there is one thing to take away from this moment, it is that having lost the opportunity to find a symbol that all of us feel joyful and invested in and we can agree on, that we should not let that happen again. We recognize the opportunity to get people of every different gender, race, class. When you see them believing in something and they are that invested, hold your hand, whoever is in the Government, give the people a chance. Take it back, open it up, do not be afraid of people. People want to have a stake in this and they are not getting the stake, and so we will have a Coat of Arms—and it is an amendment Bill, and I would not be surprised if it is amended again in the future because it is unfinished work. I thank you.

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne):** Mr. President, the evening is well spent, and I want to say it again with a different emphasis, this evening has been well spent. I want to say for my part, Mr. President, I am proud to be associated with this advancement of our national musical instrument onto the Coat of Arms of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** This represents yet another step— notwithstanding some of the negativity and the naysaying—in what I see has been a sequential advancement, promotion and elevation of something that is precious to the people of this nation, the steelpan, predominantly, within the last several years, under this Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts—

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:**—under this Prime Minister of Trinidad and

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Tobago—

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:**—under this Pan Trinbago, led and supported as it is—

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:**—and with the support and involvement and prayers and energy of so many stakeholders who love the pan. So I want to be associated with this. I am honoured to be a part of the team, team Trinidad and Tobago, that is achieving this particular advancement, and I recognize that we have some members of the pan fraternity with us. They were present in the other place during the debate on Monday. They are present today, and that is just another sign of how connected this Bill and this advancement is to the people who hold the pan in high esteem in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, I want to join the Senators who have paused to wish a Happy New Year to all and their families, that is important, and to single out a very touching moment shared by Sen. Dr. Richards when he indicated his sympathies, solidarity and condolences to the family of the former Member of Parliament, the late hon. Lisa Morris-Julian. So I appreciate that. But I have another comment to share with respect to Sen. Dr. Richards—because I paid close attention to everyone who spoke in this important debate and I can only describe the contribution of Sen. Dr. Paul Richards today as iconic and historic in the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** It really, really was all relevant, well researched and it included—it was not just cheerleading for the Government. It included

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some very important concepts and suggestions for the future.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** That commendation is not limited to Sen Dr. Richards. It applies to Sen. Vieira; the outstanding Sen. Thompson-Ahye, who always has a different take on things and that is quite refreshing. And, the most recent speaker from the Independent Bench, Sen. Maharaj, again, tends to have a different complexion on a number of national matters but it is always worth your time to listen closely to Sen. Maharaj. And one of the things, in my view, she introduced into this debate—and it is very important—is the fact that the pan is much more than an instrument that creates music.

The steelpan is a symbol of importance to the poor, the underserved, the under-represented, the voiceless, those that have been oppressed in our history. Therefore, when we, as a society, are able to agree on uplifting and promoting the steelpan, in my view, what we are doing is promoting and uplifting and elevating and motivating and encouraging those elements in the population that would have felt that degree of under-representation in the past. So this is not just—and I saw some Members of the Opposition, they were probably in a bit of a dilemma because at the end of the day, they voted for the measure in the other place, they are likely to vote for it here today—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Roberts:** Who says we voting for anything?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** That is why I said you are likely to vote for it.

**Sen. Roberts:** Likely—[*Member sucks teeth*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** They have been known to change their minds.

So, Mr. President, I am speaking to you and I know they need—

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**7.15 p.m.**

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

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

**Hon. Senators:** [*Continuous interruption and laughter*]

**Mr. President:** Continue.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, I am not going to be tempted into crosstalk but I am aware that there may be Members on that side who are very familiar with the threat posed by DJs from time to time and I will leave it at that.

**Hon. Senators:** “Oooooooo.” [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** I will leave it at that. Mr. President, back to the matter at hand.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Back to the matter at hand, we were talking about what the steelpan represents to the ordinary man and woman in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Continuous interruption*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, the murmuring is intrusive. Right.

There was a point, as has been referenced by speakers before, when engagement and involvement in the playing of the pan, association with a pan yard was deemed taboo by many communities and many families in this country. I recall a story told by the older members of my family of the old days when there was violence in Port of Spain, the old days but it was not in the form of firearms, it was bottles and knives and big stone and so on and other implements of violence.

There was a story my uncle told of one day in Port of Spain around Carnival time when two bands, two steel bands were on the move and they clashed on the



street and violence broke out. Bottles started to pelt, who “pull ah knife” and there were some very ugly scenes and then one of the band captains said very loudly “start playing, start playing your instruments”. Mr. President, a few of the players started to beat their pans and the sound got a little bit louder and as the story goes, almost like magic, there was a soothing of the environment and what started off as conflict became two steel orchestras playing together on the streets of Port of Spain. The knives disappeared, the bottles were put on the ground and this for me symbolizes the power of the steelpan, the power of the music, the power of our national innovation to solve problems even bigger than it might seem at first blush.

So I do not want anyone in contributing to this debate to understate or undervalue or underrepresent what we are doing today. We in this Chamber, because this is the final signature as it were in approving this Bill, are making history. We are not the first or only country to have changed its Coat of Arms and I will give some examples of the international scenario but this change is very, very significant, Mr. President, and I am so pleased to be part of it at this time.

Yes, there are mixed views. A number of Senators referred to newspaper articles, talk radio and so on, but this is Trinidad and Tobago. There will be mixed views on everything and I do not see that as a negative, I do not see it as a negative. This is a beautiful democracy and everyone has a view. But if as an elected Government, democratically-elected Government, we engage ourselves in a repeated and protracted cycle of indecision where we are not able to take bold steps, we are not able to change things that there is a general consensus requires change, then what is going to happen?

We could stay while acknowledging the three ships present us with a problem, we could find ourselves in five years, 10 years, 50 years without a

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determination of the exact shape, the exact colour. I hear about the angle of the pan sticks, some say that the pan sticks are too long. That is Trinidad and Tobago, that is part of our creativity. What we do is it is easier for us to find fault sometimes than to acknowledge when the right thing is being done for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and unfortunately, we have public officials sometimes feeding into that mentality. There is a level of—I do not want to say toxicity but a powerful negativity out there, some of it is propagated via social media or otherwise that always tries to give us a sense that we cannot do things, we cannot make positive changes when we are living proof that we can do so. This Bill is living proof that we can do so and we are doing so. So, Mr President, I am very proud to be so associated.

Now, Sen. Thompson-Ahye gave us a lot of edification today, like all the other Independent Senators. But, I may be wrong and I stand to be corrected if I am but I thought I heard Sen. Thompson-Ahye say or declare that she was worried when she landed in a regional airport or a foreign airport and was greeted by a pan player who was not a Trinbagonian. For some reason, that triggered the concern of Sen. Thompson-Ahye. But I have a different take on such an experience, Mr. President.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** If I may?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Of course you may.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** I did say afterwards that I did change, that was my initial reaction that hey, these people want to take over the pan, you know and it happened in two countries. But then, I am thinking that you know this is a good thing because it means it is spreading but I just wanted to hold on to what was ours so I did not see the bigger picture that it is growing, it is getting bigger.

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**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Well I could not have said it any better, Mr. President. So the point is that even though this is now our national proclaimed and declared as our national musical instrument, this is a gift that we can continue to give to the world. So as it stands now, we have Brazilians playing and enjoying the steelpan, we have Japanese, we have people in Holland, all over the world and that is a great thing. Now the challenge, as some have identified, is how can we continue to benefit from this expansion and explosion. I can tell you, and I suspect the Minister may have a few words on it shortly, I know for a fact, this is engaging the contemplation and the analysis of key stakeholders, including at the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

So I just want to assure you that this is not something to be frowned upon, this is something to be celebrated, and of course, the question is how can we continue to extract the maximum value. I heard talk of patents and identifying the pan more with Trinidad and Tobago but a number of these steps have already been taken. Again, there is excellent work taking place so all of that is good.

Mr. President, I just want to identify, because I heard Sen. Mark quite clearly state during his contribution that this Government does not like pan, he said that and then of course, at the end, he said they love pan just like we love pan. So it is not the first time he has contradicted himself.

**Sen. Mark:** “It cancel itself.”

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** You have cancelled yourself?

**Sen. Mark:** No, it cancelled.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** It cancelled itself?

**Sen. Mark:** Yeah, yeah.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Two negatives—[*Laughter*] Alright, alright. In

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his feeble attempt at crosstalk, he is trying to distract me, I will not be distracted. The point of the matter is this Government has demonstrated, even the worst and most cynical detractor will have to admit, that within the last two-plus years, this Government's track record on the national musical instrument is uncontested and unrivalled.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** All you have to do—you do not have to listen to me, I am a Member of the Government—is speak to the pan people, the pan fraternity who are walking and stepping and playing now with elevated pride. That is a fact. Today, we had the first ever official visit to Trinidad and Tobago of a Minister of foreign affairs of Brazil, hosted at the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs and the good staff, brilliant staff had the concept of bringing a youth steel band to the Ministry to play for this visiting Minister.

We got the Beetham Vibration Steel Orchestra, young people from the Beetham Estate to come there with their steelpans and play the national anthem of Trinidad and Tobago, the national anthem of Brazil and then a really iconic song called "*Mas Que Nada*", which is a Brazilian bossa nova-type rhythm. In speaking to those young people, the age range is from 10 to 30, most of them on the younger end of that spectrum, they are aware that they are living and experiencing an important period in the history of their instrument, of our instrument. So all of these things that sometimes we cast as trite: World Steelpan Day, World Steelpan Festival, proclamation of national musical instrument, now elevation to the Coat of Arms. Sometimes we just see these things as if yeah, we did it. It is important to them, it is changing their world view, their life view, their self-view and importantly their country view, their national view. Mr. President, it cannot be

understated.

I will not belabour the point but it is not just the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, they really are the vanguards, the leaders, the visionaries. There are other Ministries present here who have been contributing to this advancement including the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** We have been making our contribution, it is a team effort.

Sen. Thompson-Ahye spoke about the steelpan pins. We have now given out thousands of these pins. They are in high demand, they are almost like currency for diplomats and other stakeholders beyond Trinidad and Tobago. Very, very popular and it is a conversation piece, it really elevates the steelpan. Whenever we have a visiting diplomat in this country, you will see us giving gifts and so, the gift is a book on pan, the gift is a steelpan itself. There is a lot of work taking place in such regard. When we engage in an overseas visit, we are taking the pan with us consistently as we move.

Members of the diplomatic corps, we are in Carnival season now, they are encouraged and facilitated to go to the pan yards, to engage, to interact with our local pan fraternity. All of this is part of the promotion and elevation of our national musical instrument. Every function we attend, every formal flag-raising ceremony, it is not the piano, it is not the guitar, it is not the flute or anything else, it is the pan consistently. These are some of the contributions that we are making and the pan fraternity benefits from these.

Mr. President, very briefly I will tell you we had again the first ever visit to this country of a Minister of foreign affairs of Japan and I want to share this

experience with you because I was told that he is a gifted musician and he wanted to play a piece while in this country. I am not a gifted musician by any means but we had the concept of maybe doing something like a duet. I went and learnt to play the steelpan on the occasion of that visit. I got a tutor, Michelle Huggins-Watts and my very slow musical brain and learnt a Japanese traditional song called “*Sakura Sakura*”.

**7.30 p.m.**

When that Minister came here, I found myself, him on his guitar, and myself on the steelpan playing together for a particular audience. What that taught me, Mr. President, is that sometimes when we showcase our culture to others, we learn more about ourselves in so doing. And so, even as we elevate the steelpan and we boast and we show it off, and we promote it, we are learning about who we are and what we are, and that was my experience in that regard.

The pan has gone to the United Nations General Assembly. When launched, the candidature of Dennis France, it is a steel orchestra that was part of that; we had tassa as well, which we enjoyed, but the steelpan was very much there. When we closed off the campaign, we had steelpan there as well. It has all been a part of these engagements. Our overseas mission, I will not list all of them: China, Miami, Toronto, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and India, they have been bringing the pan fraternity to them. This is all part of the elevation of the national musical instrument.

So, Mr. President, there was talk about World Steelpan Day, and I just want to spend a few seconds on that particular development. Because I heard it said here, and sometimes it is referred to as the UN gifted us recognition of the steelpan. That is not what happened. It took hard work by stakeholders. Sen.

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Maharaj referenced the genesis of the idea, hard work by stakeholders of Trinidad and Tobago, including members of our diplomatic team, to help achieve that particular innovation.

And to add to Sen. Thompson Ahye's strong reference to the fact that the steelpan is not limited to any ethnic group or subpopulation in this country, Mr. President, with respect to the actual resolution and the concept note at the General Assembly, it was a young female diplomat of Trinidad and Tobago, a Hindu Trinbagonian of our great distinction, a patriot from Rio Claro, who was the architect of that concept note and key elements of the resolutions; I call her Ms. Steelpan to this day.

But, again, besides the Jit Samaroos and all of the others, today, we have persons from diverse backgrounds who are invested in the steelpan. So when we change our Coat of Arms and we elevate the steelpan in the way that we are doing, it is for all of us. Just a few moments, Mr. President, to give the international context. I can give a few examples. I have many, but I will give a few of the countries who have taken steps like this: The Republic of Mozambique, a wonderful Portuguese-speaking country, also changed their Coat of Arms and adjusted their symbols, that occurred in the year 1982. The Republic of South Africa, which is a special country to the people of CARICOM and the people of Trinidad and Tobago given their history and their history of Apartheid, also changed their Coat of Arms in the year 2000. The entire design and shape of their Coat of Arms was amended to highlight the changes that were occurring in the South Africa society.

Their old Coat of Arms had some animals on it, the oryx, the wildebeest, the springbok, et cetera, which were seen as symbols of old the African and white

apartheid symbols. They were all removed, Mr. President. They were replaced by the secretary bird, which is a more common South African element. Human figures were added greeting each other, that human connection was added, given the importance of community togetherness to the healing of South Africa. The national flower of South Africa was also incorporated over time. This is the reference from South Africa. It was viewed that their Coat of Arms, the original one, was outdated due to being designed under the British and Afrikaner minorities and not representative of modern South African pride and society., really a good parallel to the experience and journey that we are on in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Republic of Costa Rica, quite similarly, underwent significant changes to their Coat of Arms, most recently in 1998, to eliminate elements that are not typical of what?—Costa Rican culture. To eliminate elements that are not typical of Costa Rican culture. I would want any stakeholder of this country to tell me that those three ships are typical of Trinidad and Tobago culture. They are not. They are not. So why should they be retained one day more after January 2025? Many examples, but, Mr. President, I promise to be brief.

The last one I may refer to is the Republic of Nicaragua, which had, it is very interesting, ships were included as part of their original Coat of Arms design. That earlier emblem had been adopted by several Central American countries during the time of the Federation. The ships were removed. The Coat of Arms of Nicaragua was officially adopted in 1971, reflecting Nicaragua's national identity, aspirations, and its place in the world today.

Now what more fitting example could we have? What more fitting example and inspiration could we have for a progressive change; removal of symbols? Whatever we name the ships, whatever the historical reference might be, the fact is



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the arrival of those ships and the placement of vessels like those on the Coat of Arms of our country has been a pain and oppression in the minds of those connected to our first people. Sometimes we forget about them, and we should never do so, to have those symbols placed there.

When they get an official document, they are seeing the vessels that brought genocide, disease, and destruction to them. It represents nothing else to the first people. Therefore, besides the horrible history of enslavement of African bodies and depersonalization, and the oppression, and other damages done in Trinidad and Tobago, specifically the first people, what was done to them and what the promotion of these ships on a Coat of Arms says to them, should give us further impetus to make the change that we are making today.

So we looked at the removal, and we have looked at the power of what we are placing there. Mr. President, I do not have to be labour the point because the points have already been made. Briefly, I heard Sen. Mark say something about this is all being—so he is trying to compliment the move by the Government and then he was saying this is all being done to trick Pan Trinbago into grabbing their land or something along those lines—to trick Pan Trinbago. Mr. President, now that may sound like a—

**Sen. Lyder:** Give them back their—

**Sen. Mitchell:** What is wrong with Sen. Lyder today?

**Sen. Lyder:** Give them back their land “dey” here. Give them back their land. Look they are here.

**Mr. President:** So, Sen. Lyder take a walk.

**Sen. Lyder:** Give them back their land, they are right here—sorry Sir. **Mr.**

**President:** You have until 7.49 p.m., however, in about a few seconds we have to

do a procedural. So I would ask that you just do that procedural now. So we dispense with that, and then you can continue.

### **PROCEDURAL MOTION**

**The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne):** Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 14(5), I beg to move that the Senate do continue to sit until the completion of business at hand, inclusive of the matters on the adjournment.

*Question put and agreed to.*

### **NATIONAL EMBLEMS OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (REGULATION) (AMDT.) BILL, 2025**

**Sen The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Thank you, Mr. President. So, I was responding to a comment that had been made by Sen. Mark, and, Mr. President, that may sound like a useful political talking point or whatever it might be, but first of all, it is patently false and wrong and untrue. Second of all, Mr. President, it really is unfortunate that a comment like that would be made in the presence of Pan Trinbago itself because, on their behalf, I take it as an insult to Pan Trinbago, its leadership, and the pan fraternity that Sen. Mark would even deem it prudent to come into this Senate with foolish comments such as that. That is certainly not the case, and my awareness is that there is great enthusiasm within Pan Trinbago for the infrastructure that has been identified and approved for their operations.

Mr. President, the other comment that I would wish to make has to do with the issue of historical injustice. I heard reference to the National Reparations Committee and some of the other work that is taking place, and just to put it in to context, this is not a one-off measure. We must give credit to the hon. Prime Minister for really a bold decision.

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Because in a country like this, it is very easy to just adopt a safe posture, and you do the easy things and some of the more difficult things, you kick the can down the road, next five years, next five years. It is really hard to take. Let us face it, it is hard to take bold decision-making to bring us to this point otherwise we would have never gotten there. I can say that with complete certainty, Mr. President.

But this is all connected to a journey our society has been on for some time, and I expect will continue. Mr. President, we have to illuminate and analyze, and determine where a range of these symbols, Sen. Vieira SC, may have referred to them as colonial vestiges—and we have to be sensitive as well because far be it from the truth that we would want any of our nationals, or citizens, or members of our society to feel that they are in any way included in what they might deem to be an attempt to marginalize who they are, what they are, or what they were. That is not the idea at all. Because in this nation, every creed and race, including Portuguese, those of British descent, those of French descent, every creed and race, must find an equal place.

So that is not something for debate or derision, but the fact of the matter is this society, like many others, is undergoing some introspection and reconciliation of the past with the future. In that regard, the fact that we have been able, together, to take these steps to remove a symbol that has brought significant pain to a number of subpopulations within this country and to elevate a symbol that unites us, a symbol that empowers those who need empowerment the most in Trinidad and Tobago, and a symbol that represents, in many ways, the future of our diverse, blessed society, I believe is a point of pride for us all.

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**7.45 p.m.**

As far as I am aware, standing as a Minister in this Government, this Bill puts the Pan in a position of pride, and prominence. It will be on every vehicle, every document, in every embassy across the world, our 20 overseas missions. This is a historic move, Mr. President, and I am proud to be associated with it. I commend this Bill and congratulate the mover, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. Thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial.

**Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** Thank you, Mr. President for recognizing me to join in this debate. I wish to lend my support to this Bill, so that there is no consternation on the part of any Member opposite, and they do not have any doubt that we are here to support this move to give pan a place of prominence on our national Coat of Arms.

So, the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs can rest easy. This is not a situation where one day is 11-9, and the next day is 20-nil, “we doh operate so”. We said since in the Lower House that we are supporting, and we are supporting this move. So, he does not need to be so worried about us changing and flipping the script on them. Mr. President, the UNC has never wavered from its commitment to uplift pan, the pan movement, pan players, and the promotion of pan as our national instrument, and we would have stuck to that commitment when we supported the Bill brought late last year to recognize pan as a national instrument. We supported it, but, Mr. President, we are still able to make comments, suggestions, and so on, on matters of national interest, and this is a matter of national interest because as the person who piloted the Bill, the Minister

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of Tourism, Culture and the Arts would have said a coat of arms is the “cornerstone of national identity”. A coat of arms is a national symbol, and so that any change being made to it, is naturally going to engage in some national debate, and discussion, and that is a healthy process. I do not understand why it is the Government seems to have this aversion to discussion and healthy debate because that is what democracy is about.

The hon. Sen. Hislop, in trying to respond to Sen. Mark, and I think Sen. Roberts, made the point for me when they raised the issue of how the announcement was made, and other Senators would have mentioned it. But, he actually confirmed what we were saying, in that he said, “The PNM convention is where they discuss things, and then they inform the rest of the public”. That is exactly the problem. So, whilst Members opposite have complained about the type of comments being made, and they are saying that—Nobody is denying the love of pan. Nobody is denying that that is our national instrument. Nobody is saying it does not deserve a place of prominence in our society, and should be seen on every building, letterhead, and vehicle owned by the Government, every Ministry. It should be everywhere because it belongs to us, and it comes from us, but the way in which you engage people, and my friend the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts would know about things like public engagement, and getting buy-in, and communication. There was a communication problem surrounding the role-out of this measure.

So, that being said, I do not want to waste too much time, I think Sen. Maharaj touched on it, and others would have spoken about it, but the Government has to acknowledge that they have a communication problem when it comes to certain decisions that affect the national population. Because if you want to get

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buy-in discussion is important. Why are we having a discussion about changing statues, and street names, and so on? Because we want to get buy-in. Right? So, what is the rush? And I say the rush is that they are scrambling to look for accomplishments at this point in time, this late in the game, and that is just in the— Earlier, we heard Sen. Mark in one of the questions, he was asking about whether legislative amendments would be considered by the Ministry of Labour, and he said, “Given the timeline, and so on, we do not have time for that”. They do not have time to now do anything, so they are scrambling for accomplishments, and so they have rushed without consultation to make changes. Well, let me tell you what good could have come out of a consultation on this. Some wider consultation. I do not think you would have found anybody in this country, you would be hard-pressed to find anybody who will say that they do not want to see the pan on—

**Sen. Mtichell:** Mr. President, excuse me. Mr. President, a point of order 53(1)(b), we have heard this from almost everybody.

**Sen. West:** Several, several.

**Mr. President:** Yes. So, as much as we have heard that particular point from several Senators before, the Senator is at the very beginning of her contribution and subsequent to that she is responding to comments that came before that were opposing. Continue, Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial.

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

**Mr. President:** Thank you, Mr. President. In the course of having a consultation, as I said, you will not find anybody who will be opposed to removing the three ships, and placing the steelpan. I would think you would be hard-pressed to find that. What I think you would have found is that people would have liked to see

greater change. For example, I would have been the first person to tell you that the palm tree was the colonial symbol for Tobago, and that is how it arrived on the Coat of Arms. I know you do not need to pass Maths to be a senior Minister in the PNM, but like you do not have to pass Social Studies either because they do not know all of what that Coat of Arms actually represents, and how much of it is actually linked to our colonial past, and the colonization of Trinidad and Tobago. I think Sen. Mark, mentioned as well, the helm being the representative of the Queen.

So, if you had proper consultation, and if you are going to go through, and I know my friend is trying to downplay the expense, and the rollout, and all of that—I will stop calling you my friend, because you are frowning. The Minister is saying that he does not want to— You know, he is trying to downplay all of that. But, if you are going through a process, and if you are going to make a change to a national symbol, what the Minister calls the cornerstone of our identity, well, get the buy-in of the people and hear what they have to say, and do not change something—Somebody mentioned that we are going to be back here again to change very soon again. That is very likely because the people are going to say, “Well I feel—” in the same way that the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs would have said that, you know, how do our first people feel when they see the three ships, what is it a reminder of, and I agree with him 100 percent. It is the symbol what would have been something that was destructive to their community, and we should replace it, but there are other things that should be replaced too.

So, why the piecemeal method? Why not adopt a concerted—you put the concerted effort, and do the work, do the work. Do not just come by “vaps” at a convention and say, “We taking off the three ships, and we putting the pan, ray,

okay, good”. That is distraction. That is the typical way that this Government operates, they do things just out of the blue, they create a big brouhaha, and anybody who has a suggestion otherwise, and suddenly you are unpatriotic. We are not unpatriotic, we are not by any means unpatriotic, we want to see pan have its rightful place, and a rightful place of prominence throughout this country.

Mr. President, let me just say, part of that, and I know Sen. Roberts, and I like how he used the phrase “not just symbolism but substance”, and Sen. Mark would have alluded to the issue of the land for Pan Trinbago, and I want to respond directly to the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs who said that it was unfortunate that that statement was made. But, again it is as though no one is entitled to have an opinion or to ask to have a discussion about certain matters. There was a very valuable piece of property, lands that belonged to Caroni, and through the Orange Grove company that it was called, or whatever, and the lease was signed. I have a copy of that lease it was signed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, 2001, prepared by none other than the then corporate secretary of Caroni 1975 Limited, Mr. Clarence Rambharat, and that memorandum of lease was just November, think back in our history, November 2001. The 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 2001, the Government was handed to the PNM, it was handed to them, and that memorandum of lease was never registered.

In 2004, all the lands belonging to Caroni 1975 Limited, and the Orange Grove company became vested in the State through the—so, it is now under the management of the Commissioner of State Lands. They have taken a decision, and it is not enough to come here and say that, “Well, we are insulting Pan Trinbago by saying that they take away their land”. They made a decision to put Pan Trinbago in a different location, and there have been national debates, and national concern



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raised as to whether or not the entire pan fraternity is in support of that measure to move away because of what that land was supposed to represent for them. I will say this because the Minister raised it. If you throw back to your memory, and even I, even though I was very young then, but I still remember what that land was supposed to represent for the pan fraternity, was independence.

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

**Sen. J. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** It was supposed to represent sustainability. It was supposed to represent the ability to control your own affairs. It was supposed to move the pan fraternity away from standing up with your hand out, waiting, and hoping, and praying, and asking for a bigger, and better subvention every year but to be a revenue generating entity because that is what we, in the UNC, at the time under the Basdeo Panday Administration, saw as being the promise of the pan for Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. J. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** When we speak about substance and not just symbolism, that is what we mean because it is not enough to say, “We love pan, and we want to see it on the Coat of Arms”. It is simply not enough. So, I would like to know why it is for all the years following the execution of that memorandum of lease, that it was never registered by the PNM Administration that was holding office from 2001 to 2007, and in 2004 the lands now moved and were vested in the Commissioner of State Lands. Why it is they have not taken action to do that, and why they have made this decision. I want to assure them that a next UNC Government will in fact revisit the decision—

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

**Sen. J. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:**—to take away 15 acres of land, and put people in

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a half acre of land in an old building in Port of Spain on Wrightson Road, as opposed to 15 acres of land with revenue generating things. A factory, a pan theatre, a factory, a hotel, and a gas station to earn revenue, and all of these plans. Why has that all been scrapped now? But coming here to say you do the most for pan. You did not. I am sorry to say, you did not.

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

**Sen. Roberts:** Shame.

**Sen. J. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** Because, yes, we have only had progress of symbolism from this Government when it comes to pan, and no progress at all as it relates to substance for the upliftment of the pan community. Pan is something that transcends, it brings people together, and it is the method by which this Government does things, and is actually taking something as beautiful as the steelpan and causing it to create divisions, and causing arguments amongst people.

You should have known had you—and I listened to the conversation about whether it is “shall” and “may”, and we are going back to first year law school about “shall” and “may”. You know something, the spirit, and the intention of the law, why would they say, “The Minister may appoint a committee”, the spirit, and the intention of it is that when there is a need, when the need arises for a committee to have consultation, and advise the Minister, the Minister has the ability to appoint a committee.

**8.00 p.m.**

If the Minister and the Government was really interested in doing something of substance and bringing people together as a nation, to really take a decision on the changing of a national emblem and the incorporation of one—or it could have been more things that could have been changed about that particular emblem, to remove

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the relics and the vestiges of colonialism, then they would have appointed a committee and have consultations, and not make the announcement—

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

**Sen. J. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:**—at a PNM convention, when by their own admission, by their own Senator, Sen. Hislop, said, “They had the discussion amongst them and then they informed the public.” Because that is how they do it. “So we is not people too? We is not citizens too?”

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

**Sen. J. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** Because they do not want to talk to us. They talk to themselves. They make a decision and then they inform the rest of us. Their words today, and they have confirmed what we have always been saying, that they have some sort of aversion to democracy and an inclination towards dictatorial standards and operating in that way. So that is the issue that we have there.

Mr. President, I want to say that we have not really seen—and I think—well, I think this was dealt with already, about the monetization of pan. That is something that has already been covered, so I would not go into that. I just want to say—because I think Sen. Vieira raised it, and he said that, when you use terms like the “vestiges of colonialism” and so on, you know, it may seem to create a sentiment of—anti-European sentiment and we have descendants of Europeans who still form part of our rainbow nation, and that is all well and good, because they are Trinbagonians just like the rest of us. And so I do not want it to be mistaken when we say things like “relics and vestiges of colonialism” and so on, that that is what we are referring to. What we are referring to is the system of colonialism that was represented on our national Coat of Arms, and that was a system of exploitation, and it is something that we agree—any symbol.

But it pains me to sit here and listen to a Government say that they are opposed, and they want to remove the relics of colonialism from our cornerstone of democracy, from our national emblem, to acknowledge that it is going to be a costly exercise. At some point in time, we are going to have to do a lot of changes, and you are going to have to make orders, and some people will have birth certificates with pan, some people will have birth certificates with boats, and that is how we are going down the road to operate for a little while.

I find it unfortunate that those are the steps and that is the method by which we go about doing something, as opposed to making a proper change, and perhaps doing away with something called a coat of arms altogether, because do we really want that? Do you know if the people of Trinidad want that? Do we want a coat of arms, or do we want something different? Have we had the opportunity to have a discussion? And the answer is, no.

So I just want to wind up by saying, method is just as important as the outcome. So the outcome of placing the pan on the Coat of Arms is lovely, it is great. We love it. We support it. We want to see it everywhere, but you cannot justify—the end does not justify the means. That is a problem this Government has in every respect, because they do not understand governance. They do not understand what it is to truly—and the spirit of governance. They do not understand that governance is a collaborative thing. It is not an edict that you just pass and you just hand down orders to people. Maybe that is how they operate in their internal affairs, but that is not how you are supposed to govern a country. And so the method by which you operate, and how you do things, it is just as important as the end result.

So we are very happy with the end result to an extent. We are very happy to

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support the placement of the pan on the Coat of Arms. We are not happy with the method. We are not happy with how this Government has treated the wider pan fraternity as a whole. We are not happy with how they have not really pursued, aggressively, the policy of putting pan—making it more available in the schools and so on. We are not happy with what they have done to protect pan internationally, and the patents and so on.

So do not just say that, “We have made so much progress.” Yes, it might be a step in improving the national pride by putting it there, but it is simply not enough. There is more to be done. Do not rest on your laurels to think that this is really—because at the end of the day, the pan could be on all of the Coat of Arms, but it does not make pan, as a career, attractive to any young person. You think they are going to look up at the new Coat of Arms when it goes there or anywhere else and say, “Oh, I see a pan there, our national instrument and because of that, I will make a career out of pan, because it will be a money-making venture. I could live a decent standard of life.” No. But that is where we want to be because that is our national instrument born out of our collective will and resilience as a people. So we want it to be—we want music as a whole, but let the steelpan take its rightful place as being something that we are proud of, that people are proud to say, as a career, “I am a panman.” Can they say that now by just saying that, “Well, it is on the Coat of Arms”? No, they cannot. The vision—and that is the difference between a government of platitudes and a government of vision. The vision—

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

**Sen. J. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** That is why they could stand up on 46(1) how much they want, but the importance of the issue of the Pan Trinbago headquarters

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in Trincity, on those 15 acres of land that was allocated and earmarked for them, is the transitioning away from symbolism to substance for the pan movement in Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder.

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

**Sen. Damian Lyder:** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, initially, I had no intentions of contributing here today because I think that the four that have contributed on this side have thoroughly annihilated this Government and their mamaguy with what they have brought here today; their absolute mamaguy. But as I listened to each one on the Government's side speak and try to justify the process that was done in bringing this Bill here today, Mr. President, I had no choice but to get up and say a few words, especially after listening to the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs. I had to say a few words.

Mr. President, as the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs said that, "Every creed and race find an equal place in this country," and he even mentioned Portuguese. There are two Portuguese sitting in this Chamber here today. We may be Portuguese by race, but first and foremost, we are Trinbagonians. That is what we are, Trinbagonians.

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** All of us here are Trinbagonians. So just like any other Trinbagonian in this country who appreciates the arts, who appreciates our culture, our heritage, I too want to put for the record that I appreciate the pan, the pan movement, what it has contributed to our country, to our culture. I see so much potential that can come of this industry if only managed properly, by a proper

government—with support from a proper government, Mr. President.

So I am not standing here today to go against or to object against the pan going into our Coat of Arms. In fact, the thought of it makes me very happy. It makes many of us in this country very happy. So it is not a simple policy of the United National Congress party, that we support the pan on the Coat of Arms, but from a personal level, Mr. President, this means the world to me.

As a young man growing up in Trinidad and Tobago, taking part in everything, from Kiddies Carnival, all the way up, for 27 years unbroken in proper big mass, I have integrated into this thing called Carnival and, by extension, pan. From sitting in Fatima College and looking across at the Phase II Pan Groove, probably the best pan side, second to Renegades, I enjoyed listening to pan. While I may not have listened to the algebra being taught by the teacher at the time, I listened to the sweet sounds of pan.

And so, therefore, Mr. President, I feel proud to take part in this debate here today, to take part in this Bill. To be one of those—from this diverse group of races in this country that make up one culture, sweet T&T, I feel proud to contribute towards this. But, Mr. President, I cannot run away from the fact that while I feel this level of bliss and happiness, that we are replacing three ships with the greatest instrument, and the only instrument invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, I feel a sense of betrayal, Mr. President; a sense of betrayal.

Initially, when I was listening to Sen. Sunity Maharaj, I was contemplating contributing, and then when I heard the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs speak, I had to get involved. You see, Sen. Sunity Maharaj brought up something that is very profound. It is a lack of inclusion of so many people in the process that we are going through here today. I am not going to go at length about

that day that I sat down in absolute horror to listen to a Prime Minister announce this at a political convention. What comes from that is a staining effect on those who now perceive the entire motive to be political rather than actually in keeping with promoting our heritage. Any responsible politician would not have chosen that location to announce that but would have come out on a press conference, would have spoken at the Diplomatic Centre and would have spoken to all the citizens.

I heard Sen. Laurence Hislop talked about, “He is the Prime Minister.” Yes, but he is the Prime Minister of all the people in this country, all the citizens. He is not a PNM Prime Minister, he is supposed to be a Prime Minister of all. So, Mr. President, that is why there is so much discontent. There are so many ramblings happening when it comes to this Bill. Mr. President, there are 309,000 persons who voted for the United National Congress, who will forever live with the feeling of shame that this was done for a political motive and not for our true culture and heritage. They have been robbed of being a part of that process. They have been robbed of being able to sit down 20/30 years later and say, “We saw the pan go onto this Coat of Arms and we feel a part of it,” because they had to sit down and watch it being announced in a political convention.

Forget about UNC and PNM, because there are many people in this country who are apolitical. They do not want to hear about UNC and PNM. They too were betrayed. They too were not given an opportunity for consultation, and they too were not given the luxury of feeling that sense of national unity, where what was supposed to be a responsible Prime Minister, would leave the politics out of it. You cannot fool anybody because we know we are in an election year, Mr. President; we know that.



So, Mr. President, I just want to say to you that though I feel happy about this, I feel betrayed, and this will go down in the history books. This will go down in the history books as a major misstep by this Prime Minister in the process and the way in which he did it. I will move on from that part now, Mr. President.

Mr. President, when Sen. Sunity Maharaj spoke about “lack of inclusion”, that is something that stood out for me as well. As a young man growing up, I remember when there were so many competitions, schools competing to create the mascot or create some symbol, people sending in artworks, judges who could happen to be the greatest artists in this country, sitting down and judging hundreds of pieces of work and finding the best piece, where you include a nation, where schoolchildren would have been involved in this and had a stake in this, where citizens could have had a stake in this. Not simply a Prime Minister coming to us and telling us, “This is who we, the Cabinet, is going to choose to do the artwork”—and like Sen. Mark, I have nothing against the artist, but who picked it?

**8.15 p.m.**

Where is the inclusion of our country? But instead of including the school children in the process, Mr. President, we see a Government who has cut funding to schools when it comes to pan. We are seeing schools having to sell barbecue tickets and raffles just to buy some pan. No assistance from the Government.

Mr. President, instead of seeing inclusion—and this level of betrayal—you know who else is betrayed, Mr. President? The regular pan player who cannot only not afford to buy a new pan, but cannot afford to survive in this country today because an industry which should be putting money in his pocket, giving him a career—this Government has failed to monetize that and commercialize that for the regular pan man, but “we comin’ here” to deal with symbols.

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How can you just simply deal with a symbol on a coat of arms and not think about what that symbol represents and who that symbol represents? The hundreds of pan men who are struggling in this country today. And the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs says that they are the Government who are the voice for the voiceless. Mr. President, they are the Government who are the voice for the voiceless? Who in the Government is the voice for the voiceless pan members who have lost 12 acres of land in Trincity, Mr. President? Who?

**Mr. President:** Senator—

**Sen. D. Lyder:** That is a betrayal.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder. We have heard this now. Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial just finished expanding upon that in her contribution, so I would ask you to move to another topic. You have cleared the context which you have created for the first 10 minutes of your contribution so you are into the meat of it now, and I would expect to hear something new if you have it. You do not have to repeat anything that anybody has said before because it has been quite extensive for the length of time that we have been here. Continue Sen. Lyder.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Thank you, Mr. President. I want to reply to a story that the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs indicated. It was a lovely story. I mean, I heard the stories as well growing up about being in Port of Spain and two pan groups getting into fights—knife and bottle.

I heard the story. It is a story you hear all the time. He said that they would call upon the pan groups to play sweet pan and everything would calm down in the streets of Port of Spain. Mr. President, that is probably back in the 1970s or 1980s because right now, today, in 2025, that story has changed. That story is a different story today. It is not the same story that the Minister indicated. Today, what we

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have is young gangs shooting each other with sub-machine guns, knives and bottles, Mr. President, and no pan side for them—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. D. Lyder:** That is what we are seeing today.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Continuous Crosstalk*]

**Mr. President:** Okay, Sen. Lyder. I see what you are trying to do. It does not connect. Nice try, but it does not connect. Okay?

**Sen. D. Lyder:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. President:** No, no, no. The context—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. President:** Members. The context which the Leader of Government Business raised in terms of using that example, you have taken that said example and then gone off course to make another point in relation to crime, which is why you have not made that connection but he remained within the confines of the context of the Bill that is before us. Understood?

**Sen. Roberts:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. President:** I am talking to Sen. Lyder. Understood Sen. Lyder?

**Sen. D. Lyder:** You see, Mr. President, the context of what I was saying is that the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs came and said that their Government did more for pan than anyone in the past.

**Sen. Roberts:** He lie.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** That is what he said. So maybe, I should have started with that so that I would have given you the context of where I was going.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Right. I am saying that based on his story of the old days

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when he said that his Government, the PNM Government, has done more for pan than anyone else, I referred to his story where he spoke about the pan sides coming together and playing sweet pan. But today, the Government has done so little for pan and has invested so little in pan in this country today. Those same youths that were fighting back in those days are fighting with guns today with no proper plan, no proper initiative and no opportunities provided by the Government to prop and assist Pan Trinbago and the pan community. That is why we have young children “killing themselves” in the streets today, with no opportunities. Pan could have been an opportunity for them, Mr. President.

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Pan could have been a great opportunity for them. You could have housed them in the 12 acres, but I will not say more about that. Mr. President, that is the betrayal. We see it all the time on social media. You are seeing them in Japan. They are not putting pan on their coat of arms, but guess what? They have better pan schools than us. They have invested in pan. There are pan factories in Japan today, Mr. President.

We have pan players coming all the way from Japan to play here in Trinidad and Tobago. You can see carnival parades happening in Japan. They have found a way to monetize it and they have been given support, yet this Government comes here and the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs comes here and tells us “We have done more for pan than anyone else in the past.”

So I am not going to go on too much longer but I am going to put a challenge to the Government. Because if you say that you have done more, I am going to put a challenge to you here today. You have members of the pan fraternity sitting right there in the public gallery. The same members of the pan

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fraternity that the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs identified, I am identifying them as well. They are right there sitting down and I am putting a challenge.

Mr. President, they did more for the pan fraternity. Okay. All right. Well, here is what, Mr. President. When Kamla Persad-Bissessar came into power in 2010, I believe it was 2012 if I am not mistaken, on Independence, as a one-time payment on Independence—because it was such a special time; 50 years of independence, Kamla Persad-Bissessar gave the first-place winners in pan \$2 million. That is \$1 million more than the \$1 million more that is currently allocated to them. So I put it to you, when we pass this here today—you did more for pan? Let us put it to the test.

When we pass this here today—this is such a special and momentous occasion—we are going to pass this here today, you know. We are all going to vote for it. I challenge you. We have Panorama coming up. Give them \$2million.

**Hon. Senator:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. D. Lyder:** I am talking about the finals.

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Give them \$2 million if you have done more for the pan fraternity. It is a special time and a special occasion. Give them \$2 million, Mr. President. Give them \$2 million. I am waiting. Nah, you see, it is only mamaguy. You see, the whole nature of this Bill is based on a foundation of being disingenuous. It was never about the pan people but about an election this year. Trying to mamaguy the people. But let me go a little bit further. If you did more for the pan fraternity, let me put another challenge to you.

I understand that the stipend for the regular pan man—I believe when

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Basdeo Panday came into power, it went from \$200 to \$400. That was the stipend.

Sen. Mark, it was not about \$400 when Basdeo Panday came?

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. D. Lyder:** So he doubled it. The PNM came back into power, and it went from \$400 to \$500; \$100 more. When Kamla Persad-Bissessar came into power in 2010, she raised it to \$1,000.

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** \$1000 to every single pan man who walked through this country—a one-time stipend. Mr. President, you know what this PNM did?

**Sen. Roberts:** Cut it in half.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** They cut it from \$1,000, down \$500.

**Sen. D. Lyder:** And on the eve of an election, they want to mamaguy the pan community and say, “We will take it from 500 to 800”. Mr. President, if they really care about the pan community, I put the challenge here now. Come out in a press conference next week or this week. Come out tomorrow in the press conference and tell the pan players that they are not only getting back up to \$1000 that Kamla gave them, but give them \$1,500.

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

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Give them \$1500. Stop playing politics with the pan. Stop playing politics.

**Sen. Hislop:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. D. Lyder:** Nah. No Sen. Hislop, “ah talking loud”. I want them to hear because it will carry the message that a UNC Government would come inside, and we will raise—

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

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**Sen. D. Lyder:**—the stipend. We will raise the stipend, Mr. President.

So, Mr. President, that is the challenge I put to the Government as I come to a close here. As I come to a close, Mr. President, pan is an important instrument to our heritage, to our culture, to our identity, and in a hundred years from now, people would look back on this as a historical day. We are creating history today.

I listened to Sen. Richards talk about “why can we not create our own history? History is evolving.” He is right. What we see today in England, in South Africa, in Russia—I believe they erased Lenin off the map in Russia. It is ever changing, Mr. President and there is nothing wrong with us creating new history.

This is indeed good history we are creating. This is indeed good history, but you cannot merely come to the country by bringing a symbol. You must protect the instrument. You must protect the pan players, Pan Trinbago, and all the members of the pan fraternity. You must not let what happened when the PNM was in power—as Sen. Roberts said for over 67 per cent of the years—

**Sen. Roberts:** 76.

**Sen. Hislop:** —76 per cent of the years of independence. You must not let what happened where we lost the patent to our pan to somebody in the United States of America, and then the PNM comes and tries to mamaguy us with a G pan. Tries to mamaguy us with a G pan, Mr. President. And we do not have nothing against the G pan. I would like to learn how to play it, but the fact is, too little, too late. We lost the patent on pan and that is because of the negligence by this Government, Mr. President.

**Sen. Roberts:** PNM.

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

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**Sen. D. Lyder:** The negligence of this PNM Government, Mr. President. So do not come and mamaguy us that you love pan, you love the culture, and you love everything. “Yuh love alyuh self”, and you love power. Mr. President, I love pan. I love sweet Trinidad and Tobago. I support the pan. The United National Congress supports the pan on our Coat of Arms, but we support proper process. We support inclusion of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and we do not support politicizing this instrument and the mamaguy that they are coming at. I am giving them a challenge. Let us see if they have the testicular fortitude to come up and rise up to that challenge, Mr. President, but I doubt it. I thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Francis.

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

**Sen. Helon Francis:** Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for the blessed opportunity to contribute to what I believe will be remembered as a historic occasion in our history. Greetings distinguished colleagues, and I would like to obviously take the opportunity to acknowledge the members of Pan Trinbago who have been sitting here for so long—

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

**Sen. H. Francis:**—and are taking in the entire debate in. Prior to this, I have been following the discourse in the public domain via the newspaper, the radio, and social media. The topic had consumed the nation with wide ranges of commentary on every corner of society from criticism to compliments, some hot like fire and some cold as ice. Diverse perspectives from our extremely diverse society and such would be the nature of a debate. 0 However, for me, this is not a debate. It



evidently meant something meaningful, not just for me, but to the citizens of this great nation. Something that was far deeper than the image of a steelpan or three carvel-type type ships. It provoked dialogue about the past, present, and the future of our country. One that I appreciate, and I am sure many of us did as well.

**8.30 p.m.**

See moments like this, we must be capable of separating our biases for the greater good of our land. Otherwise, what would you say is the point of being in this Chamber? What would you say is the point of being alive and present in this momentous time in our history? Let us be grateful. Whether political ploy or pure nationalism, at this point, it really does not matter. We should be able to see through that and just be filled with national pride.

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

**Sen. H. Francis:** The steelpan being embodied on our Coat of Arms is more than just a gesture. Do not look at it as a simple concept. It is a change in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a change in the fabric of our society. That is what this is, leaving colonial behaviours behind, leaving the suffering of our forefathers, not forgetting but simply leaving it in the past. In my opinion, this is not about forgetting our colonial past, but simply replacing the legacy with a value of our own.

There is a reason why a Hindu is proud to be a Hindu. There is a reason why a Catholic is proud to be a Catholic. There is a reason why a Christian is proud to be a Christian. There is a reason why you are who you are. Now let there be a reminder of why we are Trinidad and Tobago. So let this simplify our reason and purify our blood and transform for a better Trinidad and Tobago. There is a child who is going to grow and see this Coat of Arms, and not understand where it

came from. But you will. But a child is going to grow one day and not understand that colonial thought by being motivated by something that is purely us, and we should see beauty in that. So let us not get caught in the winds of political dialogue, let us take our time to understand what is happening and give it its due respect.

I have realize now our society some people find it hard to understand change and to understand the culture. You often hear people refer to a culture in a certain way, as if it is solely a repository of tokens from our past, or something that is taught to be desperately held on to, as if it is trying to escape and change like it is something that we are trying to destroy or wipe clean for our collective memories. In my opinion, however, I believe new reality is quite opposite. Culture is change. It is dynamic always. You see, culture is a record of how we navigate change over time. Let me remind you what I just said.

**Hon. Senator:** Yes.

**Sen. H. Francis:** You see culture is a record of how we navigate change over time. When Carnival was born, it was out of our burning desire for change, because I am sure we all know of the Canboulay riots.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yes.

**Sen. H. Francis:** Culture is all about change and just as it applies to our society, it should also apply to our symbolism, because the two cannot be in disharmony. Finally, Mr. President, in closing, as we deliberate on these changes, let us do so with a deep sense of responsibility, for our Coat of Arms should not just be about symbolism, or the symbolism of our evolution as a nation but it should include our collective aspirations of our future direction in which we shall continue building

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our nation. In that regard, I am reminded of the words of William Shakespeare in one of his more well-known, plays, *Hamlet*:

“...we know what we are but know not what we may be...”

Thank you for your time.

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

**Mr. President:** Sen. Teemal.

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

**Sen. Deeroop Teemal:** Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate that is in front of this House here today. Those of us who have spoken have mentioned about this being a momentous occasion. I do agree with that, however, coming at the very last of the innings, Mr. President, I run the risk of some repetitions. But, despite the fact that there have been so many batsmen before me, using a variety of strokes, it leaves me as the last batsman. Of course, technically I am not the last, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts will be the last. It is like being given a second chance, but the batsman who has contributed the most to bite the bat. So being last batsman there is an opportunity for me to score a run or two, probably more by luck than skill.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. D. Teemal:** But in the context of things with luck, sometimes the last batsman may score an occasional boundary or two.

Listening to my fellow colleagues during this debate, a lot of attention has been placed on the pan itself and at times, I thought we were reverting to the Bill that was passed some time ago and the pan is a national instrument. I think it is good, Mr. President, that you did allow that flexibility for it augmented the debate. I would want to agree with those speakers who did speak extensively about the pan

and to endorse the many positives that were expressed and despite the eloquence of many of the speakers, you know, words are limited when we try to capture the innovation and we try to capture the creativity and the genius of pan. But I am also grateful for certain contributors, like Sen. Dr. Paul Richards, Sen. Vieira, Sen. Sunity Maharaj and others for bringing the debate of pan into the context of the National Coat of Arms because I think that is what is before us here today.

The pan definitely yes, and all of the positives, definitely yes, but we need to also look at the context within a National Coat of Arms. During the debate at several times, I did find myself wondering whether it was a debate about who did more for pan, right, because I heard a lot about who did not do, who did and who should have done and who betrayed pan and who promoted pan, so, I definitely do not intend to go there.

Columbus' ships, historically linked to colonial conquest, slavery and the exploitation of indigenous peoples, symbolize a painful legacy for many. Replacing these with the steelpan, a unique, cultural creation as we have heard, born in Trinidad and Tobago, signals a move towards embracing an identity that is inclusive, independent and reflective of our local heritage.

Now, some may agree, some may argue, sorry, that removing the ships erases a part of our nation's complex history. The question of erasure was dealt with by Sen. Dr. Paul Richards rather comprehensively and some may argue that while the colonial period was traumatic, it also shaped Trinidad and Tobago's multiculturalism. Some would argue that retaining ships could serve as a reminder of the past and a tool for education rather than an erasure of the past.

Now, the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts did mention, in his piloting of the Bill, about the view of some that other cultural instruments are not

represented, and some critics have pointed out that the steelpan's inclusion does not adequately address the broader issue of multicultural representation in national symbols. The hon. Minister did offer a rationale for the use of the steelpan, since it was indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago in his words.

Now I just want to raise something for further—not necessarily at this debate—but for further discussion and reflection and dialogue as a nation. I would ask whether the use of only what is indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago, should that be the sole criteria for inclusion in national symbolism? But I believe if we are to say it is the sole criteria for inclusion in national symbolism, then how have we arrived at that? How have we determined that and whether or not, you know, we should be looking and discussing much further, whether or not it is only indigenous representations that should be the National Coat of Arms, or whether the National Coat of Arms should be representative of the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago. I ask that in the context of the indigenous peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, because we are using the term “indigenous” here.

Now, whilst the inclusion of the steelpan is a positive step, it is a positive step, at the present time it is still perceived by some to be only one cultural expression in our diverse society. It raises the question to me of belonging and inclusivity and about the indigenous peoples of Trinidad and Tobago who suffered massively at the hands of the colonizers. I refer to Sen. Vieira's excellent contribution and his eloquence in terms of introducing, you know, concepts of nationality, concepts of inclusion and the challenges we face as a nation, as a diverse nation. I ask the question, is this a missed opportunity to include other symbols?

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Whilst the change is intended to foster national pride, to me, there is an element of risk in polarizing those who feel alienated from in national decision-making process. Now we could be dismissive of that statement and say, but to me, it is a fact that there are some who may be polarized and who may feel alienated from this decision.

**8.45 p.m.**

Now, whilst the decision to replace Columbus' ships with the national instrument, the steelpan, is a positive step, as it reflects a desire to shed colonial symbols, it raises the broader question about how multiculturalism is represented in national symbols.

The steelpan has the potential to unify our people and to be a unifying symbol. I deliberately repeat the word "the potential" because I have heard respective Members of this House talk about it as a unifying symbol as a fait accompli. To me we are in a process of evolving as a nation. We are in the process of seeking unification of our people, and the steelpan has the potential to unify and be a unifying symbol. But at the same time, its placement in the Coat of Arms must be seen as part of a larger ongoing effort to ensure that all voices in the multicultural tapestry feel equally represented. And I will humbly suggest, this calls for continuing, meaningful engagement and dialogue.

As I mentioned some names before—they have gone into detail about this, so I will not speak much more on it. It is my hope that this change to the Coat of Arms, in the process of mitigating the negative impacts of colonialism—and again I stress the negative impacts of colonialism, because we must not forget that there were positive impacts.

**Hon. Senator:** Correct.

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**Sen. D. Teemal:** And our presence here and our progress as a nation have benefited in some regard from colonialism. Not everything about colonialism was bad. And it is a start—what we are seeing here is a start of a process of decolonization in Trinidad and Tobago. I would caution against selective decolonization. I think it is a term to reflect on “selective decolonization”, particularly with political overtures based on cultural nationalism. Decolonization through review of symbols is but a start. The primary challenge remains in my opinion, the decolonization of our minds, mental decolonization, our systems of governments, our Constitution, our laws, a lot of what we do in this Parliament, how our Parliament is structured, our education system, the curriculum of our education system, our police service, our prison service and our public service systems, and other institutions are still riddled with inefficient and irrelevant colonial practices.

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

**Sen. D. Teemal:** I remember when I had graduated from the University of the West Indies with a degree in Civil Engineering, and we had to—on development projects, you had to fill out forms to apply for planning approvals, and the form that was being used by the corporations—they were the county councils at that time, appeared to me to be the same form that was used in colonial times. Because you had to fill out, how far away is this house from a pig sty or a cow shed. Yeah. Things like that. And I will not be too surprised that that form is still in use.

**Sen. Vieira:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. D. Teemal:** So, I humbly suggest to build on what we are doing here today, that there be a dedicated and focused effort to identify how we can mitigate—to identify the negative impacts of colonialism, especially on the minds of our young

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citizens, our youths, our children, in our education system in particular, and focus effort where we bring our best minds together—we dedicated to achieve the process of decolonization bearing in mind, you know, our diverse society. I thank you.

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

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

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

**The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. We have been here for a few hours—

**Sen. West:** [*Laughter*] Quite a bit.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—and we have had—

**Hon. Senator:** Heavy.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—very spirited discussion on the proposed amendment that we have before us today. In that light, I would like to thank sincerely all Senators who have contributed and made the discussion spirited, and I thank all Senators for their suggestions and their disagreements at times. I particularly want to thank Senators on the Government Bench for their support, Sen. Hislop, Sen. Donna Cox. Specially, I would like to thank our Leader of Government Business in the Senate, Sen. Browne, for his comprehensive contribution, taking the time to respond and to rebut in certain instances, to most, if not all of the arguments that were presented opposite. And on that basis I could probably say I beg to move and sit.

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



**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** But, I have a few things that I wish to say. I thank the Independent Senators in particular for the simple way in which they conducted this debate, with the solemnity that this debate deserved, the dignity that this debate deserved. We can disagree, and several Independent Senators have disagreed. But we do not have to be disagreeable.

**Sen. West:** [*Laughter*] Well said.

**Sen. Lyder:** We do not know about that.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** We do not have to conduct ourselves—

**Sen. Lyder:** We do not know about that.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—in a way—

**Sen. Lyder:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Senator:** “Hmm.”

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—I will leave that there—

**Sen. West:** “Mm-hmm.”

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—because I too, Mr. President, I want to accord this debate with the dignity that it deserves. And, in my responses—which is a bit unusual for me—

**Sen. West:** “Mm-hmm.” Quite.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** I would not want to denigrate—

**Sen. Bacchus:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—the debate into what it can go into. So, I would touch on some of the disagreements. So, the disagreement coming from the Independent Bench is one that touches on what I believe in my opinion, form over substance. Because, we all agree in the power and the symbolism of the steelpan. But there have been disagreements with respect to the form in which we got it from

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announcement to where we are today. And it is something that—I mean, in my time studying in Trinidad—my time studying in England, I have always had that in the back of my mind.

In Trinidad and Tobago, sometimes we spend a little too much time focusing on form over substance. Now, form is important. Form is important. And, what we have gotten here today is that everybody agrees that the pan is the best symbol to go on the Coat of Arms. But form over substance—and I will say this to you, Mr. President, because I have heard it said on the Independent Bench as well as on the Opposition Benches, about this preference to not have an announcement of Government's policy in a PNM party convention. Let me say this to you and to the national public, the People's National Movement is not the United National Congress.

**Sen. West:** Definitely not.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Our party conventions are not like the UNC forum meetings.

**Sen. Hosein:** “For rum.”

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** In every one of our party conventions, you would find—whether the political leader of the People's National Movement is the Opposition Leader or the Prime Minister, you would hear their major government policies.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Every single one of them. And that is not strange. If you go to a republican convention, you go to a democratic convention, you go to any one of the parties—

**Sen. West:** Serious, serious, parties.

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**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—in the United Kingdom, and when they have their party's convention—which is a very, very, serious and sacred meeting.

**Sen. Cox:** They do not have any convention.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** They do have any convention.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** “Dem does have curry duck, lime and cook-out.”

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** When you have it, just like in the United States and in the United Kingdom and in Jamaica, where there are serious parties, you would find major government policy being announced and put forward. Whether it is a manifesto when you are in Opposition or when you are in government, major government policies being announced. So, we make no apologies about that. Okay. You have had disagreements, with respect to the forum—not the UNC's “for rum”.

**Sen. Hosein:** “For rum”

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** The forum. So, okay, we will take that.

**Sen. Lyder:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Now, with respect to the form, we have not heard any suggestions as to what the form should have taken. What should we have done? Go from constituency to constituency and spend a grandiose amount of money in listening and understanding—well, which symbol, this symbol, that symbol. Should we have done that?

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. West:** Two hours later. Two years later.

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**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Or, this conversation has been in the public domain for decades. Somebody brought a *TNT Mirror* article from 1980s—a rasta man, I do not recall his name—a panman, suggesting—and even did some art work, that the steelpan should be on the Coat of Arms.

**Sen. Bacchus:** Yeah.

**Sen. Cox:** Correct.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** This has been there for a long time. And let me say something because I have been misquoted in this Chamber. I said, “we are focused on the removal of painful colonial vestiges”.

**Sen. Lyder:** Scrap.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Not all colonial vestiges.

**Sen. Lyder:** Scrap the whole thing then. Scrap the whole Coat of Arms.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Painful colonial vestiges.

**Sen. Lyder:** Scrap the whole thing.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Those three ships, with the sails. And you see that cross there?

**Sen. Bacchus:** Yeah

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** That is the Genovese flag.

**Hon. Senator:** Scrap the helmet. The British helmet.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder. So to wrap up, Minister, continue.

**Sen. Lyder:** Thank you very much.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Disagreeable and disgusting.

**Sen. West:** And it is getting worse.

**Sen. Lyder:** Scrap the helmet.

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**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** “Painful colonial vestiges”, that is what I said. Removable of painful colonial vestiges. This is not to take away from the Portuguese who came into Trinidad and Tobago. Sen. Vieira, your ancestors came here as shop-keepers or as indentured labourers from Madeira. I did my own DNA testing. I have some Portuguese in me from the Iberian coast. I did the research. I know that you came here as shop-keepers or—

**Sen. Cox:** Indentured labourers.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—indentured labourers. That is not painful. How does that compare to Christopher Columbus and his ships and his rediscovery—his landing in the Caribbean bringing diseases—

**Hon. Senator:** Genocide.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—rape, genocide, the beginning of slavery—how does that compare?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** With respect to Sen. Richards—yes, Sen. Richards, I agree with you. We have to start to monetize what we have created in the steelpan. We have to do that. And, for that very reason is why—and it may seem simple, it is an intangible but it has significant effect. The declaration of World Steelpan Day on the UN’s calendar, when we moved that Motion and got the support, World Steelpan Day is now a platform—and we celebrate it in Trinidad and Tobago.

**9.00 p.m.**

The declaration of World Steelpan Day on the UN’s calendar, when we moved that Motion and we got the support, World Steelpan Day is now a platform and we celebrate it in Trinidad and Tobago. If you pay attention, you would see it also celebrated all across the world, bringing more attention to the steelpan, to our

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culture, to Trinidad and Tobago, and to our steelpan men all across the world. We passed the National Musical Instrument Act in 2024, again, bringing prominence to the steelpan. Most importantly—we hear a lot of nonsense from the Opposition about the patent, “We did not geh no patent. We are not protecting this. We are not protecting that.” What we did—a very important piece of intellectual property.

They do not pay attention to the steelpan. They profess to love it. Not one of them wearing are their pins today, every one of them got, but they profess to love steelpan. They did not pay attention—

**Sen. Lyder:** Where is my pin? “I eh geh no pin”.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** But something very important—

**Sen. Lyder:** Mr. President, I got no pin. Mr. President, I got no pin.

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

**Sen. Lyder:** I want my pin.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder—

**Sen. Lyder:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder, you are standing up to argue with me about a pin. That—I am sure—

**Sen. Lyder:** [*Inaudible*]—I want my pin. They never gave me my pin.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder, that could be rectified after. You do not need to disturb the proceedings for that, and you know this.

**Sen. Lyder:** Not small pin, eh, but the pan pin.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder—

**Sen. Lyder:** Sorry.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Thank you very much. I do not know, pins, pin heads—Mr. President, listen, we secured intellectual property vested in the world

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governing body, Pan Trinbago, last year, geographical indicator, a very important piece of intellectual property. The time is long past with respect to patent law by which we could go and apply for a patent.

I believe it was about 30 years after the creation, the invention of the steelpan, 30 years have passed, we could not get the patent for the steelpan. A very important piece of intellectual property that we have gotten—Pan Trinbago, and we are developing it—is the geographical indicator.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** What that geographical indicator does, it says these steelpans are made in Trinidad and Tobago. For those that are made in Trinidad and Tobago, they are made to a particular standard, a very high standard, and they are the best in the world. But more than that, the brand of that geographical indicator—and I have stated it here before. You have—what Scotch whisky is to Scotch whisky—

**Hon. Senator:** A Swiss watch.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—a Swiss watch—champagne is to France, we can now, and we are doing it, we have to develop the brand's identity to push all over the world that the steelpan is uniquely Trinbagonian, it is valuable.

You have an opportunity to push Trinidad and Tobago's brand. You have an opportunity to push the steelpan, the steelpan player, the culture of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the importance and the potency of what we have done here. So to answer your point, we do not just wake up today for tomorrow to say, "Well, we guh gih pan players all ah this money," or "We guh gih this to Pan Trinbago," or "We will gih this," or "We will gih this". You do not just wake up and say, "Well, tomorrow we have to monetize the pan." Step by step, creating the awareness,

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creating the value in the steelpan seen across the world, that is where you have it.

We celebrate Joshua Regrello today. You know what Joshua Regrello did? We are all proud of him. He saw what we were doing internationally. We went to the United Nations, we got the geographical indicator protection, and to his credit, he said, “Okay, I am going to the Guinness World Records and I will take Trinidad and Tobago on my back and bring prominence to this thing here called the steelpan,” and we applaud him for it.

So by these measures and by these steps, we are causing people to invest in steelpan. We just provided grant money and the chroming factory had recently been opened. We have pan manufacturers here. So this thing about, “The Government has to do this,” and “The Government”—no, the Government has to facilitate and get persons involved to see the prospect and the potential, and invest and build in it, because the private sector will always doing it better than the public sector.

Mr. President, there was talk about the National Emblems Committee—and perhaps the Opposition missed it. The National Emblems Committee falls under the Ministry and Minister of National Security. I offered Sen. Mark the opportunity for me to correct him before he volunteered himself to make a fool of himself. The National Emblems Committee is populated. The Chairman, Major Joseph Bridgewater; Vice-Chairman, Russel Halfhide; and the other persons are, Chief of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs; the Legal Officer, Ministry of National Security; and the Director of Culture, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. It is populated.

I adopt the explanation by Sen. Laurence Hislop. You know, Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial is an attorney of some vintage and still represented



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incorrectly the purport of the section. It is an advisory committee to the Minister of National Security, but in our whole governance construct, it is the Minister of National Security who sets the policy. It is the Cabinet of the day that sets the policy. It is an advisory committee.

Listen, I “doh” blame them, you know. Sen. Mark has not been in government for very long—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** But you are wrong. I mean, it was really shameless politicking; shameless. We are here to discuss the national emblem, that is the Coat of Arms, and the entire Opposition’s contribution simply boiled down to, “We do more for Pan Trinbago, all yuh do less for Pan Trinbago. We will do more for Pan Trinbago,” because all they are focused on is elections. Forget elections, this is about the national identity of all of us here in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Forget elections.

Sen. Anil Roberts—you know, somebody sent me a little idiom while I was talking, “Every court must have its jester”, and I laughed because I know the idiom. “Every court must have its jester”. But there is a problem when the Opposition is populated by clowns because then the Senate becomes a circus.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** He said nothing of substance. We are talking about the replacement of the ships with the steelpan, but you are talking about painting Mannie Ramjohn Stadium, of no consequence. Shameless politicking. “We go gih dem more money. We guh gih yuh less money. We guh gih you more money.”

You all gave the pan fraternity a lot of money in 2014 and 2015, and what

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has come of it? What has come of it? It took a PNM Government, with the executive and the president of Pan Trinbago to turn the whole thing around. A lot of credit has to go to the President for Pan Trinbago, and I have thought about it for a long time, because there have been presidents of Pan Trinbago and you know, unfortunately, the organization has always descended into bacchanal. What I have come to, the reason why they have done so well is because the president is a former politician, elected politician, and as an elected politician, you are familiar with accountability and being accountable to your pan membership and everybody who is involved, but not them.

Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial went to town on the land. Now, how does the land come into a debate on the Coat of Arms, I do not know, but I have spoken about the land here before. The land was given to Pan Trinbago by Basdeo Panday and the Panday Government. They also got money to start the construction of the headquarters. The Member for Siparia, as she was then the Minister of Legal Affairs, did the wrong form of lease, and that is why it was never registered. The lease was defective.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Lyder:** So then, just give it to them. Just correct it.

**Sen. West:** Why are we not surprised?

**Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** The lease was done by Clarence Rambharat.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** No, it was done by the Ministry of Legal Affairs—

**Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** It was done by Clarence Rambharat.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—because when Cabinet makes a decision, it goes to the Ministry of Legal Affairs to correct; a decision of that nature.

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

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**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** I do not blame you, Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial, because you do not know. You have never been in Government. I do not blame you.

**Hon. Senators:** *[Interruption]*

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** He signed it as the corporate secretary but the lease was done by the Member for Siparia.

**Sen. Mark:** No, by Clarence Rambharat.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Fast-forward, Mr. President—

**Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial:** He signed—*[Inaudible]*

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Mr. President, I am being disturbed by the braying of Sen. Lutchmedial-Ramdial.

**Sen. Mark:** Yeah, but you are misleading the Parliament.

**Mr. President:** Okay.

**Sen. Mark:** We are not taking that from you.

**Mr. President:** Enough, Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** And he is using offensive language.

**Sen. Lyder:** Very offensive.

**Sen. Mark:** We are not tolerating that.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark—

**Sen. Lyder:** We are—*[Inaudible]*

**Mr. President:** No, Sen. Lyder.

**Sen. Lyder:** Yeah, but—*[Inaudible]*—

**Mr. President:** Sen. Lyder, I am on my legs. Continue, Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Thank you very much. So, you know, fast-forward, it has become an eyesore; it was an unfinished property, an unfinished building.

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Fast-forward to 2010 to 2015—and I highlighted this already, you know, it is on the *Hansard*—the then Government, the People's Partnership as they were called, took a Cabinet decision to complete the building for Pan Trinbago. It was sent to UDeCOTT. You know who was the Chairman of UDeCOTT then? Sen. John.

**Sen. John:** Do not even call my name.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** So Sen. John will know—

**Sen. John:** That is not true. You are lying. [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. President:** Okay. All right.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. President:** Members, if there is an objection to something that is being said, you can ask to give way or you can raise a Standing Order.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

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

**Sen. John:** Yeah, but he is lying—

**Mr. President:** First and foremost, Sen. John, you know we do not use that word inside here; two—

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. President:** Again, I am on my legs and I am speaking, if you have an objection, raise a Standing Order.

**Sen. Smith:** Mr. President, we rise on Standing Order 46(6), there is a lot of imputing of improper motives on the part of the Government.

**Mr. President:** Okay. So the Standing Order in relation to imputing improper motives has been raised. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, just be careful. I am sure you stand by your statements, if that is what you are doing, but,

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again, just be mindful. Continue, Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Thank you very much. I stand by my statements. I own them because I have a copy of the Cabinet Notes.

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

**9.15 p.m.**

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Now, Sen. John is becoming very sensitive. Sen. John did not hear me finish my point. The Cabinet took a decision for UDeCoTT to finish the Pan Trinbago headquarters between 2010 and 2015. Sen. John was the Chairman of UDeCoTT and UDeCOTT simply could not arrive at an agreement or a consensus with Pan Trinbago and simply did not finish the building. That is a fact, an undisputed fact. I have the Cabinet Notes. The Member for Oropouche East was the Minister at the time.

**Sen. John.:** Well, you started it [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** I mean, if that is your retort, that, “They started it and why we mus’ finish it?” Well, okay. Well then that is your retort but the fact of the matter is that between 2010 and 2015, you had an opportunity to complete it and you simply did not.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Lyder:** “What alyuh do for 10 years?”

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** That is it.

**Sen. Lyder:** “What alyuh do for 10 years?”

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** What we did—

**Mr. President:** Again—

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**Hon. Senators:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. President:**—again—

**Hon. Senators:** [*Continuous interruption*]

**Mr. President:** Okay, so, as much as it might be a sensitive topic, there is still no requirement to shout across the Floor at the Minister who is wrapping up this debate. If you have something to say, I am going to repeat this for the last time, ask the Member to give way and if he is so to do, he would allow you to speak. Continue Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Thank you very much. What we did was, 2023/2024, consulted with Pan Trinbago and decided, one, the headquarters of pan should be in the city. There was a building that we located on Wrightson Road, on the Waterfront, a very valuable building. A building that is more valuable than the land down in Trincity, way more valuable and the Cabinet decided that they would gift Pan Trinbago the land, construct a six-story headquarters, which would be shared—

**Sen. Mark:** Could you give way?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:**—and—no!

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Mark:** Give us the value of the land, the value of the building—

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** We would—

**Sen. Mark:**—and the value of the land.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark—

**Sen. Mark:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. President:** No, no. You followed the procedure, you asked to give way and the Minister indicated that he would not. You cannot then proceed to shout across

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the Floor. Minister continue.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. The value of the property at Wrightson Road is way more than the value of the property in Trincity, Okay? Right.

**Sen. Mark:**—\$75 million

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** Pan Trinbago, being the owners of the building, would be able to monetize the museum that we would build, monetize the spaces within the building, monetize the use of the roof and that is what we agreed to. So, for the Opposition, it has only been about naked politicking because we have an election and as I said, it is all about elections for them. All about elections. So, Mr. President, I do not want to belabour the point anymore.

Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy asked the question about the birth certificate. The way that the subsidiary legislations operate, we can put in the order for birth certificates and they can be allowed to subsist for as long as possible, as long as when the person dies and the person dies they get a death certificate with the new Coat of Arms. Or, our birth certificates have been changed, maybe, two/three times during my lifetime, so it is not that much of an issue. As I indicated, there will be a cost. The cost will be managed, it will not be an onerous cost because there are ways to keep those costs down. I do not have any more points to respond to at this time.

So, Mr. President, I would say that we have demonstrated Government's commitment to the renewal, rebirth and prosperity of our national identity through the formal modernization of our Coat of Arms and I would urge all Members—and I am grateful for all Members indicating their support for this move and for this measure. Together, we now attach ourselves firmly—notwithstanding its birth and

National Emblems of Trinidad and  
Tobago (Regulation) (Amdt.) Bill, 2025  
Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell (cont'd)

existence here in Trinidad and Tobago—to the symbol of the steelpan and what it means to our people, what it means to our communities and what it means to our country, Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. President, I beg to move.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Desk thumping*] *Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole Senate.*

*Senate in Committee.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Senators, as we are well aware, there are five clauses in this Bill. I have seen no circulated amendments regarding such, so we shall—

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. Chairman, I just want a little information on this.

**Mr. President:** Pardon?

**Sen. Mark:** Clause 5(2)

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Alright, well we will proceed accordingly.

*Clauses 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 5.*

*Question proposed:* That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. Chairman, because of the importance of this matter, before us and we want the actual Bill, when it passes, to collectively reflect the will of this honourable Senate, I am asking, through you, to the hon. Minister, whether you would consider, after “Order” in 5(2) to put the word “affirmative” after “Order”—“by affirmative resolution”. So that for instance, we here in the Parliament can have some oversight over that exercise, particularly, if this thing is prolonged because everybody would like this thing to be effective. So, when January comes, we should be getting a report from this—another debate on this matter. So, I am



suggesting for the consideration of the hon. Minister, Mr. Chairman, that in clause 5(2) after the word—or just—the amendment, “Order subject to an affirmative resolution of the Parliament”. So that is my submission for your consideration, to the hon. Minister.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Tourism Culture and the Arts.

**Sen. Mitchell:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I know Sen. Mark is quite prolific at making that intervention requiring that affirmative resolution be preferred rather than negative resolution. I do not think that that is proportionate. I think there is a level of flexibility that clause 5(2) gives to the Minister of National Security, that is necessary. I do not believe that we should disturb the whole Parliament to debate that. There are other mechanisms that we can use, as you are well aware. The adjournment Motions and questions that can be put and I would respectfully disagree with the Member’s suggestion.

**Sen. Mark:** When you say an adjournment Motion, adjournment Motion does not come into the overall monitoring. It is our responsibility. The Parliament has the legal responsibility to monitor and to have an oversight role collectively, as opposed to Wade Mark or the Hon. Randall Mitchel, coming with a matter on the Motion on the Adjournment. So, I respectfully, as you said, a short while ago, disagree with that proposal, Mr. Chairman.

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

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, final—Sen. Thompson-Ahye.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** I am usually on the same page with Sen. Mark when it comes to affirmative resolution and negative resolution. I have read the report into Parliament’s records from the House of Lords and their feeling about this, at that level. But I think in this case, when you are talking about a date, a later date, “as the Ministry may”, I do not think the fears that we would normally have about

affirmative against negative resolution would really be a relevant consideration in this type of thing because the person who will really be looking at the date would have in his or her position all of the circumstances to know if it is that, you know, you just do not have the wherewithal, you do not have time period to deal with all of these applications that are coming to you, for birth certificates and all of that sort of thing. I think we could safely leave it in this case for the Minister. So I really would depart from him at this stage. Sen. Mark, you understand?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Sen. Thompson-Ahye:** Yeah, I think he agrees.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Mitchell:** I accept and I adopt what Sen. Thompson-Ahye has stated. Further to my previous submission, Sen. Mark is well aware that there is also a mechanism to negative the negative resolution made.

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*] hon. Minister negative.

*Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

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

*Senate resumed.*

*Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.*

**9.30 p.m.**

## ADJOURNMENT

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne):** Mr. President, I beg to move—

**Sen. Mark:** No, no, no, no. Mr. President, [*Inaudible*] you have approved two matters on the Motion for the Adjournment.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Mark, have a seat. Have a seat. Have a seat. Have a seat.

Have a seat.

**Hon. Senators:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. President:** Yes, yes, yes. I know. Sen. Mark, Christmas, New Year's.

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. President:** Yes. Yes, Sen. Mark, it has been a while. Let the procedure run.

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. President, I accept the apology of Sen. Mark. Mr. President, if I may, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2025 at 1.30 p.m. It is ascribed as Private Members' Day and Sen. Mark may wish to indicate what matters.

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. President, my apologies. We shall be returning to that very important subject matter, parliamentary autonomy.

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

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

### **The Scourge of Domestic Violence**

**Sen. Anthony Vieira SC:** Thank you, Mr. President. The scourge of domestic violence has reached epidemic proportions as we can no longer turn a blind eye to the widespread and often tragic consequences of the crisis. The recent deaths and assaults caused by intimate partner violence across our nation are more than isolated incidents they are a consequence of systematic failure in addressing the root causes and repercussions of domestic violence.

Mr. President, last year Tara "Geeta" Ramsaroop and her one-year-old

daughter, Jada Mootilal were chopped to death in Barrackpore. Laura Sankar was chopped to death in Princes Town. Shameia Went was chopped to death in San Fernando. Four-year-old Amarah Lallitte was decapitated in Arouca. Calida Schamber and Carmelita De Leon were shot to death in Glencoe. Keifer Dianne Wilson was beaten to death with a wheel spanner and then knocked over with a vehicle on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. Anna Ellis was stabbed in St. James; she survived. Afiya Adams was doused with gasoline and then set alight in Freeport; she died four days later.

Last year, the Minister of Health revealed that between March 2020 and March 2022, 6,250 reports of domestic violence were made to the police. In most cases, the victims were women in intimate relationships suffering at and hands of individuals they knew and trusted. This is not normal behaviour and it seems to be getting worse. The fact that domestic violence is illegal makes no difference. The sad reality is that even when victims had protection orders, those orders were not enough to protect them. The fact that women continue to be brutally attacked, abused and even killed causes us to question the effectiveness of protective orders, and whether there is anything else we can do to ensure they fulfil their intended purpose.

One of the core issues may lie in enforcement. If offenders realise that they can violate these orders with little consequence, it is a failure in the system and erodes confidence in the system designed to safeguard victims. But I posit that enforcement alone is not the answer. Punitive measures are a one-dimensional choice to a multi-layered conundrum. Strengthening our response to domestic violence requires an integrated approach one that recognizes the complex multifaceted nature of this crisis. As High Court judge the Honourable Mr. Justice Frank Seepersad has stated, domestic violence is not just a police or court issue, it

is a societal problem demanding a comprehensive and unified response from all of us. I wholeheartedly agree.

We should bear in mind that domestic violence often stems from deeper psychological and social factors, a desire for control, a sense of entitlement, cultural beliefs and sometimes economic stress. Economic challenges such as job loss or financial insecurity can exacerbate tensions leading to outbursts of violence. In many cases, individuals are perpetuating a cycle they witnessed as children or the abuser may be grappling with untreated mental health issues. With all these dynamics at play, is it any wonder that punitive measures alone cannot address the root cause.

If we hope to curb domestic violence, we must acknowledge that it requires interventions beyond those traditionally used for crime, especially when it is difficult for victims to leave the relationship or charge the offender. Victims are often connected to the abuser through children and other family members. So while the conventional adversarial approach addresses certain aspects, I believe there is another lever we can pull better geared toward addressing the root causes.

Section 6(8) of the Domestic Violence Act allows for counselling orders, but this provision is underutilized. Counselling could be one of the most powerful tools to interrupt the cycle of abuse and foster genuine behavioural change. Counselling provides the root towards self-awareness, accountability and the adoption of non-violent conflict resolution skills.

Imagine if you would, a situation where potential abusers are mandated into a programme that teaches anger management, empathy, communication and conflict de-escalation. Such skills could mean the difference between life and death for some victims. If counselling can be utilized early and consistently it has the potential to reduce repeat offences making homes safer across the nation, but,

effective counselling is not as simple as it sounds. Domestic violence counselling is a specialized field and it is crucial that the professionals tasked with this responsibility have both the qualifications and the experience to address the unique challenges of domestic violence cases. Just as we would not ask a general medical doctor to perform complex surgery, we cannot rely on unqualified individuals to handle such sensitive high-stakes cases.

So as a guardrail, I would recommend that the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists develop a roster of approved counsellors with rigorous standards for expertise in domestic violence treatment. The Association could provide best practice guidelines so that counselling sessions are consistent, impactful and geared towards real change. Additionally, counsellors should report regularly to the court on a respondent's progress allowing for timely intervention if the risk of violence resurfaces. If a counsellor suspects or anticipates that violence is imminent or threatened, they should be able at once to inform the court and the applicant of the defensive or avoidance measures that can be undertaken.

Under the current framework, we seem ill-equipped to foresee and to forestall. Addressing domestic violence would require a comprehensive approach that includes education, support services and legal intervention. No single entity, whether Government, the courts or the police can solve this problem alone, it will require collaboration across sectors and levels of society.

**Mr. President:** Senator, you have two more minutes.

**Sen. A. Vieira SC:** Thank you. Collaboration among professionals is essential. I do not propose counselling as a cure-all. Domestic violence is what experts call "a wicked problem." A problem with no single simple cause or simple solution, one that requires a sustained, multifaceted approach and so to address this, we must think innovatively recognizing that complex issues require complex solutions. A

programme focused on counselling and behavioural intervention is just one element in a broader strategy, but it is an essential one.

No one should lose a loved one to preventable violence. Families should not have to grieve because our system failed to protect their daughters, sisters and mothers. By investing in counselling and making it a staple of our domestic violence response, we are choosing to build a safer, more humane society. We owe it to the victims and survivors to ensure that protection orders are more than mere words on paper. By strengthening the use of counselling orders we create an avenue for real change helping both the abusers who are willing to reform and the victims who deserve safety and peace.

Let us act decisively to break the cycle of abuse and put an end to this crisis. Let us create a system where every citizen, every family and every child can feel safe in their homes. Mr. President, I thank you.

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

**Mr. President:** Attorney General

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

**The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC):** Thank you very much, Mr. President, and thank you to Sen. Vieira SC for raising a question on this Motion which is very relevant and indeed as he has said represents a scourge in epidemic proportions in our society. So that I am—I was about to say happy, but I would not use the word happy in this context, but I am pleased to be able to rise to address this very important subject raised by the Independent Senator.

We have in Trinidad and Tobago the Domestic Violence Act, which has been amended from time to time, which is a very comprehensive piece of legislation. The challenge that we face in this society is not that our laws are

inadequate or deficient, that is not to say, of course, that laws do not need to evolve and be improved continuously. The issue of domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago is a critical social crisis. As policymakers, I agree with the Senator, that we need to address it seriously and we must leverage all available mechanisms to protect not just the victims, but to rehabilitate the offenders and restore harmony in the family.

**9.45 p.m.**

Mr. President, counselling orders as provided under section 6 of the Domestic Violence Act, which the Senator has referred to, are among the tools available to us in Trinidad and Tobago. The truth of the matter is that our courts, some very significant courts that have been brought into being in this country relatively recently by significant amendments, are working hard at the very issues that the Senator has pointed out.

Of course, we have under section 6(1), we have the normal injunctive relief that can be applied for to protect the victims from the offenders, most of the time being members of their own family. But additional to the injunctive relief that can be applied for by a victim of domestic violence, there is section 6(1)(b)(viii) of the Act, which I believe the Senator has referred to, which authorises a court to issue protection orders directing respondents, and the respondents would be the persons who are the abusers, the applicants, that is to say, the persons who are being abused or their children, to receive counselling or therapy from approved persons or programmes.

The point is that there is already existing the legislation that allows for this, and this is done through referrals for counselling in the Family Court Division, Social Services unit right here in Trinidad and Tobago. Those services are comprehensive and include psychosocial assessments, psychoeducational



programmes for children and parents, psychotherapy, as well as psychological and psychiatric evaluations. Importantly the courts, that is to say, the Family Courts and the Children Courts provide wraparound services enabling court users whether they are the applicants, that is those who are being abused; the respondents, that is the abusers; and their children, to access in-house counselling and other support services directly. So it is not that we do not have the enabling framework within which to address this problem that is plaguing our society and it is a scourge. The Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. President, has provided some valuable statistical data which shed light on how counselling orders are being currently utilized. Permit me to give some statistics in that regard.

In relation to Family Court referrals, between January 2023 and November 2024, 1,336 individuals comprising 605 applicants, that is to say, those who are being abused, 543 respondents, that is to say, the abusers, and 188 children were, in fact, referred to the Social Services unit for interventions such as counselling, psychotherapy, psychiatric assessments and psychological evaluations. This is being done by our Family Court in addressing the problem of domestic violence. So, it is not just about whether the police are protecting and responding to complaints, our court systems are designed to address this scourge, and the data that has been provided by the Judiciary highlights the efforts made to connect individuals with critical support services.

However, unfortunately, compliance remains a challenge. Six hundred and ninety seven individuals including 89 children, 301 applicants and 307 respondents did not fully comply with the court's orders in that period that I have identified for 2023 to '24. Non-compliance includes missing scheduled sessions or failing to complete treatment plans, which we can agree, are essential for achieving meaningful behavioural change because what we are concerned about is

introducing a psychosocial, psychoeducational, psychological counselling system to introduce behavioural change to include the respondents, that is to say, the abusers and the victims and to care for the children.

Turning our attention to the data provided by the Childrens Court. Similarly, in the period I speak of, 269 individuals, that is to say, 269 children were referred to the Social Services unit for services such as psychoeducational programmes and psychosocial assessments. Of these, 156 individuals did not achieve full compliance highlighting an urgent need for stronger measures to ensure participation.

Part of the challenge that we are having in our society is that, not sufficient resources in terms of the persons, the skilled persons are being given the support to apply the systems that exists in our society. The data indicates that while many individuals adhere to court order referrals, there remain notable instances of non-compliance and to address this our courts currently employ various tools to track compliance including the involvement of social workers, child and family facilitators and probation officers. Their assessments are incorporated into—

**Mr. President:** AG, you have two more minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you—into progress reports submitted to the court providing critical insights to inform further judicial outcome. So, we have that challenge where we have to get more of our society involved to understand that there is a compliance issue to introduce behavioural change.

It would be incomplete for me to end, Mr. President, without referring to the consultation, the national consultation that my office had recently, coming out of the landmark case of *Tot Lampkin v the Attorney General*, where a young woman, Samantha Isaacs, a mother and victim of relentless domestic abuse, after attempts to get protection from the Judiciary and the police, was murdered by the father of

her four-year old child at the time on December 17, 2017. Out of that case which went to the High Court, I took the decision not to appeal that decision, and instead I called a national consultation of Trinidad and Tobago, and I was very heartened by the turnout, and the interrogative sessions that were engaged coming out of that decision and that national consultation.

One of the things that I was very heartened to understand from that national consultation was the National Strategic Action Plan that is being promoted through the Office of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago led by Minister Ayanna Webster-Roy. A very comprehensive National Strategic Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Violence for the period 2023 to 2027 which is providing a very holistic programme towards dealing with victim-centred approach and calling for a harmonization of the measures by which victims, respondents and the family members who are impacted by this scourge are all being encouraged to embrace the holistic, the behavioural change that our society needs to make.

Something that has come across to me very, very clearly, Mr. President, in the undertaking that I have been embarking on since getting involved in this area, which is for me deeply disturbing, is the culture of silence that exists in our society. People turn a blind eye or prefer to turn a blind eye to the scourge of domestic violence and we have to fix that. Thank you very much.

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

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

### **Monopolization of the Pharmaceutical Industry**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the growing monopolization of the pharmaceutical industry by a small clique is negatively impacting on the market dynamics and, of course, prices. Mr. President, Trinidad and Tobago should have the appropriate pieces of legislation to discourage unfair

trade practices and monopolistic trends in any sector particularly the health care sector with particular reference to the pharmaceutical sector.

Today, in spite of the existence of a Fair Trading Commission which is supposed to discourage monopolies, what we have, Mr. President, is a kind of control over the pharmaceutical business by, as I said, a few companies. Now, let me demonstrate the concern that we would like to draw to your attention.

Smith Robertson which is a subsidiary of the Agostini group, controls, as we speak, some 85 per cent of the major brand names international pharmaceutical distribution lines; 85 per cent. Smith Robertson has a heavy influence and control over the bulk of generic drugs from other distributors for local and Caribbean distribution. Same company, Smith Robertson.

Smith Robertson, a subsidiary of the Agostini group currently, Mr. President, controls over 70 per cent of all Third Schedule drugs. Those are pharmaceutical products that are only provided under strict rules. They supply 500 pharmacies in this country. Mr. President, this has implications. This same company, Smith Robinson, currently supplies to SuperPharm which is a subsidiary of Agostini which is owned by Christian Moutte. What we are seeing, Mr. President, is that this same company called Smith Robertson, they are supplying themselves through SuperPharm and they have recently purchased all Neal & Massy pharmacies at their various outlets, Hi-Lo outlets. It is now called or "M Massy" or "M Pharm". And what is taking place, Mr. President, is that they are offering massive trade deals and discounts to these pharmacies, underwriting, undermining the other pharmacies in the country of revenues.

Mr. President, this company called Smith Robertson, which is a monopoly in this country, is selling directly through their wholesale outlet in Port of Spain, in

San Juan and in San Fernando. They do not have a retail licence but they are selling retail products under the Third Schedule, Mr. President, to customers, to doctors, to patients and to other wholesalers, Mr. President, and they do not have a retail pharmacy licence. We would like to know what the Minister of Health is doing about this thing, this situation, Mr. President.

Now, Mr. President, you also have a reregistration process of Third Schedule pharmaceuticals taking place as we speak, coming out of South America, and that is having an impact because as a result of this arrangement you have increased prices, sometimes three, four, five times and it is the ordinary patients and consumers who are paying a heavy price on this front, Mr. President.

Mr. President, there appears to be an unfair and cosy relationship between the Minister, or I should say, the Ministry of Health and this particular company called Smith Robertson. Mr. President, I have been advised that this same company supplies close to 60 per cent of the C-40 NIPDEC drug, and that filters through the system. So, again, you are seeing one single company, Smith Robertson, Mr. President, having a monopoly on pharmaceuticals in Trinidad and Tobago.

**10.00 p.m.**

Mr. President, that is not healthy for the industry. It is not healthy for the industry because citizens have to pay through their noses in order to get critical pharmaceutical products. To demonstrate the monopoly of Smith Robertson, a subsidiary of Agostini, they are allocated US \$200 million per year, which is \$1.4 billion, which is \$286 million a month. They have a monopoly on that industry and the Fair Trading Commission, like Rip Van Winkle, is sleeping; is sleeping, Mr. President.

Monopolization of the Pharmaceutical  
Industry (cont'd)  
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

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**Mr. President:** Senator, you have two more minutes.

**Sen. W. Mark:** So I am calling on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to take action in order to protect the patients, to take action to protect the consumers, because there is a clear monopoly taking place and the Government is in league with Smith Robertson, because they know that Smith Roberson, which is owned by Christian Mouttet, is their financier. So what is going on is that these people are charging pharmaceutical prices that you and I need to buy from the pharmacies, four, five, and six times the price, and the Government is doing nothing.

Mr. President, in closing, Smith Robertson owes a quarter billion dollars to the Government, and they have not been paying, they have not been demanding, you know why, Mr. President? They are doing whatever they want and the Government is allowing them to get away with murder in this country. So I have raised this matter today to get to the attention of the Government, through you, Mr. President, that this monopoly is hurting the small people. The Fair Trading Commission—under the law, once a pharmacy or a company has more than 40 per cent share of the market, this Fair Trading Commission is supposed to intervene.

You have one company called Smith Robertson, having 70 per cent of the pharmaceutical market, and this Commission, the Fair Trading Commission that is supposed to intervene to protect the consumers, is sleeping at the wheel. How can that be fair? I have raised this matter to get some answers from the Government, to protect the patients, the doctors and the local retailers. Thank you, Mr. President.

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

**Mr. President:** Leader of Government Business.

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

**The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery**

**Browne):** Thank you, Mr. President. Here we go again. Sen. Mark, under the cloak of a matter on the adjournment, has found—let me see if I can get a metaphor that can help an understanding of what just transpired. Sen. Mark, is like a—you know the old children’s party where you have a piñata? He places a piñata filled with allegations, name-dropping—I heard the names of certain businessmen, he puts that in there; names of companies, he puts that in there; unfounded allegations; unreferenced statistics, percentages, it is 30 per cent, it is 70 per cent. He throws all that in the piñata and then he spends 10 minutes beating at it, hoping something falls out to make a headline in the newspaper tomorrow, or to register a talking point that might end up in an election platform, or to convince someone. Mr. President, we are well familiar with this Senator’s methodologies and we are well familiar with his modus operandi.

However, this matter on the adjournment is an opportunity to enlighten the population on certain elements of the market disposition in Trinidad and Tobago, and certain elements of competition policy. So we can start with some basic definitions of terms, and 30 per cent does not a monopoly make; 30 per cent does not a monopoly make.

Mr. President, with respect to competition policy, a core aim of competition policy is to foster a competitive market environment where no single entity or group of entities can unfairly dominate. By promoting fair competition, we can ensure that businesses can compete on equal footing, driving innovation and efficiency, with the benefits of competition being broadly shared. So I do not know if I heard elements of a sort of anti-free market, anti-capitalist disposition, with which Sen. Mark might be quite familiar, but I want to say reference with Fair Trading Commission on several occasions, the Fair Trading Commission plays a

crucial role in maintaining competitive market dynamics within this Trinidad and Tobago economy, including the pharmaceutical industry by, for example, actively addressing monopolization by dominant corporations. That work is ongoing.

With respect to the Fair Trading Commission, the Commission is an independent statutory body, established pursuant to and responsible for implementing the Fair Trading Act, which was fully proclaimed in February 2020. The objectives of this independent statutory body are: To prevent anti-competitive conduct, thereby encouraging and ensuring competition and efficiency, while, at the same time, complementing other policies that do promote competition. It also ensures that all legitimate business enterprises have an equal opportunity to participate in our economy. It maintains free and fair competition in business; raises awareness of the benefits of competition; takes action against abuses of dominance, restraints of trade and other anti-competitive agreements and practices; and the Commission also reviews and approves major applications.

Mr. President, with respect to this Commission's work in local health care and pharmaceutical sector, it must be stated that in Trinidad and Tobago, a dominant firm that has monopoly power will not automatically be deemed to have committed an offence pursuant to the Fair Trading Act. However, that same dominant firm that may have monopoly power will be considered to be abusing that power if it impedes the maintenance of, or development of effective competition in a particular market, with the firm then being in breach of the provisions of the Fair Trading Act. A dominant firm will, therefore, be considered as abusing monopoly power if it engages in the following conduct, among other things:

- Restricting an enterprise from entering the market;



- Preventing or deterring an enterprise from engaging in competition;
- Eliminating or removing an enterprise from a market;
- Directly or indirectly imposing unfair purchase or selling prices that are excessive, unreasonable, discriminatory or predatory; and
- Limiting production and/or distribution of goods or services to the prejudices of the consumers.

The Fair Trading Commission is committed to its ongoing efforts to addressing any attempts of monopolization of the pharmaceutical industry, while it continues its goal to foster a more competitive and fair marketplace. These efforts include targeted stakeholder meetings in the pharmaceutical industry.

Over the past few years, the Commission has engaged proactively in stakeholder meetings with representatives across the local health care and pharmaceutical sector. As part of these ongoing advocacy efforts, the Commission has recently engaged with key partners, such as the Ministry of Health, the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago, the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago, to inform of the need for compliance with the Fair Trading Act, and to seek to address any anti-competitive concerns that they may have.

The Commission has also engaged with NIPDEC Pharmaceutical Division, the Tobacco Control Unit of the Ministry of Health, and held a meeting with key stakeholders in the pharmaceutical sector back in 2021, the objective being to ascertain whether they have been reports or complaints of anti-competitive conduct. Emanating from this range of stakeholder meetings, no complaints or any issues were raised regarding any perception of the monopolization of the pharmaceutical industry by a few dominant corporations.

I will thus be extremely grateful if Sen. Mark can, in the future, advise the

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Industry (cont'd)  
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source with which he used as justification for raising those perceptions that he raised.

Now, with the respect to the Commission there is also a review of mergers. The Commission has also engaged—

**Mr. President:** Minister, you have two more minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Thank you—stakeholders at the macro and the micro level for feedback when conducting its merger review and analysis, when considering pharmaceutical mergers, such as Smith Robertson, Oscar Francois, Nestlé's Bountiful Company, Apotex pharmaceuticals, Artemis Parent Incorporated, et cetera. In not one of these analyses were there instances identified of any concerns of the growing monopolization of the pharmaceutical industry by a few dominate corporations, in spite of questions and surveys inviting stakeholders to raise this and any other competitive concerns that they may have with respect to this sector. There are also market study, insights and other interventions.

So, Mr. President, the efforts and commitments continue. While the reports of information about health care and pharmaceutical industry have been made to the Commission, there has been no specific allegation concerning abuses of monopolies or high prices of pharmaceutical products. I wish to reaffirm the Government's commitment to creating a fair and competitive market that promotes inclusive growth and development. The independent Fair Trading Commission plays a significant role in this effort by ensuring that the principles of fair competition are upheld across key sectors of our economy, including the pharmaceutical sector.

We recognize that a fair and competitive health sector is essential, not only because of its economic significance but most importantly, for the health and well-

Monopolization of the Pharmaceutical  
Industry (cont'd)  
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being of all of our citizens. We encourage stakeholders to provide the Fair Trading Commission with concrete evidence of any monopolistic or anti-competitive behaviour that they suspect is taking place in the sector, and to seek clarification from or advice from the Commission if and where needed, and that invitation is extended to all citizens, including Senators, including Sen. Wade Mark. Mr. President, I thank you.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 10.12 p.m.*