

SENATE

Tuesday, July 01, 2025

The Senate met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation – Chairman’s Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2023. [*The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation – Chairman’s Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2024. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darryl Allahar):

Mr. President, I am answering on behalf—

Mr. President: No, no. You have the question already?

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: I have the question. Yes, please, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Amery Browne.

Caricom’s Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR)**(Reason for Virtual Participation in Twenty-eighth Meeting)**

5. **Sen. Dr. Amery Browne** asked the hon. Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs:

Can the Minister explain his decision to not participate in-person at the Twenty-eighth Meeting of Caricom's Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) on May 08—09, 2025?

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darryl Allaha):

Mr. President, I am answering on behalf of the hon. Minister as follows. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, participated virtually in the 28th Meeting of Caricom's Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCO) on May 8—9, 2025.

The determination to participate virtually in the meeting held in St. Kitts and Nevis was principally a matter of cost efficiency in recognition of the immediate need to embrace financial prudence. This new administration intends to approach the discharge of all official government travel abroad based on the principle of value for money and cost efficiency.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Allaha: Mr. President, this decision was also taken in cognizance of the digital infrastructure put in place by the Caricom Secretariat to support virtual and hybrid participation, which embraces flexibility.

The delegation from Trinidad and Tobago was not the only country to participate virtually, as Belize, Guyana, St. Vincent and the Grenadines also opted to accept the kind facilitation of the host country to conduct the meeting in a hybrid format. And, Mr. President, it should be noted that Trinidad and Tobago has used this format for several meetings over the years.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to ask a supplemental. Can the Minister indicate how many times did the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago intervene during the course of this meeting via virtual participation?

Mr. President: The hon. Leader of Government Business.

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: Mr. President, I think that is outside of the question. The question asked the decision not to participate in person, not what happened in the meeting.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. President. Therein lies the answer.

Caricom's Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR)

(Details of Virtual Participation in Meeting)

6. **Sen. Dr. Amery Browne** asked the hon. Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs:

Given the Minister's decision to participate virtually at the Twenty-eighth Meeting of Caricom's Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) on May 8—9, 2025, can the Minister indicate what views, if any, did the Minister express on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago on:

- (i) the application by the Dominican Republic for Associate Membership in CARICOM;
- (ii) the situation in Haiti; and
- (iii) ongoing Cuban medical support to Trinidad and Tobago and the wider region?

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darryl Allahar):

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, and this is on behalf of the Minister, my colleague. As a former Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs with specific insight into how such matters are considered by the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCO), it is reasonable to expect that the Senator would appreciate the need for discretion that is required, especially with matters discussed in caucus or at a retreat.

It should therefore be understood, Mr. President, that views on some issues that are particularly sensitive remain within the confines of that meeting's setting. The application by the Dominican Republic for associate membership in Caricom, the situation in Haiti, and the ongoing Cuban medical support to Trinidad and Tobago and the wider region are all matters that remain under active consideration at the regional level. The publicly sourced documentation on these meetings are available on the Caricom Secretariat's website, which the Senator is familiar with.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Supplemental. Thank you, Mr. President. Is the Minister aware that Trinidad and Tobago has responsibility within COFCO to participate on the matter of the application by the Dominican Republic for associate membership in Caricom?

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: Mr. President, I repeat the answer I had given. It should be understood, Mr. President, that the views on some issues are particularly sensitive and remain within the confines of the meeting's setting.

The application by the Dominican Republic for associate membership in Caricom, the situation in Haiti and the ongoing Cuban medical support to Trinidad and Tobago and the wider region are all matters that remain under active consideration at the regional level.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Supplemental, Mr. President. Mr. President, is the Minister aware that Trinidad and Tobago did not intervene, in any form, on the matter of the application by the Dominican Republic for associate membership in Caricom, did not intervene in any form on the matter of the situation in Haiti and did not intervene in any form on the matter of the Cuban medical support during the meeting?

Mr. President: Those are three questions in one.

Sen. Dr. Browne: So I am just condensing it.

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: Mr. President, in answer what I would say is, yet again, it is reasonable to expect that Sen. Browne would appreciate the need for discretion that is required, especially with matters discussed in caucus or at a retreat.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Browne: Is the Minister aware that this COFCO meeting did not occur in caucus and was not a retreat? Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: I would say again, Mr. President, the Senator should understand that the views of Trinidad and Tobago in that sort of meeting, regardless of the label put on the meeting, those issues are particularly sensitive and remain within the confines of that meeting setting, however we describe them.

The application by the Dominican Republic for associate membership in Caricom, the situation in Haiti, and the ongoing Cuban medical support to Trinidad and Tobago and the wider region are all matters that remain under active consideration at the regional level.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION)

(FINANCIAL YEAR 2025) BILL, 2025

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [June 27, 2025]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, on the last occasion, Monday, June 30, 2025, there were four speakers, with Sen. Dr. Natalie Chaitan-Maharaj, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services being the last speaker. The debate on the Bill will now resume.

As you are aware, the list of the other speakers I read out the last period: Minister

of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development; and we also had Sen. Vishnu Dhanpaul; Sen. Teemal; the Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence; Sen. Janelle John-Bates; Sen. Brian Baig and, of course, we had four speakers yesterday, the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation; Sen. Daniel Rasheed; Sen. The Hon. Philip Alexander, Minister in the Ministry of Housing; and, of course, Sen. Dr. Natalie Chaitan-Maharaj, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services. The debate will now be resumed.

The Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Satyakama Maharaj): Mr. President, before I begin, I wish to sincerely congratulate you on your appointment as President of the Senate. I can think of no one more deserving of this honour.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister for the confidence placed in me by appointing me to serve in this capacity. I also extend warm regards to all my esteemed colleagues in the Senate on both sides of the House. It is both an honour and a profound responsibility to rise before you here today.

10.45 a.m.

As Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism, I view my role, and that of the Ministry, as central to the economic transformation of Trinidad and Tobago. This is not merely a matter of shaping policy, it is a results-driven mission aimed at delivering tangible benefits to our nation. From time immemorial, we have heard of the need to diversify our economy, yet it remains dangerously tethered on oil and gas.

At the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, our overarching

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

responsibility is the diversification of the economy beyond the energy sector. Our focus is on generating national revenue, earning and preserving foreign exchange, and attracting both local and foreign investment. We are committed to supporting and strengthening local businesses and institutions, creating meaningful and sustainable jobs, while advancing our technological capacity and skills development. We are also working to facilitate trade with greater efficiency and competitiveness, while elevating the quality of our goods, services and national reputation on a global stage, and perhaps, most importantly, setting a clear tone that Trinidad and Tobago is open for business.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: As management guru, Peter Drucker, once wisely noted, “A country’s wealth is not its resources, it is the confidence of its business people.”

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: This renewed focus in confidence forms the foundation of our strategy across all three pillars, trade, investment and tourism. That is the foundation on which we are now focused on building Trinidad and Tobago, a nation not only opened for business, but ready to compete, to innovate and to lead.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: This is more than a ministerial mandate, it is a national imperative, and I intend to pursue it with discipline, boldness and a spirit of genuine partnership with the private sector. But before we could chart the way forward, we must first confront the reality of what I and this Ministry have inherited.

We have assumed responsibility for a Ministry, and indeed an economy, that

has lacked a coherent vision, a focused strategy and executable plans to fulfil the critical role of trade, investment and tourism in national development. There is currently no integrated framework for growing national revenue, earning and saving foreign exchange or generating high-quality future-ready jobs. There is no clear pathway for developing skills, technologies and competitiveness needed to differentiate Trinidad and Tobago in the global market place. Instead of expanding non-energy foreign exchange earnings and investments, we have seen the opposite, a troubling pattern of disinvestment by foreign, local and even state institutions. I will return to this point shortly.

We face a business community that is frustrated and fatigued. They encounter barriers instead of bridges. Rather than fostering an ease of doing business, the environment has become one of difficulty, delay and distrust. Investors, both foreign and domestic, have been quietly walking away. Mr. President, we have heard from speaker to speaker, Minister to Minister about what our Ministers have found when they have assumed office. What we found at the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism is far worse than anything you have heard before. There was no leadership, no direction and zero evidence that anything whatsoever was being done to diversify the economy.

Mr. President, coming from the private sector—and I have been in business for over four decades—I was shocked to see the lethargy. In tourism, for instance, we were told that pre-COVID, we had 2,000 yachts visiting our shores. Today, we have 300. And when we asked, why, shoulders shrugged and we could get no answer. That is what we inherited. We have met with one potential investor who could make a giant step towards diversifying the economy, who reported to us that for three years, no one will meet with them. They have been trying to get a meeting, a simple meeting. This, Mr. President, is what we have been facing, but

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

rest assured, we would fix it.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: We have another investor who has been there for decades—I would not call the name—hiring hundreds of workers, paying taxes, earning foreign exchange, yet you put a policy in place where you increase the fees that these people were paying for decades by 10 times, rendering their business unsustainable.

We had to step in—the Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development, and myself had to step in because the Prime Minister in her wisdom, in her ultimate wisdom, established a triumvirate: Finance, planning and trade; the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, a cluster. We meet regularly and we work together hand in hand to diversify this economy and to take this economy out of the doldrums it has just found itself in.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: That is what we found. The fish rots from the head. Investors are not beating their doors to do business here. If we cannot create the right investment climate, they will take their business elsewhere. We actually have one of our local companies, so frustrated that they have opened two plants in another country, and that country welcomed them with opened arms. That is what we have inherited.

Mr. President, our country is in a cross-roads. All economic indicators are spiralling downward. That is the reality. I am not in here for theater or for graphics or branding. I am here to tell you what the reality is, we can either continue heading in that downward direction and becoming a nation of traders and a failed state, or we can change course and steer our country towards First World status.

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: You see, Mr. President, we are not a developing country, I have been to developing countries, we are a middle income country, but we are heading that way, and we could be heading that way. Right? In five years' time, Mr. President, I envision that people will have to get visas to come here. That is our plan.

For us, even more concerning, Mr. President, is the fragmentation of the private sector, siloed, splintered and lacking unified representation. Their collective potential has been diminished, and neither the previous administration nor parts in the private sector, it seems, has recognized the economic cost of this division. In many cases, businesses and investors are not seen as partners in nation building, but are treated as burdens, or worse, as pariahs. This is not just inefficient, it is unacceptable, and it is precisely what this administration intends to change.

Let me now return to the issue of this investment, which I referenced earlier, because this is not theoretical, it is real and the consequences are already being felt across our economy. Let us consider a few examples, I have more: Lever Brothers, a long-standing foreign direct investor and manufacturer was neglected for years. Nobody worked with them. Rather than being supported and engaged, they were ignored to the point they shut down the manufacturing operations entirely, and they are not alone. Do you know what it takes to get a foreign investor? A foreign investor is gold and you have to treat them as such. ArcelorMittal, one of the largest non-energy manufacturing exporters in Trinidad and Tobago, and a major foreign exchange earner was driven out of this country, not by market forces, but government indifference.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: The previous administration outright refused to meet with them to address their concerns. As a result, we lost hundreds of jobs, millions in annual foreign exchange earnings and one of the most significant contributors to our non-energy economy. Let us be clear, this was not just an economic loss, it was a self-inflicted wound.

And let me turn to Petrotrin, because I am from south, and I have seen it first hand, Mr. President, I have seen the pain and the agony and what that closure has caused. So, I am talking from my heart here. What happened here is nothing short of a national disaster. The economic and social devastation across the southern belt is well known: Jobs lost, foreign exchange lost, national revenue lost, productive national assets now lie idle, and all this based on what we now understand to be a misleading narrative.

You see, I am 45 years in business, I can read a balance sheet, I can read a P&L, I can read a cash flow. So, when I looked at it, I saw something, and I and consulted with other people because I believe seeking professional help is always important.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: If they had sought international professional help with that CLICO matter, we would not have been in this mess today. The Government—that is another one that is going to come up at a different time. The Government of the day told the country that Petrotrin was hemorrhaging losses, but I have reviewed the 2018 audited accounts, and here is what it showed. I am just rounding it off. In 2017, Petrotrin generated \$2.5 billion in net cash from operating activities, of which \$500 million was used for investment, and \$1.8 billion for financing. That left a cash surplus.

In 2018, the year the decision was made to shut it down, Petrotrin was still

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

generating \$2 billion in positive cash flows. Approximately, \$600 million was reinvested and \$1.7 billion was used to meet financial aggregations. There was no imminent insolvency, Mr. President. The country was still generating foreign exchange and meeting its debts. Despite this, the decision was made against the advice of consultants and without any restructuring plan to shut down a critical national enterprise. The result, a staggering economic blow and the destruction of one of our most strategic national assets. Let me be clear, the story that was told to the population was not one of financial necessity, it was one of political expediency. A fraud, in the pure economic sense, was committed on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are still paying the price today.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: Worse yet, this is not an isolated pattern. We have inherited over \$100 billion—way about \$100 billion in distressed and abandoned national assets, stranded assets from Petrotrin and Caroni lands, the Couva children's hospital, the Tamana Intech Park, UWI Debe campus, the National Oncology Centre, Magdalena Grand and dozens of unfinished, forsaken HDC developments across the country.

Each of these represents not just lost money, but lost opportunity, lost confidence, and lost time. These failures are not abstract. They have eroded our industrial base, undermined investor trust, and crippled our ability to compete. This is a legacy we are here to reverse, but rest assured, we will fix it.

11.00 a.m.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: See, when we came into office, Mr. President, in the first week, we did not come in and say we are going to wing it for a year, and go on an on-the-job training for a year or two years. We came in on Monday, and on

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Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

Friday, we held a one-day strategy session.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: We determined, in the first session, in the morning session, where we are, how this integrates with everybody else in this society. And in the second session, we started developing an implementation plan for the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism. We, from the inception, never had any intention of winging it, we came in there to hit the ground running.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: When we came into office, maybe it is because I have been a member of all these business organisations for four-and-a-half decades. I am well-known in the business community. I was the entrepreneur of the year. They have given me every business award, so I would not go into that. But they know me, so they are all now setting up meetings, and I have been bombarded, and I have counted about 50 business organisations, and also embassies, who want to meet.

And I have always admired one organisation. I believe in national unity, and I always admired one organisation in this country that represents religious unity, the IRO. So, I have been, I am spearheading a strategy to bring in all these organisations, and I intend to call it “the private sector organisation of Trinidad and Tobago.” Where they all come in for business unity, so they can approach the Ministry with one voice. That is going to be the most transformational development in the history of business in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: You know, we have clear plans for trade, export, foreign exchange earnings, foreign exchange savings, and the expansion of the manufacturing sector. That is where I came from. We have stranded assets in this

country, hundreds of billions of dollars in stranded assets that could be repurposed.

Tourism is another important pillar that has been ignored. Look at Tobago. It is easier to get a flight to Miami than to Tobago. But when people stay here, they spend their money here, they build the economy here. So we have to put things in place to fix that. Mr. President, when you look at it, we have so many marketable things in this country that could attract people to come here. We have the highest density of leatherback turtle nesting in the world, you know. Four times more than the second one. A visitor can come. I went to Alaska to see whales, we can imagine the attraction of that. People come to see leatherback turtles nesting. They can see 18 nestings in one night. You go to other parts of the world, they cannot see one sometimes. We have all those things.

But let me tell you, after oil and gas, Mr. President, the next biggest thing we have in this country is Trinidad Carnival. And I have met, been meeting with a multinational agency. Because you know, in Carnival, all the hotels are booked up next year already. Flights start to book up already. If we can create that same environment, that same opportunity all year round, oil and gas will be secondary to this economy.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Alexander: “Tell dem nah man.”

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: And I cannot reveal it, I cannot reveal it as yet, it is still in the formative stages. But we have a project that is going to be as transformational as the development of Point Lisas Industrial Estate when I introduce that. We are going to transform this economy beyond oil and gas, with tourism, investment and trade.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Alexander: Overdue.

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: So we also want to do a cultural reset in this country. We are transforming the internal mindset within the Ministry and across the wider public sector. Business and investments are not burdens; they are the engines of prosperity. And we are sending a clear signal, Trinidad and Tobago is open for business, serious business.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: And I just saw it announced today, and the Minister of Planning just reminded me, we now have two new flights to Tobago to boost local tourism.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: So, Mr President, we are not only focused on short-term, we have a target. You know what gets measured, gets done. So we set a target of investment we want to achieve in two years and in five years. It is ambitious. But you know, when you set targets, you get—you know the Ministry has really good people that never had any guidance and leadership that they can look up to. They are good, good, good. I was shocked how good these people are, right? And we set targets for them and we said we want so much US investment in two years and they are starting to add, right? And they are welcoming people. How much investment that is, right? And they are focused on that. So we are open for business. We are. It is serious business. But we also have a long-term transformational plan on the way. Let us never forget Trinidad and Tobago is the greatest country on earth.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: This is a First World country in waiting.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: With bold leadership, strategic clarity and unified

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj (cont'd)

national action, we will secure her economic future, not only for today, but for generations to come.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. S. Maharaj: Mr. President, hon. Senators, this is a time for bold steps, not business as usual. The work ahead will not be easy, but it is necessary. We owe it to our people, our entrepreneurs, our youth and our future. At the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, we intend to move forward together with urgency, with unity, and with unshakable confidence in the greatness of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, on behalf of the Senate, may I congratulate the hon. Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism on his maiden contribution.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman.

Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman: Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Swaratsingh: “Yuh see yuh get ah new Tobago flight, eh”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Just came back on the new Tobago flight. [*Laughter*] Thank you, Sen. Dr. Swaratsingh. And Mr. President, thank you for inviting me to join the debate at this time, and I am very confident that by the time we come back here in September, you will be pronouncing my name fluently.

Alright. So, before I commence, I want to say this. I want to place this on the record, that the Government, in carrying out its responsibility, it definitely has to allocate and appropriate whichever finances it sees fit to deal with whatever policies, whatever endeavours that it intends to undertake. Once, of course, it

adheres to principles of accountability and transparency, and once it does so responsibly. Previous governments would have come here and done the same exercises, including this Government. And now they seek to do this. Sen. John-Bates would have pointed this out, I think, at last week's Sitting, that this exercise is not a novel one. It happens year after year, after year. So there are two things I need to correct with that being said, Mr. President. One is this notion that is largely unfounded, that the previous Government somehow under-budgeted. We go with the ebbs and flows. We go with external factors. We deal with internal factors. And indeed, every government comes back right here to do this task, mid-term appropriations.

The other misconception that I need to clear up and place on the record is this. And actually, I need to refute rather firmly that the previous PNM-led administration did nothing for the country and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And you would hear me say from time to time that we have a responsibility. I will keep saying it. It will become my mantra. We have a responsibility to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and part of that responsibility means that we need to be honest and we need to be truthful in how we represent things.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Now, let me just go a bit into some of the things that the previous Government would have done. And I say this without hesitation. Let us look at some of the fiscal and social measures. The previous Government, previously PNM-led administration, would have increased personal allowances to \$90,000 annually. This means that for the average person earning \$7,500 or less a month, they did not have to pay income tax.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Now, for those with big fancy salaries, that might mean nothing but for the average person working in a Ministry, or working even in a THA division, I can tell you that that was a huge relief.

Let us go further. Minimum wage. This Government likes to talk about the working class and therefore, the workers. Let me tell you what we did. We increased the minimum wage three times.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Currently, the public sector minimum wage stands at \$22.50 an hour. Note that when you people left office in 2015, the minimum wage was \$15 an hour. What that represents is a 50 per cent increase in just a period of 10 years.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Talk about improving our quality of living. That was decreased to 12.5 per cent on all purchases. For homeowners, who it is their first-time getting a home, young families now trying to raise children, now trying to get a home, no stamp duty for first-time owners. Nice little exemption once your property is valued at \$1.5 million or under.

Let us talk about entrepreneurs. Sen. Maharaj, you would have gone through, you know, the importance of the business community, and I commend that. That is something I feel very strongly about. So let us talk a little bit about our entrepreneurs, \$20,000 grant for young entrepreneurs.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: And let us go further with that, \$300 million was allocated to FCB to provide low-interest loans to small and medium businesses. Loans, 100 per cent guaranteed by the Government, the then PNM-led Government.

We have the Housing and Village Improvement Programme, where you provide your land and labour. We know so many people, their parents might say, you know, “ah have ah piece of land there, you could build.” That is something we do a lot in Tobago, at least. And the Government was able to help them build homes at a low cost.

Tax exemptions from January 1st, 2025, gym equipment, no VAT, no import duties.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: We are encouraging people to be fit, to be healthy across the islands. Tax exemptions on hybrid batteries, no VAT, no import duties.

Let us take a look at even the infrastructural projects. The new Ministry of Health building, the San Fernando Waterfront Project. NAPA was repaired for \$20 million. I am not sure if you recall, but this Government would have previously proposed that NAPA be repaired at \$100 million. Talk about cost savings.

11.15 a.m.

The President House, \$89 million spent to repair as opposed to what was proposed by the UNC; \$169 million seems like wanton wastage. Let us talk about community swimming pools. Let us talk about the Brian Lara Stadium. And of course, this is the one I wanted to actually get to, this beautiful, beautiful building that we now sit in, renovation of the Red House.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: None of us can debate. None of us can oppose the excellent job that has been done by the previous PNM-led administration.

Sen. Roberts: Watch the [*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: You have a Standing Order you want to raise Sen. Roberts?

Sen. Roberts: *[Interruption]*

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: “It must be needed a little moisture.” That is alright. Alright. Yesterday we had a Motion regarding housing; 6,000 houses were built, all done by the previous—

Hon. Senators: *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman:—PNM-led administration. And I mean, I could go on and on and on. I have a long, long list here, but—

Sen. Roberts: Go on, go on.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: No, I will pick and choose, especially ones that I particularly care about. Let us talk about the four boats between Tobago and Trinidad—

Hon. Senators: *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman:—and the one cargo ship. And here is why I want to talk about that, because there was a time when we felt a lot of pain in Tobago. Getting down to Trinidad was very difficult. And what did the PNM-led administration do? Four boats, nice and swanky.

Hon. Senators: *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: AC, top of the line boats, allowing Tobagonians to be able to hop on the boat with their vehicles early in the morning come down here, right to Port of Spain, do business in Trinidad, and then head right back up the road 4.00 p.m. to Tobago. I welcome any sort of initiative wherever it comes from, including the additional flights from CAL wherever it comes from, that improves the lives of Tobagonians and allows us to feel more integrated.

Hon. Senators: *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: So there is nothing with that knowledge in that the PNM then led administration—no you could pound the table, Sen. Roberts [*Laughter*—would have done a great thing. Alright. Let us talk about the Curepe interchange. Oh, yes, that was a big one as well.

Sen. Dhanpaul: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Yeah, completed at a cost of \$221 million; the UNC plan was to build it for \$440 million.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Wanton wastage, as opposed to conservative and cost savings. Alright?

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: What was that? Alright. Yes, alright. You had your turn to talk. I did not hear any kind of real substance coming from your side, alright.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: And the point is this, Mr. President, we cannot stand here and mislead the people of Trinidad and Tobago into thinking that over the past 10 years, the PNM-led administration did nothing. Again, let me go back to Tobago, because that is my passion point. The Tobago hospital—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: When we go to Tobago, in our hospital, we receive top-of-the-line treatment. We have a state-of-the-art facility on the hill, excellent views.

Sen. Roberts: Thank you.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Yeah, no, no, no, no, no, no. That was us. We “taking” it over there, right. The new cancer centre in South Trinidad, the old

Augustus Long Hospital building. And we could go on and on, but I just need to put on the record that the PNM-led administration for the 10 years we sat in power, we showed up, we showed out, and we did exceedingly well.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Now here is the thing, the realities, right, and I like to have sober discussions. The reality is this, no one government can have everything done and can get everything done in any given time. Of course, whatever your plans are, whatever your policies are, they have to adjust to the changes in the global economic climate. So what this Government now describes as having done nothing is really and truly what we call fiscal conservatism. What we did is that we acted fiscally responsible to ensure that we can navigate, on behalf of this entire country, including UNC and UNC supporters, that we can navigate and insulate the economy from external economic shocks.

Now, Mr. President, on Friday, Sen. Dhanpaul would have led us through the finance mechanics of the previous Government's fiscal policy. So I would not get into that. I just want to get a little bit into the theory and the idea behind the last administration's fiscal conservatism. What it did is, it allowed for economic stability, especially in a very volatile period of time. We had several things happening. We had the oil and gas sector globally going through a depression. We saw so many external economic shocks the world had to grapple with COVID. And while you might want to gloss over the yeoman service that we saw coming out from the PNM-led Government in navigating COVID, you might want to gloss over it, but we have to admit that it was handled, and it was handled very well—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: More so it was handled better than many, many larger economies and many more developed countries. We were able to navigate it and we were able to handle it.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: You have a Standing Order?

Mr. President: I cannot hear. I am having difficulty in hearing the contribution. So could I ask Members to speak in hushed tones so everyone can hear the hon. Senator from Tobago. Continue please.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Thank you, Mr. President. And maybe take some notes while you guys are at it. Now I need to encourage the Government in making its plans and in rolling out its policies. I want you to think about responsibility. I want you to think about fiscal conservatism. We had several students who came yesterday and they sat in on the first part of our Sitting. And, we need to be cautious of the kind of excessive debt that we might be forcing upon them and making them inherit when we go too crazy with the things that we are doing. And, if history is really supposed to repeat itself, and this Government really goes back into its old ways and embarks on some sort of reckless spending spree, we have to remember it is those children who were there yesterday, our own children, our grandchildren for those who might be a little bit older, they are the ones who are going to carry the burden of repayment.

Imagine, I think it was Sen. Roberts yesterday who spoke about one Ministry having three Ministers, and all I thought about is, oh my goodness. Imagine burdening an entire population with the salaries of three Ministers in one Ministry.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Now, my belief is that the reason why this Government cannot endorse the PNM style of fiscal conservatism is because, what it does, what that policy does, what that theory does, is that it requires political discipline. It requires the efficient use of public funds and it is difficult for my friends on the other side to endorse any policy position which involves strict scrutiny of public spending, efficient use of taxpayers' moneys and the restriction of politically motivated spending.

And, the thing is this, eh, this Government wants to sit here and mislead people into thinking that the past Government crashed the economy when that is far from the truth. And let me put this on record, the past Government implemented a fiscal policy that allowed us to navigate internal and external disruptions that would have otherwise toppled this country had we had a less responsible government at the helm. And admittedly, these decisions were not always easy and they were not always popular but that is the nature of governance and at all times, the collective interest has to prevail over political popularity.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: And, as I mentioned, the words "collective interest". Let me also add this, the past Government's management of our economy draws a very stark contrast to what the kind of madness and the chaos and the mayhem that we are already seeing now. We are already two months in office and we are already seeing that persons are being victimized, on the whims of one person who has no business making the kind of decisions that they are making. And it hurts me, it really bothers me when I hear—and I started off in union work as well. So it really hurts me when I hear this Government touting around and giving false notions about representing workers and about being for the workers. It really

bothers me when that is just being touted around for the sake of expediency, for the sake of political gain. It is just highly hypocritical. Let me put it that way.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: It is right here we were all sitting last Friday debating, I think it was the Revenue Authority Bill when, without warning, we received news, all of us checked our phone at the same time, only to hear of 10,000 workers, 10,000 families just blatantly placed on the breadline. No warning, no planning, no economic impact assessment, just some—the usual excuse. “PNM hire the contractors.” And you telling me, “we sitting” in this esteemed House, and “we saying” that in order to spite a handful of alleged PNM contractors, this Government was willing to strip 10,000 vulnerable workers of their employment, deprive 10,000 families of food on their table, spike the crime rate, and of course, most relevant to today’s debate, shock an already delicate economy by destroying disposable income of 10,000 families?

Now understand the link here. You took away the income of these people; understand the impact that that has on the economy. This is income as small as it might have been. This is income—

Sen. Dhanpaul: Multiply, multiply.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman:—correct. You have to apply the multiplying effect. This is income that would have otherwise been spent in the communities, would have otherwise been spent right here in Port of Spain, in people’s village stores in your shops, and in the blink of an eye, these people, their salaries are gone. And then, the thing is this, we have the table-banging crew that has just been quieted down by Mr. President. We have them down there, and last week I heard them, and actually last night, I heard them bawling: “Shame, shame, shame.” I say this, and it gives me no pleasure to do this but—

Sen. Dhanpaul: Do it.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman:—when I assess this Government’s performance and this Government’s treatment of workers to date, I have to say: Shame, shame.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: And you know, I noted that every speaker on the Government side would have mentioned Tobago, just sprinkling the word “Tobago” as if it is, you know, some nice sort of token that makes the debate sound sweet. And of course, every time I hear the word “Tobago”, my ears perk up a little bit. So, since we all love Tobago so much. Let us have a look at the Supplemental Appropriations Bill, 2025, right. And before we look at the Bill, let me just echo the statement of the Chief Secretary. We are political opposites, the Chief Secretary and I, but when we speak of Tobago, we speak with one voice. I can guarantee you that. And he would have described Tobago’s supplementary allocation as woefully inadequate. And you know, when the Bill was just circulated, I looked at the Bill, and I looked at Head 15 labeled Tobago House of Assembly and personally, I felt sick. Tobago was given \$32 million in supplemental funding—1 per cent of the national mid-year spending.

So, for every single dollar spent in Trinidad on all kinds of things, and from the sounds of it, productive things, I am not taking that away, but for every single dollar that has been spent in Trinidad, Tobago gets one cent. And let me place on the record exactly what this \$32 million was allocated for:

“To meet expenditure in accordance with the 120th Report of the Salaries Review Commission...supported by the Minister of Finance Circular No. 11 of 2024 of 23/12/24 for remuneration to holders of Public Officers within the purview of the Salaries Review Commission.”

So in other words, Tobago has gotten \$0.00 in additional funding from this Government, who is sprinkling around the name Tobago and saying how much they love Tobago. The money that we have gotten in Tobago, the \$32 million that has been allocated for mid-year payments, that is strictly for back pay and for the increased salaries of politicians and, of course, judicial officers and so on, and that was strictly because the Government was mandated to do so.

Mind you, under various Heads in this same Bill, Heads 22, 23, 25 monies were allocated to pay various arrears via various Ministries in Trinidad. And my point is not that these arrears should not be paid. I fully endorse it. I listened to the contributions of several Senators who walked us through and Ministers who walked us through what the money will be used for and the arrears that need to be paid. So my challenge is not with the payment of arrears, people need to get their money. My challenge, however, is we are talking about Tobago but really and truly, where is the love for Tobago?

11.30 a.m.

And I have a letter here—since I made my maiden contribution last week, people have started sending things to me, messages, Facebook, you know, the norm. Three persons would have sent me the same letter and everybody is saying, “Well, Senator, wa yuh could do?”

Mr. President, here is what I would do. I cannot stand here and I cannot not read this letter on behalf of the people Tobago, and you know, three people sent the letter, but dozens others received the same letter. The letter is dated the 9th of June, 2025, and it comes from the Tobago Festivals Commission Limited, and it says:

“Dear Sir/Madam,”

So, they sent a generic letter. That is to tell the amount of vendors in Tobago that got this one letter.

“Re: Acknowledgement of Outstanding Payments.

On behalf of the Tobago Festivals Commission Limited, we are writing to formally acknowledge outstanding payments due to your company. We wish to sincerely apologize for the delay in payments expected and any inconvenience this has caused. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances we are currently unable to fulfil our commitments to you at this present moment.

Please be assured that we are actively working to resolve this issue. Our team is currently reviewing and actively addressing our outstanding payments and we are committed to keeping you informed throughout this process until resolution. We definitely understand the unease this may cause and we deeply regret any impact this delay may have on your operations or planning.

Over anything else, we deeply value the relationship we have built with your company and remain committed to rebuilding and maintaining the trust and professionalism that defines our partnership. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact our office at...”

—and then they placed the e-mail address and telephone number for the office.

Now, these people have families to feed. They have workers to pay. They have operational overheads. They have businesses to run. And Tobagonian business is a very organically grown, very locally grown. They are small businesses and they depend on, you know, little jobs around the THA. We are a small economy, a small island, so a lot of what we get done in Tobago comes from the THA. You know, and to think that the Government keeps mentioning Tobago, Tobago, and in all the appropriations to pay arrears in Trinidad, no consideration has been given to Tobago contractors—and this is not me fighting the Government.

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When UNC wins, everybody is supposed to win. And while we might be political opposites, I want to see Tobagonians win.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: So this is just me placing on the record and drawing to your attention something that was omitted in this Appropriations Bill and something that I hope will be addressed, and that will be addressed fiercely. And let me pre-empt any rebuttal about the CAF loan, which was approved by the previous Government—and you know, that is earmarked for something specific. That just does not suffice.

So, in all that we are saying and all that we are doing, I am imploring you, I am making a concerted call, on behalf of the people of Tobago, if this Government is saying, “When UNC wins, everybody wins,” it means that the sister isle cannot be left out. We are happy to see flights added. The PNM would have started with the sea bridge and now I am happy to see that, temporarily, the air bridge is getting additional attention. But it cannot end there. When Trinidadians come to Tobago, there has to be something to come to. And if we are being stifled on the island, then you are going to come there and it is just the beach, and it is just the villa, and nothing else there for any of us to enjoy. So you cannot be building one economy and stifling the other. All right?

So, let me close, Mr. President, by just reiterating certain things. The Government has every right to seek its supplemental appropriation. It does not mean that the previous Government underbudgeted. It means that either the Government’s priority at this time has shifted, or it means that the budget and the needs of the country has changed, as time changes, as things change, as we navigate internal and external occurrences in the economy.

Also, I need to reiterate that the previous PNM-led Government would have showed up, showed out and would have performed exceedingly well. And let me just mention this, I need to commend and acknowledge the very young Sen. Rasheed. I listened to his contribution last night and it was excellent, and you know, he made mention of his laptop that was given to him by the UNC and I thought to myself, “Hmm, this is de way de thing should work. A UNC laptop with a PNM Government, and we have an excellent product of the kind of collaboration.”

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Yes, a PNM education.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: We set up free education system—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Yeah. He set up the—yeah exactly, and he would have been schooled while the—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: We set up the Service Commissions. We set up the—
[*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Yeah. And he would have been schooled while the PNM would have been in government, and we see the excellence happening.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Surely, he had GATE tertiary education.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: And he had GATE funding—of course, of course. And we must acknowledge it. When there is a good thing, we need to acknowledge it. A good thing does not become a bad thing—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman:—just because—it is okay. It is okay. You all could “big up”—

Sen. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Sen. Charles, I am sure you will get your chance to talk, right?

Sen. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Yeah, good. Right. A good thing does not become a bad thing, just because the PNM did it.

So, before I close, I caution you, observe fiscal responsibility. Be measured. Be conservative in your policies. Be truthful. Be transparent with the things that you do and the plans that you have. Do not use mechanics, such as Tobago or workers in order to produce sound bites or little media headings. Do what you say and say what you mean. All right? And ensure that whatever your policies, it ensures—just like what the PNM did—long-term stability and long-term economic health for our country. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Thank you. The hon. Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training (Sen. The Hon. Prof. Prakash Persad): Thank you, Mr. President. I rise to speak on the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill, 2025. Firstly, let me express my appreciation and thanks to the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. Prakash Persad:—for the opportunity to serve as a Senator, as a Minister and particularly, in the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, where I spent 45 years, Mr. President, as a researcher, as a teacher, as an

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

administrator and doing industrial outreach. So, I do believe I know a bit about tertiary education and its role in the country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. Prakash Persad: Congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your elevation to the President of the Senate. Congratulations to my fellow Senators—and I will use your geographic directional method from north to south, so my fellow Senators on the Government Bench, the Opposition Senators and the Independent Senators.

For the record, Mr. President, this would not be my first contribution in this Senate in this Thirteenth Parliament. It is the first contribution in the Thirteenth Parliament, but my maiden speech in the Senate was in the Third Parliament, where I served as the Leader in Opposition. So, please do not calculate my age.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: Nevertheless, Mr. President, I will graciously accept your felicitations after I am finished speaking.

Mr. President, there is a shortfall of some \$180 million in the MTEST presently to deal with two specific matters. The first is the payment of arrears and salaries and allowances due to academic seniors and administrative and professional staff of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, for the period the 1st of January, 2014 to 31st of July, 2020. This came about because of the collective agreement between UWI and the bargaining unit. This amounts to \$178,500,000. The other one is for the payment of the arrears and salaries due to estate officers who guard the—you know, they keep the students and staff safe.

Now, Mr. President, I want to turn my attention now to the finances and the state of the tertiary education sector in this country. Whilst we talk about diversification and economic progress, et cetera, the tertiary education sector plays

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

a critical role, an essential role. It is an established fact that these institutions not only play an established role, in terms of servicing the manpower requirements, but also in the diversification of the economy, which my colleagues spoke about.

Mr. President, Trinidad and Tobago experiences oil boom and bust periods or cycles due to fluctuating oil and gas prices, and when we are in the boom period, apparently, diversification efforts seem to just go by the wayside. That is why now we are at this critical point. If we do not do something that is sustainable now, do something that would take us forward, then I think we would be in trouble as we go later on. It is something that must be done. And it just cannot be words. It must be backed up by actions.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: Now, Mr. President, we have heard from my distinguished colleagues on this side about the profligate spending that occurred under the last administration, and it was, Mr. President. This has led the country down to path, that if not urgently arrested and reversed, will lead us to a really difficult economic state.

Now, I know countries cannot become bankrupt, but if a country—if it is a law to declare a country bankrupt, then maybe it might work here. But you know, Mr. President, we have to ask ourselves, when we look at the state of the country now, the state of the institutions—as I said, I have spent 45 years at UWI and at UTT. I understand the state of the institutions. So if this was not profligate spending, leading us to this sort of almost bankruptcy—and I indicate, again, that no country could be bankrupt—then one is motivated to ask—but the amount of money expended every year, over the past 10 years, and when you look at the degree of suffering and despair and poverty, the state of infrastructure, then we

have to ask, if you are not bankrupt to arrive at this state, was the leadership bankrupt?

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: Was it intellectually bankrupt, that they could not understand how to deal with these issues and make the country better? Mr. President, I would suggest, humbly, that the country should never face this sort situation again. We should not.

Now, Mr. President, innovation entrepreneurship can provide a path forward, as we all know, but for that to happen, the foundations must be put there. In this regard, there must be a science and technology policy or something akin to it, for it is a known fact that science and technology is a driver of innovation and economic progress. That is known worldwide. And only when we do that, then entrepreneurship can arise and we get new products, new processes, new small industries, new jobs, et cetera.

So, Mr. President, to give an example, having stated that science and technology forms the basis—a critical element to move the country forward, let us look at some facts. Mr. President, I was the Chairman of the Board of NIHERST, and I left in 2015, with the change of government. That Board there, we had very competent, qualified individuals. We were doing a lot of stuff in science and technology, in STEM: Science, technology, mathematics and engineering, or as people prefer now, STEAM: Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, to join it together, because we want to include creativity in it and creative products.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. President, we paid money, and a lot of money for the design of a science centre next to the children's hospital in Couva, where is it today? Where is it

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

today? If we care about moving the country forward, should we not have done something about that? Mr. President, as some of my colleagues in the other place said, “There is geographic discrimination in the directional way from north to south for a government that says that it cares about the country, it cares about people.” When Ministers take the oath, “I am going to do so fairly without discrimination at all”, then how can we explain that? Look at the state of the Debe campus, Mr. President, look at that. So then, you know, we have to ask a variety of questions, that if there is no science and technology policy, if NIHERST that plays a critical role in science and technology popularization and education—and, Mr. President, it is established again, well established that science popularization is what drives students to science and technology that drives entrepreneurship.

So we could talk about entrepreneurship all we want, if we want to open parlours and sell by the road, then that is entrepreneurship also, but if you want to create products, optimize the industries we have and really make a change, sustainable change, then science and technology plays a critical role.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: So we have to ask, Mr. President, when I left NIHERST, we were in deep discussions to, you know, solidify relationships with NASA, where we send students to NASA. They come back and they worked in the premiere space agency in the world. They come back and feel happy about it and spread the word. This is why we encourage students to do science and technology.

IEEE, that was the world’s largest professional organization, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, gave us a lot of equipment. We spoke to people about space technology at satellite space to look at Trinidad in terms of a variety of things, all gone. NIHERST has been truncated, marginalized. Mr.

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Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

President, it really is sad. Where is NIHERST today? Even the existing science centre in Maloney is closed. Where is it? So how can we talk about innovation and these sort of things when, you know, we close it down.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: Mr. President, we have to understand that we just cannot start at the top. We do not fly first, we learn to crawl, walk, run, and then maybe we can fly. So when we want to take the country forward with science and technology, with innovation, entrepreneurship, we have to set the foundations for it.

Now, Mr. President, you know, interestingly, as I did say, I spent—I am from some time ago. When I did my degree in Electrical Engineering at UWI, maybe before many people here were born, I used a slide rule. Maybe the younger people would say, “What is a slide rule? Is it a ruler sliding?” [*Laughter*] Yeah. Then calculators came in, Mr. President. Then after calculators, we had mainframe computers with dumb terminals.

Sen. Alexander: That is back in time.

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: Yeah. What I am saying, so you grow? Right? You see, sometimes we talk about things, we want to follow the west, developed west, without laying the foundations for it. We have to keep on doing that.

Right now we have to digitally skill. We talk about AI, AGI, Generative AI, whatever you want, but that is digital skilling. Have we skilled the students from small, young? This is why the hon. Prime Minister is a visionary—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad:—it is laptops from small. If you are going to have AI and use it well, then people must be digitally skilled. This is what we do. So we have to change, Mr. President, as technology changes. Technology drives

the world now “eh”, everything is being, you know, being driven by technology. If we want to have a workforce, or you want to live in a world in which you can make a change, we have to have people, we must do the necessary stuff in that regard, Mr. President.

So, you know, we ask ourselves, “Why is it we are in this state?” To go back to NIHERST, Mr. President, when we were trying to get a draft science and technology policy, we had stakeholder consultation throughout the country, and, yes, in Tobago also, hon. Senator, and it is not glib, we meant it. One thing came out clearly was unanimous in all our discussions, that the science and technology policy should remain constant, irrespective of regime change. Mr. President, when you look at some of the spaceflights from the USA, 50 years it keeps on working, and they must be funded continuously. Science and technology policies, Mr. President, take a long time, and we have this malaise in this country, and it is a malaise that when one regime comes in, and particularly the Members opposite, they stop everything that is happening. Why else can you—how could you explain what happened to the science and technology?

Mr. President, we have to be aware of that. I talk to students all the time. Mr. President, this phone I have, it is an old Galaxy Note 10, not the newest one, but the power in this phone, Mr. President, is more than the computing power NASA had when they sent the first rocket to the moon. Would you believe that? We have this in our student’s pockets. Are we training them to make sure, you know, they can use what is available to them? The world has changed, Mr. President, and what we have now, the sort of opportunities we have now, is that we can make big changes. It is not like the long old days, people have access to everything now, all sorts of technologies. We have seen it, you know, the sort of access you have to go forward.

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

Now, what we need to do is to really empower our students, change our education system, and, like I said, it started with the wonderful idea of the Prime Minister to digitally skill from the young children, so it is no longer difficult for them. But in going forward, Mr. Chairman—Mr. President, I do not know why I keep on calling you, “Mr.Chairman”. You look distinguished like a chairman and a president. Mr. President, you know, I am what I call, fanatically moderate. I am moderate, but I am fanatically so, because most people think if you are moderate, you are easy going. No, no, no, I am moderate but fanatically so. I believe in this country, Mr. President, I have spent my life here. I took the decisions to stay here.

This might not going down well, Mr. President, with some, but I worked with both sides. We may be on the opposite sides, but we have to understand that this is one country, if it goes down, everybody goes down, everybody goes down. Everybody.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: So we may have differences of views, and that is good. That is good for democracy. You know, Mr. President, it reminds me of innovation, people talk about innovation, but to innovate you have to mash up; you have to think. You know, you cannot keep status quo. So sometimes the status quo is “hey, we are here, they are there”, and the distinguished Senators are over there in the Independent Benches. But there are times we must come together, we must agree to disagree, but we must all agree that we will go forward for the benefit of the country. That is what we need to do.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: Mr. Chairman—Mr. President, I do not know, forgive me for keep on saying, “Chairman”.

The Dalai Lama says:

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Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

Believe—“...in God but lock your car.”

What it means, we have to be pragmatic. We have to have faith in God. In this condition, we need to have faith that all of us here want the best for the country, all of us, but we must be pragmatic enough to recognize that all our agendas do not totally coincide, but there must be a core agenda that deals with the country itself going forward.

So, Mr. President, just in case there are any misconceptions, I am a foundation member of the UNC when it started. You are aware of that. Most people are aware. I served on the first UNC executive. People should be aware of that. I received a long service award from the UNC, so I am UNC, in and out, and what has attracted me to the UNC, Mr. President, is the idea of inclusivity.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: This is something I want to, you know, say to my distinguished colleagues opposite, we are not enemies, we are all Trinidadians. We all are Trinidadians and Tobagonians.

Sen. Roberts-Radgman: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: I was born in Trinidad but I belong to the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Roberts-Radgman: Right.

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: This is something, you know, Mr. President, I will like to see this sort of change where, yes, we disagree, but we must agree on things that will take the country forward.

There must be a change in the political culture, if you wish, otherwise, Mr. President, look at what is happening with our neighbour up north. When we have the polarization that way, then the country never goes forward. I reminds me of the old saying about the “crapaud in the well”, every 3feet he jumps up, he slides

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

down 2feet. We cannot be that way, Mr. President, we have to change. We have to go forward, and, you know, I think, as had been pointed out, whatever it is we are in a difficult state, and therefore, as the distinguished Senator from Tobago says to us, I want to ask you to accept your own advice and work with us also, work with us. That is what we need to do. Right?

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*] She could come across.

Hon. Senator: We have room, man, we have room. We have space. We have space.

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: No, no, you can work from there and elsewhere, as the Independent Senators do, we must work that way. We must have some common, you know, objectives, some common agendas. That is how we need to move forward.

So, Mr. President, there is no denying, we are in a difficult place, but there is a saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough gets going”, and we do have a leader in the hon. Prime Minister who is very tough, there can be no doubt about that, but, also, she has a milk of compassion in her heart, and that means, Mr. President, as we go forward, I think if we work together as a team here and we get support for some of the things we can do, then I think we are going to make Trinidad and Tobago a better place. Mr. President, a new dawn starts with the rising sun.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad: I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senator: Well done. Well done, Prof. Well done. Well done.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I want to take this opportunity to at least recognize and to welcome my colleague’s return to the Senate, and, as he said, it is not his maiden speech, but he has been here, and he was here, I recall, when I was here in

Sen. The Hon. Prof. P. Persad (cont'd)

1990. So I want to welcome you back to the Senate, Sen. The Hon. Prof. Prakash Persad.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: I now want to recognize the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

12.00 noon

The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Leroy Baptiste): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise today with a sense of duty and determination to contribute to this crucial debate on the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2025) Bill, 2025. Let me begin by expressing sincere appreciation to you and to all the hon. Senators for this platform to speak on matters critical to the lives of our citizens. I also extend heartfelt gratitude to the hon. Minister of Finance and his exceptional team for their diligence and strategic planning in ensuring Ministries can continue to meet the nation's needs. The mid-year review is not merely a fiscal checkpoint; it is a reaffirmation of our commitment to governance, equity and responsible administration.

Mr. President, before I just continue with the few brief notes that I have here to speak about the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, I just want to acknowledge that "we in ah good place." We are in an extremely good place, Mr. President. And by "we", I mean the United National Congress.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: I listened to that contribution by my colleague Sen. Roberts-Radgman, and it was clear to me that the United National Congress will be in office for five years, plus five years, plus five years again.

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Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste (cont'd)

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: What I have just listened to—I came to the realization that they have not yet figured out what they did wrong. They are actually in some kind of make-believe world that all things are fine, and that the population has misdirected themselves. All I know is I want them to keep on that platform—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—because this assures the UNC that “we in government for years to come.”

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

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Mr. President, I heard about a boost in minimum wage from \$15 to \$20; 50 cents a year, over 10 years. That is a boast.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Mr. President, I need to remind the population that the People’s National Movement has had stewardship of this country for 53 out of 69 years. “Aye, allyuh”, we only have 11 years, you know? UNC has only 11 years; 53. We are now talking about diversification of this economy. Where was all— with all these years that we have been fighting up with just an oil and gas economy, and they are now talking about tourism. And it is 53 years; I want it to be understood, not only were they in charge for 53 years, the People’s National Movement had 30 years of uninterrupted rule of this country from 1956—1986, uninterrupted, and they had two oil booms from 1972—’83, and 1999—2008; billions of dollars, again. They used to say that money is no problem in this country. Everybody wanted to come here, and we used to push out and say, “Boy, wah dem small-islanders only coming in we country for? All yuh cah remember dem days?” That is how it was.

Sen. Dr. Swaratsingh: The last 10 years, uninterrupted too.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: And then they had 10 years, again, uninterrupted. Let me tell you what I recall about the last 10 years. I recall people being locked out of the country during COVID.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: That is what I remember.

Sen. Satyakama: Trinidadians.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: If you want to know why people did not vote for the PNM—

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—they locked out people during COVID. That is what I remember.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: You know, what I reflect on from over the last 10 years? Over 200,000 persons lined up trying to get HDC homes.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: After them, a state of homelessness. Young people cannot afford a home. We have 35-year-olds, 40-year-olds, still living in their parent's home; after 10 years—

Sen. Dr. Swaratsingh: Fiscal conservatism.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—of what they call, “fiscal conservatism”. We have workers, no increases in salary from since 2013. We have, literally, the working poor. People cannot save, living from pay cheque to pay cheque. That is the reality of our country. When I think about the last 10 years, I think about crime and criminality going out of control.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: That is the picture. I mean, I am glad that they are

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste (cont'd)

ignoring all that, because it means that we have—

Sen. Dr. Swaratsingh: Have to fix it.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Have to fix it. I remember Petrotrin workers; 5,000 workers out of their jobs. TSTT workers; 2000 workers out of their jobs.

Sen. Baig: TDC.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: TDC; hundreds of workers out of their jobs in last 10 years. My God. What world are they living in?

The labour participation rate in this country, people are not even looking for jobs, it is falling because of the kind of salaries that we are paying people; pay cheque to pay cheque. People do not want those jobs, they are not interested, they are finding alternatives, and it is to our detriment. What world is the PNM living in, that they feel things were hunky-dory, and people just chose to vote them out? My God. Tobagonians rejected the PNM in the Assembly, and rejected the PNM in the Parliament.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: When they purported, “We talking for Tobagonians”—

Hon. Senator: Which Tobagonian?

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: “Which Tobagonian dey talking—What dey talking about being routed in de polls?” Who are they representing when they purport to be representing Tobagonians?

We need to talk about the absence of fire trucks. I listened with horror, that those who have been in charge of this country for decades—The Ministry of Homeland Security pointed out, that if there is a fire above two or three floors, that the fire trucks would just have to watch the building burn down. This is Trinidad and Tobago. That is our reality. That is not a good place for any of us. It is not a

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste (cont'd)

good place for our children who cannot express their adulthood and have to depend upon two-hour jaunts—let me leave it at that—because they cannot have homes to be adults in. That is not a good place for any of us.

Mr. President, my overall concern is that we are here because of the absence of vision on the other side.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: And without a vision, “ah people perish.” But, here, it is not about trying to pick piecemeal, we do a little this and we do a little that, it is that this side has a sustained, well-developed vision for this country, as you would have heard, Mr. President, and where we are going to take this country. That focuses on the diversification of the economy, so that once and for all, we have streams of income and the means to even fix and reverse some of these, as the Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism would have pointed, out the shutting down of Petrotrin, and as we hear now, premised upon falsehood. It was lies that were perpetrated against the population that led us to a point where we would have shut down things that were to all of our advantage if we had them today. We would have been in a much better place, particularly with what I have heard Sen. “Kama” Maharaj pointed out to us today.

So today, Mr. President, as the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, I have that responsibility to put a focus on dealing with workers and workers’ issues in this country. Why? Because workers represent the majority. When there are those who have the interest of the one, our interest here is consistent with the democratic principles that we are a government of the people, by the people and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Today’s discussion is not about abstract figures or

distant programmes, it is about the human impact of our policy decisions. It is about the thousands of young people seeking an opportunity, it is about families who deserve dignity in work, and it is about the institutions that must be empowered to deliver on their mandates.

Mr. President, this Bill is about continuity, about providing relevant Ministries with the funding necessary to effectively execute their work for the balance of the financial year. The funding sought is not speculative. It is grounded in active programmes, outgoing reforms, ongoing reforms and targeted interventions. Let us be clear, this Government has inherited long-standing systemic challenges stemming from years of underinvestment and inattention, but under the leadership of our Prime Minister the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, we are pursuing a transformative governance strategy, one that places people at the centre, embraces innovation and is rooted in service and justice.

The work of the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development is guided by both national and international commitments, particularly, our alignment with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, most notably, SDG8, that is, the Decent Work and Economic Growth goal. This goal speaks directly to our vision, a Trinidad and Tobago where all citizens benefit from development, where employment is meaningful and inclusive, and where entrepreneurial energy is catalyzed and not constrained. Our Ministry's work contributes to this national vision by advancing labour rights, strengthening institutional frameworks, supporting enterprise development and ensuring that our labour market meets the evolving needs of our economy. Let me pause to make—what I find was startling is the fact that after 10 years, their government never once attempted to bring any type of reform of the labour legislation in this country, to the detriment of workers. That, I want to assure, we will address. We will address.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: The first priority area in terms of this—priority area number one, Mr. President, and perhaps the most significant line Item in our request for supplementation in the allocation of funds to meet the shortfall in this budget is the one related to the On-the-Job Training programme . This is not a minor investment, it is an economic and social imperative.

12.15 p.m.

Each month, about \$30 to \$35 million is dedicated to the operations of this programme, which currently supports more than 5,500 trainees. This programme offers young people between the ages of 16 to 35 a structured two-year induction into the world of work. It enhances employability, improves productivity and most importantly, restores hope. Whether in public institutions, private enterprises or NGOs, these placements are bridges to economic independence. We are actively reviewing the administration of the programme to place greater emphasis on the quality of placement, not merely quantity. With support from the Labour Market Information Unit, this reform will better match training to market demand. Already, 1,500 training providers have formalized their commitment through memoranda of agreement. This is not expenditure, it is in investment in potential, in people and in the long-term prosperity of our country.

Beyond training, Mr. President, is the need to facilitate meaningful employment. Our revitalized national employment service and soon-to-be-launched NEON portal, National Employment Online Network, represents a digital transformation of public employment services. NEON will simplify the employment matchmaking process, improving efficiency and accessibility for job seekers and employers alike. It is a significant leap forward in modern public service delivery. In parallel, we continue to support the Commonwealth Caribbean

Seasonal Agriculture Worker Programme, known as the Farm Programme, which places local workers on Canadian farms. This exposes participants to technology, modern agricultural practices and high standards, all of which can be transferred to Trinidad and Tobago to enhance our own agricultural resilience. Importantly, we are exploring the inclusion of cannabis cultivation within this framework, pushing the boundaries of economic diversification, while ensuring regulated access and knowledge sharing.

Mr. President, employment is not solely about working for others, it is also working for oneself. With the return of the Micro and Small Enterprise Development portfolio to the Ministry, we are intensifying our efforts to empower small businesses. At the heart of this initiative is the development of an online e-business register, an innovation designed to simplify and expand access to formal registration, particularly for informal or previously underserved entrepreneurs. Formal registration opens the door to finance, mentorship, training and growth. Through NEDCO and in alignment with the Government's official policy framework, we are rolling out a comprehensive package of enterprise support: Work-centric finances or underserved demographics; skill development in entrepreneurship and financial literacy; digital empowerment through upgraded platforms and digital tools; targeted youth programmes, including a grant scheme and mentorship hubs.

We are especially proud of our focus on the Junior Cooperatives Entrepreneurship Programme, engaging students in 16 primary and 16 secondary schools. This initiative is cultivating a new generation of cooperative business leaders, embedded in the value of collaboration, inclusion and community sustainability.

Mr. President, decent work cannot exist without safe work, and let me

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste (cont'd)

underscore that because that was one of the—again, as we talk about safe work, I remember Paria and the sad state of affairs that we all had under this administration, the failure to take safety and more than that, not just safety, but the complete negligence in the treatment of workers in the world of work. It is not just Paria. Paria is the one that has become known to all. But we have had instances of people dying on the job, under this administration, that goes unreported, uninvestigated and no remedial action is taken, notwithstanding incidences of unsafe—people being forced to work in unsafe conditions in the world of work in this country. Comrades, one and all, this is one aspect that we have to get on top of. What they have failed to do, the United National Congress administration, under my Ministry—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste:—we will make sure it happens. Because decent work cannot exist without safe work. Following the International Labour Organization, 2022, recognition of occupational safety and health as a fundamental principle and right at work, we have strengthened the efforts to build a robust OSH culture. And let me be clear, the OSH Agency that we met that is—colleagues, I was asked to see if we could ask the OSH Agency to come and test the temperature to see whether the temperature in the Parliament is at the right and appropriate levels. The OSH Agency did not even have that capacity. They are so under-resourced; literally could do no proactive work when it comes to safety at work. That must change.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: Safety and healthy workers are productive workers.

This supplementation enables enforcement, guidance and outreach in service of national productivity and human dignity. Beyond individual programmes, Mr.

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste (cont'd)

President, we are executing a comprehensive labour transformation under the banner, “Workers Agenda”, a 20-point strategic plan. This agenda is the conscience of the Ministry. It is our blueprint for reform. Key areas include labour legislation reform. Again, completely neglected by the last administration. “Dey set up all kinda sub-committees, engaged in all kinda reports and then it is left on a shelf.” We will be engaging in reform of the labour legislation once and for all, and such like the Industrial Relations Act, the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, just to name two. Other areas under the name of the Workers Agenda are the freedom of association and collective bargaining, anchored in ILO Conventions 87 and 98.

We have also committed to the creation of a national living wage. So whereas there is a boast of a minimum wage that moved over 10 years, 50 cents a year, as one of the PNM’s boasted, we are working toward a living wage, that is to say, a wage where persons could afford to live comfortably. That is what the UNC’s agenda when it comes to wages in this country.

We are also looking to improve protection for vulnerable workers, including domestic workers. And yes, we are looking to the re-establishment of the National Tripartite Advisory Committee. We are also working with unions to improve access to affordable housing. We will be resolving outstanding wage negotiations and, of course, protect the cost of living allowance. Just as how they did it for the Prime Minister to ensure that his salary is renewed and reviewed every five years, consistent, to make sure it is in pace and keep pace with the cost of living, we are protecting the cost of living for the average worker.

Hon. Senator: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Baptiste: This is not rhetoric. It is a reform agenda rooted in fairness, international standards and participatory governance.

Mr. President, as I close, I remind the Senate that progress requires partnership. The mid-year review and this supplementary appropriation Bill present not just a budgetary adjustment but a moral commitment to the people we serve. Let us reaffirm that in this Republic, the Government is not merely administration, it is advocacy. It is compassionate in practice and in it is action in service of dignity and justice. Under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister and through the tireless work of our Ministries and partners, we will continue to lift our people. Let this Bill be one more step into that journey, a journey toward shared prosperity, equity and national renewal. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Is there anybody on the Opposition Bench who would like to speak?

Sen. Dr. Browne: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: No, I am asking the question. Is there anybody else on the Opposition Bench who would like to speak?

Sen. Dr. Browne: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: No. I am just asking for the third time, is there anyone on the Opposition Bench who would like to speak?

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: No, I am asking.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, thank you for the enquiry.

Mr. President: No, no, no.

Sen. Dr. Browne: We have an agreement, in collaboration with the Leader of Government Business, indicating that the Government will put in one more speaker and after lunch, we will—

Sen. Allahar: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. Browne: No?

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: But that was the agreement, and that is how the Benches operate.

Mr. President: So, is there such an agreement? May I ask—

Hon. Senator: Let them speak.

Sen. Allahar: Mr. President, I think he misheard. I said we would stop at 1.00 p.m. for lunch.

Sen. Roberts: “So, dey doh want to speak?”

Mr. President: All right. So I am asking again. Apparently, there is no agreement from what is being said. So, is there anybody on the Independent Bench? So nobody from the Independent Bench, nobody from the Opposition Bench who would like to speak, right? So, I will now call on the Leader of Government Business.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I did not expect to speak today, but I thought—again, because of coincidence, something happened and somebody sent me a copy of an email, and it just triggered in my mind that I should rise and speak as a preface to something that I might want to say a little later on in this place at another time.

Very quickly, it is a very narrow area. I know and I think we all understand that this supplementary appropriation for fiscal year 2025 is the provision of \$3.1 billion to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital expenditure to the end of the financial year, to the end September 30, 2025, in areas where insufficient or no allocation was provided.

12.30 p.m.

And quite a lot of the appropriation, the proposed appropriation, has to do with expenditure under Personnel Expenditure, Wages and Salaries, Cost of Living Allowances, Allowances for Monthly-Paid Workers, Contract Employment, Short-Term Employment, Salaries, Contributions to NIS; Remuneration to Board Members. You get the picture? Allowances to Monthly-Paid Officers; Pension Contributions; Travelling and Subsistence.

So a lot of the recurrent expenditure in areas where it was insufficiently allocated or allocation was provided, we now have to top up, as it were, to the end of September of this year. Mr. President, I think no one in this Chamber would deny that it is important, and the Government thinks so as well, that salaries for our public officers and officials be paid and be paid on time. And that is one of the reasons why we are topping up the account, as it were, to allocate money. But unfortunately, Mr. President, despite all of our best efforts sometimes commercial banks sometimes make it hard for ordinary people to do business and to access their money. Sorry?

Mr. President: No. Go ahead.

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: And this is why, Mr. President, we are at pains to work hard today because we want to get this Bill passed so that we can make adequate provision to pay our public officers up until September.

Mr. President, the PNM Government has for the last 10 years left the commercial banks alone to brutalize poor people, while enabling friends and family and financiers to access foreign exchange—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar:—and to navigate the banking system and the cream of our economic system with ease. We in this Chamber, Mr. President, and I think all

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar (cont'd)

of us and I will say that with the utmost fairness, we in this Chamber, we regularly advocate for the ordinary people on both sides. I will accept that because that is what we are here to do. And on this side of the Chamber, at least, Mr. President, the regular citizen, the regular man in the street, the man on the maxi taxi, we put them first.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: We put the regular citizens first, Mr. President. But sometimes, Mr. President, some things happen and happen to us, and some things hit home and we are left to feel the pain of the ordinary person and the inconvenience that they suffer because of this abject stupidity of commercial bankers and the preferential treatment they choose to give to big clients where they put the big boys first. So, Mr. President, I will disclose—this is a personal lamentation, Mr. President. And, you see, Mr. President, I must admit that I have not had an income for the past two months after leaving private practice. And, yes, I know I made a decision to sacrifice for national service and I will continue do so even if I do not get an income next month. And I accept that happily.

I was assured by the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister that my salary was electronically transferred to the bank because that is what they do when they pay wages and salaries when you fill out all these little forms. I think it is called the IHRIS system? I think that IHRIS system probably has glaucoma. Because for—

Hon. Senator: Cataract.

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar:—cataract probably, cataract. Yeah. But for the past few days I have been checking on my online banking and nothing has come, you know.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: And—you got paid? Well, you lucky. Yesterday I got a call while in this Chamber. I got a call from somebody so I ran outside—from the bank. The bank that puts you first, by the way, asking that I provide proof of source of funds of my salary which was sent electronically by the Government to my bank. I know we have an expert here in anti-money laundering. I do not know if the Government itself launders money to public officials from the Consolidated Fund. So, wow. That was flagged. Okay.

Sen. Al-Rawi: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: Well, you know it can. I suppose you know to do these things.

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

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: So at the end of the day—that is why you must keep your mouth shut. At the end of the day I still wait for the money that I worked very hard for. So, I understand the lamentation of the ordinary man.

So then I made some calls and this morning I understand, nothing is there yet, you know. Nothing. It is a good thing “allyuh” have something in the tea room for me and I might have to ask Sen. Al-Rawi to buy me a little aloo pie and some coffee at Pancho’s later because I still do not have my money.

So this morning, I understand, that the bank that puts you first wants to get from me two forms of ID, a salary slip and proof of my address. I have been living here for the past three days, maybe you can give me a little card to say, “Red House”. I do not know. I do not know if tomorrow the bank that puts you first wants “meh nanny name, meh nana name, meh mamoo name”, my biometric data. All of this when I have been banking there for the past 14 years. But, Mr. President, I will comply because I have already given them my warrant of appointment from Her Excellency the President as a Minister. I have already given

them my warrant of appointment from Her Excellency the President as a Senator. I have already given them the little green form that they had to stamp to the Comptroller of Accounts. Everybody knows the yellow form. Comptroller of Accounts, please do this, authorize. I have already given them my letter of assumption. What else do they want? The colour of my underwear? I do not know. I do not know. Well, God forbid. Yes. But, Mr. President, I will comply. Like everyone else, sometimes you have to accept stupidity and hostility just to try to get things done. My bank will not put you first unless you are, for example, someone in, its view, that matters. Someone who they do not view as a second-class citizen.

Now, somebody gave me an email here but I do not know. No. No. It is an email to somebody called Karen Darbasie in which a high public official is saying:

Please do a letter for PM to purchase US dollars to pay these three invoices.

He needs to have payment made tomorrow, no later and is waiting for a letter to confirm instructions now.

I need to verify certain things and I will come back to verify certain things. Invoices to be paid by him for a friend. And it is an email from that person to Karen Darbasie, Ext. 3000. But I will get back to that another day.

So, Mr. President, on the campaign trail we said that we would examine the banking system and how we can improve ease of business, ease of people getting their wages and salaries and so on, especially public officers because it comes straight from the Government. We have installed a new Governor of the Central Bank.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: I will comply, Mr. President. I know people are raring to go to say “it is financial this and financial that and so on”. I will comply,

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar (cont'd)

Mr. President. I will do what I have to do and I will so humbly with the confident expectation that things will get better for the ordinary people when dealing with commercial banks. There must be a better way, Mr. President, to balance financial oversight and what we are required to do with ease of business. And we, the UNC Government, shall find a way, Mr. President. We shall find a way. And that is because, Mr. President, unlike some commercial banks and unlike some regimes, which the people rejected recently, it is the UNC that puts people first. I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Alright. Is there anybody else from the Opposition that will like to speak? Sen. Faris Al-Rawi.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Faris Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I thank the Members opposite for the brevity of some submissions. Perhaps I should reply immediately to the Leader of Government Business to inform him on the point that he has put on to the record about the bank that puts you first and what seemed to stun him and have him utterly amazed at requests of the bank. That the hon. Member should know, as a seasoned lawyer, that he is a politically-exposed person now. And everybody who knows anything about the laws on anti-money laundering, countering the financing of terrorism and proliferation financing, as well as the Integrity in Public Life Act, ought to know what a politically-exposed person is.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: So, hon. Senator, welcome to the world of law, and your obligations, I am surprised that you did not know that, but I am happy to lend assistance.

Mr. President, I listened to the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development speak this morning with great passion. He is an eloquent speaker. I listened to him say, “We are in a good place”. And by “we” I mean “the UNC”. I listened to him say that he was stunned at Sen. Roberts-Radgman’s contribution, and that we in the Opposition seemed to have not understand the reality that we were living in some, and I quote, “make-believe world”. I listened to the hon. Senator speak to the fact that workers’ rights were critical. The hon. Senator said, we need to focus on workers and workers’ issues. The hon. Senator reflected upon the plight, and I will quote from him as per my notes of some 5,000 Petrotrin workers, some 2,000 TSTT workers, the TDC 100 workers. The hon. Senator said, that in the last 10 his exact words, he said, “My God! What world are they living in?”—is what the hon. Senator said. But as the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and as a former trade unionist, the hon. Member made absolutely no mention—

Hon. Senator: “Umm hmm”.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi:—of what happened in the last seven weeks alone, 10,700 CEPEP workers fired, with prejudice, some argue.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Five hundred workers in WASA were not renewed. Ten senior executives in WASA sent home; 140 change agents in the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government sent home; 900 persons in a particular RHA, they asked not to be named, contracts not renewed; 700 persons in another RHA, again, the whistleblower saying, “Please do not call my name”; the Attorney General Office 10 officers at least, sent home.

Sen. Roberts-Radgman: What is the total?

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: That is 12,960 people in seven weeks. And the hon. Minister of

Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development has the gall to talk about 7,000 workers in 10 years. Mr. President, I am told again and I pray this is not true, that the forestry workers numbering 4,700 are next on the chopping block this week. I am told that the URP workers are next on the chopping block, some 5,000 workers. And, Mr. President, I therefore find it remarkable that someone who came from the labour movement now the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development himself did not have one word of assurance, not one word of assurance for the most vulnerable persons, people earn \$120 a day, \$1,400 a fortnight. Not one word was said of them.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

12.45 p.m.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Instead we heard the Leader of Government Business complaining that he had to fill out forms to collect his salary, not knowing he was a politically exposed person. He too, not one word offered of solace, of reassurance, nothing, Mr. President. I saw another union leader, Michael Annisette, make a plea to the Government to speak to capricious action, but, Mr. President, it is relevant in the context of this debate. We are asking for an appropriation.

Let us go on in terms of further responses. I heard the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, the hon. Eli Zakour, speak last night very elegantly, very measured. The hon. Member made some very serious allegations, speaking to the fact that there were 14 items that he spoke to. And, Mr. President, I think I am obliged to make some commentary and reflection upon those contributions coming from the hon. Member.

The hon. Member last night read from what appeared to be a report when I walked away from the debate talking about allegations at VMCOTT; serious allegations. Indeed, I was quite surprised at the allegations made. I did some

investigation and found out that indeed those allegations were made. What the hon. Senator failed to tell us, is that the hon. Member seems to have been reading from allegations made by two employees of VMCOTT, the finance manager and the HR manager, who were brought before the Board of VMCOTT on a number of allegations. Stemming from those, one of those managers was brought up on charges by the Fraud Squad, and the matter was under, and still is under active consideration, so, I say no more.

That individual wrote a letter to the hon. Minister, and that is the letter that the hon. Member read, as he is entitled to, the hon. Member has control of the information and structures, I make no complaint of him putting that. But that was devoid of context. And the context was that in the Ministry of Works and Transport, now Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, as it relates to the hon. Senator, there is a report from Permanent Secretary Alfred, showing that the former Minister promptly requested the Permanent Secretaries to initiate an investigation by the internal audit department of the Ministry to ascertain whether any of those allegations from that person were true. The matter was investigated and a report was issued. The hon. Senator did not read from the report. Had he read from the report, it would have shown that absolutely no finding of fact or truth was made in respect of those allegations.

Now, I do not condemn the hon. Minister for reading from the allegations, the hon. Minister is entitled to do so, but I am saying unfortunately, he was not granted the perspective that he should have brought to Senate just to give the context.

Sen. Zakour: Mr. President, 42(9).

Mr. President: After he speaks [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Mr. President, what I am cautioning with the greatest of

respect, the hon. Senator whom I know to be a very decent man, let me say that plainly—is that one should be careful to have the full context put onto the record, so that the record is fairly demonstrated, because there is a report. I call upon the hon. Minister, when he is given his two minutes to clarify his statements, to get that report and read it, so that the names of the persons on the Board are properly protected, at least with a mark of truth that exists in the hon. Minister's portfolio and Ministry.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Because it is a dereliction of duty to attack people in a context that is devoid of the facts. It is fair to make the allegations, it is very fair to make the allegations, but I caution the hon. Minister, most respectfully.

Mr. President, let us go to the issue of buses. Let us go to the PTSC that the hon. Sen. Zakour raised. The hon. Sen. Zakour made a very serious allegation against a former Member of the Senate, Sen. Richie Sookhai. In respect of those allegations, the allegations are that Sookhai's diesel company, which the past Senator was a Member of, had done business with the PTSC. If that is true, I would like again, in the context of truthful and wholesome context, if the hon. Minister would condescend to tell us the truth about procurement. A statutory corporation such as the PTSC is the entity that engages in procurement.

I would honestly appreciate it if the hon. Minister would clarify whether he is making the allegation that the Minister somehow entered into the procurement with a related party. I doubt that is the case, Mr. President. Because if that is the case, I can ask now, whether the hon. Sen. Zakour, whom I know for the record again, as a person of decency and integrity—let me make that absolutely clear. I would like to know if the hon. Sen. Zakour has issued a circular to all of the PTSC saying under no circumstances is anyone to purchase gas from the gas stations that

he owns. Is that what the hon. Senator is saying? Has the hon. Senator issued a circular to the whole of PTSC saying “I am the owner of two gas stations in this country, and therefore, nobody from the PTSC who uses the government card, who uses public money, is to purchase gasoline from my gas station?” Is that what you are saying?

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Would the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism be saying, “Nobody buy Sacha Cosmetics”? Now that is a global brand. We are lucky in this country to have somebody like the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: He is a remarkable feature of this country, his family is legendary, his mother if you permit to say, was the famous Madam Maharaj. He is legendary in what he has done in the trade market of Trinidad and Tobago. Broken barriers. I compliment it, warmly. He really is an outstanding remarkable businessman, but is he similarly going to put forward positions as such? I doubt he needs to. I am raising it in the context of warning Sen. Zakour, with the greatest of respect, that you ought to be extremely careful about the kind of allegations you have put to be read. It is most unfortunate that those remarks were made. I honestly recommend that the hon. Senator take time to get the context of positions, because it cannot just be you “pelting stone, and pelting stone, and pelting stone. Okay?”

With respect to the report on VMCOTT, what are the consequences of the police report? What is happening in the police report? What is the Ministry’s position at the Airport Authority? The allegations made that they were dealing in security contracts? Was that a breach of the public procurement law? Was it done

for reasons, Mr. President? I am not saying that I would be aware of all manner of ill that happened anywhere, but there is a reason why the Public Procurement Act came into effect. It is a very difficult piece of law to work with, but it is in fact the law. So I just respectfully caution that if that is the line the hon. Sen. Zakour wishes to go along, then please put out the circular, and ban your personal gas stations from any form of public money. That would be fair, if you stand by those forms of allegations. Just a word to the wise.

Mr. President, I want to come quickly to the budgetary items. We have been in a cyclical difficulty of revenue. We went through price shocks in the year 2016. The price of oil fell to have \$27 a barrel. Our revenue from oil and gas dropped from \$21 billion per year to \$900 million. Ever since that happened the PNM Government, took the decision to run with the two budgetary cycles. The appropriation at the beginning of the year, and a mid-year, and every single mid-year, we said because of the vagaries in price of oil, and the price of gas that we would give the Government the opportunity to do two budgets.

And, therefore, let me say it plainly, perhaps, it is an admission, but it is more of a reminder. We specifically under-budgeted, because we said so in the context of bearing in mind the vagaries of the global climate. Especially as it affects our market prices for oil and gas, and we peg the oil and gas prices in the budget, per MMBtu for gas and oil prices. We peg them at the budget; why? Because anything over the price of oil, or over the price of gas goes by the law into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. If your gas price and oil prices are below what is pegged in the budget, then it does not go into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. And the Minister of Finance then was at pains to say why the Government engaged in mid-year budgeting.

If you go back to any one of the questions asked in the Standing Finance

Committee of the last budget which is, relevant to this debate, you will see every single Minister, I was one of them, who said we will at the mid-year budget the items that have been under-catered for, because of two things. One, the need to know where the price of oil and gas is, and, two, because of the effect of the public procurement law. Let me put on record this. The public procurement law saw in the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government that I had control of until recently.

In the last financial year, the full first year of the public procurement law coming into effect, we reported that our expenditure dropped from 100 per cent to 15 per cent. The public procurement law was so difficult and so thick to work with, that only 15 per cent of the PSIP was spent, 1-5 per cent. And that constitutes those two reasons of why the last Government specifically under-budgeted, but said so expressly at the Appropriation Bill, and in the Standing Finance Committee. So, Mr. President, I think it is incumbent to put those positions on the record.

Mr. President, in this debate, I note that there is a hallmark item in the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government catered for by way of supplementation. I paid attention to the debate in the House and the Standing Finance Committee, but without going into that debate on those contributions, but relevant to the line Items in this Bill, I would like to say that I note that CEPEP, which is in great contention right now, CEPEP was allocated \$60.5 million. That \$60.5 million was specifically said to be for the payment of contractors in the CEPEP pool, and to provide for 12 additional contractors. I note that nothing has been said of the fact that every single CEPEP contractor has been dismissed, and therefore, the entire workforce, nearly 11,000 people, have been dismissed. And therefore, I wonder what on earth is going to be the situation with that \$60.5

million, because it cannot be that it is to pay 12 new CEPEP contracts, when I know for a fact that only two contracts were relative to that conversation.

But, Mr. President, I note that coming from Members opposite in the public domain are things such as—and I note in media publications that there were allegations of skewing of allocations to allegedly marginal seats, and PNM seats. In fact, there is a table going around which shows things like La Horquetta/Talparo supposedly got 45 contractors, Moruga/Tableland 42, San Fernando West 46, and you go down to the rest you see 33 to Arima, and you see 39. If you add up the list that is floated around by the UNC, you get over 837 contractors. But in law and in fact, we know that the entire CEPEP programme only had 336 contractors. So even the story of “ah-ha” is wrong. And therefore, I have to ask what is the story?

Relative to CEPEP, I notice that there was an allegation again, made by the current Minister in charge of CEPEP, that is Member for Couva South, that CEPEP was spending exorbitant sums of money. Mr. President, I would like to put on the record that for the year 2024/2025, which we are dealing with, the CEPEP Bill was \$351,452,611. But, if I go under the UNC’s tenure to 2010 to 2015, what strikes me is that the Bill involved—look at 2014 to 2015, \$693,721,861, so we are looking at \$351 million versus \$694 million.

1.00 p.m.

How do you seriously make an “ah ha” shame allegation of the last Government for spending \$351 million to employ nearly 11,000 people, when the UNC was spending close to \$700 million? Mr. President, it just makes absolutely no sense. It is a mockery of the concept of research and the fact that facts are relevant and capable of being disclosed. It makes absolutely no sense.

But, Mr. President, is it that the \$60 million is going to be used in damages to be paid for unfair and unjust dismissals of the CEPEP workers? Is it going to

be, that it is to be paid by way of legal fees to come? Because I noticed Sen. Baig was very happy to talk about legal fees, calling out names of persons who supposedly received benefits of legal fees under the PNM. And, Mr. President, I, for my part, wish to say—I was told, Mr. President, that there is a break to be taken at 1.00 p.m., is that the case?

Mr. President: No.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: No. May I continue? Thank you, Sir. I was told for my part that these allegations of fees were exorbitant, and that we should have regard to the truth, and what the PNM did and did not do. But, Mr. President, what I find staggering is that the Member, Sen. Brian Baig, completely omitted the fact, certainly for the period of time that I was Attorney General—I came to the House and to the Senate and to the world at large, and I published a value-for-money statement. I put out the list of every single person that I paid, authorized payment for as Attorney General, I gave a value for money stated, I put forward into that position, that under my tenure for the near six years that I was reporting then, that for the five-year to five-year period, five years under my hand as Attorney General, with all matters disclosed, the Government had spent \$371 million. Five years under the UNC, they had spent \$636 million.

In respect of the value-for-money contribution for legal fees, I also pointed out that the Director of Public Prosecutions had consumed \$148 million of a total of \$410 million, if you take it to a six-year marker. So, in the tenure in which I was Attorney General, in the six years, nearly seven years reporting, I reported an expenditure of \$410 million, still less than five years of the UNC which had spent \$636 million. Of that \$410 million, I reported that the DPP had spent \$148.7 million. I reported that \$141 million was arrears, which I had to pay. So, of that \$410 million, I had paid \$122 million in arrears. That therefore left, Mr. President,

a position of \$67 million to foreign professionals and \$72 million to local professionals. Of that \$72 million, I then went in to further discourse and I had identified every single person by name. I showed the amount of matters they conducted, what the money was spent for and then I went into the big items.

Now, Mr. President, permit me to put on the record, why did I disclose all of those figures publicly? I saw that there was great merit in one of my predecessors, now current Attorney General John Jeremie SC, because he, at no point in time, hesitated to publish figures similarly. In fact, that hon. Member also—I took a leaf from his book—of saying that I would produce a legislative agenda and so was the precedent set. I thought it was a very good precedent.

So I want to just caution, Mr. President, what we are really to look at when we are looking at the expenditure of legal fees is the value-for-money figure. In the value-for-money figure, I think that it is fair that we deal with that. I note, for instance, that in our tenuring time, there were considerable expenditures, and I join the hon. Attorney General's concern, made in the other House but reported in the press, that there has to be a discussion in relation to certain matters, in particular matters which are consuming a lot of money and going nowhere.

But while I am on the issue of legal fees, if I could—and I am grateful the hon. Attorney General is here. Mr. President, in the cut and thrust of politics, sometimes unkind words are said. I, for my own part, recall the media asking me a reflection on the hon. Attorney General and I said some sharp words, which I think were unfortunate. I publicly say to the hon. Attorney General and to his family that sometimes words can be hurtful, and I accept sometimes that words can be hurtful, and I apologize. That is just fair. Because you know, sometimes you get lost in the fact that you are talking to an individual and you forget the individual has children or family members. So I want to publicly tell the hon. Attorney

General and his son and his daughter, two brilliant twins, brilliant kids, I apologize.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Browne: That is very noteworthy, Faris.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: And that was honestly meant in the cut and trust of politics but it is wrong, I apologize.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Good example.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: But one thing that I am particularly warmed about with the hon. Attorney General, being the hon. Attorney General as he is now, there is a matter that the hon. Attorney General reported on in the House, it was the expenditure of the legal fees for White & Case in the Piarco matter. The hon. Attorney General mentioned that some \$140 million was spent. I can say that that is true, but I want to say, if there is one person who deserves a national award, it is perhaps the hon. Attorney General. Why? In 2004, as the Attorney General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, he brought litigation in another jurisdiction, in this case, Miami, against certain persons, the Piarco matter. He was excoriated for bringing that litigation. All sorts of allegations were made against him. I can say publicly that—

Sen. Dr. Browne: By whom?

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC:—I had cause—by, in fact, Members of the UNC. I had cause, in fact, in my tenure as Attorney General and as a Minister, to defend the name of the hon. Attorney General against some serious allegations, which were just wrong, untrue, false; matters which had, in fact, reached mutual legal assistant stage. And when it came to my attention, I said, “This is rubbish, it is wrong, it is untrue,” and I produced evidence to prove that his name was a good name; his name was a good name.

But in that Piarco matter, the hon. Attorney General, in 2004, survived

attack, after attack, after attack for going behind white-collar crime. As a result of his work, which I inherited, we were able to pursue the Piarco matter and to receive TT \$1.2 billion in judgement in a Miami court. It is under appeal in that court, in that jurisdiction, but all I can say is that the appeal is pending because it has been heard already. But I would like to remind that the Miami docket is a public docket, and if we are looking at legal fees that were expended in the Piarco matter to White & Case, I would just urge members of the public to go on to the Miami-Dade website, the Civil, Family Probate Courts division, the website of the Miami-Dade Clerk, and you will note that, thanks to the combination of works and the historical work done by the hon. Attorney General then, as Attorney General in 2004, the work which I had the pleasure of continuing and bringing to conclusion, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has a final judgment awarding costs and attorney's fees in a sum over US \$17 million. The final judgment was granted to Trinidad and Tobago, \$17,389,910.93. An interest accrues on that. That judgment was published to the world on the 9th of May, 2025, after the election.

So, history is going to be in sharp focus because it really is quite remarkable that the hon. Attorney General has the pleasure of concluding that work and I am sure we are in good hands because the kind of "licks" that the hon. Attorney General took for that matter is unprecedented. He has thick skin. I say that in the context of value for money, the Piarco matter, the fact that White & Case were paid \$140 million—"dey done earn all their fees". Take \$20 million and multiply it by US \$7, and they already worked for their money. So, we look forward to that particular position coming forward. We look forward to a little bit more.

Let us turn to the Rural Development Company, as it then was, as we are dealing with appropriation for \$20 million to the RDC, the Rural Development Company itself, and that is for payments towards the loan financing that was taken

for that company. I want to thank the hon. Sen. Vishnu Dhanpaul in particular. Sen. Vishnu Dhanpaul, as Minister of Finance, when we sat as a Government to borrow nearly \$1.2 billion, did, in fact, carry out the borrowings but made sure to put those borrowings in an escrow account. And that, therefore, ring-fenced and protected moneys. The drawdown for those moneys has to come through the Permanent Secretaries of whatever Ministry is responsible. Take the Rural Development Company, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government has to give the authorization for expenditure. The Budget Division of the Ministry of Finance, in conjunction with the accounts division of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, must be certified by the engineers at the Rural Development Company's head office, which is the Ministry of Rural Development itself.

I would like to say, as Minister of Rural Development and Local Government up to April 28, 2025, I want the record to show that the use of the Public Procurement Act was fully in gear, the PDAT committees are the ones that authorize expenditures, et cetera. The Minister is not involved in procurement, the Permanent Secretaries are involved in procurement. But very importantly, I want the public record to also show that the engineering division, which must go out and certify whether works are done or not, was headed by someone in the case of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, who, in fact, has operated for decades in the public service. I would like to say a little bit more about that individual, but I would not because I think it would skew the conversation, but what I can say is that I am sure that the engineering department stood at arm's length, having worked for a previous Government, et cetera, and did its job.

What I would really like to say in this debate, Mr. President, is it is very unfortunate for us to be castigating things out of context. This is a mid-year where

moneys are required to be supplemented. The real golden question we have to ask ourselves is, where is the financing coming from? I listened to the very noble intentions of the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise. I join him in saying that, yes, there is an idealistic focus on living wages, not being minimum wages but being affordable living wages, where we peg to the RPI indices as it happens where there is a review period, et cetera. But I would like to know six months from now, when the grip happens, as to how we are going to afford it when the NIS is collapsing, because we have an aging population and the workforce is falling. I would like to know how we are going to treat with the sustainability of wage increases, which we would all love to give. But at the end of the day, a form of Solomonic justice has to happen where you had to decide, in the social balancing exercise, how you treat with this, and it is not an easy exercise.

I would like to say to the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services, the Senator is clearly a very intelligent and well-qualified individual having worked in the public sector and in the RHA sector. But I would just like to say, having served 15 years in the Parliament, I would respectfully recommend refraining from things like labelling Terrence Deyalsingh as a mere druggist. And why do I say that? Whether we like it or not—

Hon. Senators: *[Interruption]*

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC:—there is a fact that then Minister Deyalsingh had to preside over the COVID pandemic, a lot of which relates to the budget, Mr. President, that we are treating with right now. Because—

Sen. Dr. Chaitan-Maharaj: *[Inaudible]*

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Sorry? Would you like me to give way, Senator? I have offered to give way to the hon. Senator, but she has not accepted the invitation. I

am just saying, as we are looking to the Ministry of Health's supplementation for goods and expired goods, the just-in-time delivery mechanisms, the reform that is going into effect, led by Minister Deyalsingh, a mere druggist, but a Minister of Health—in fact, the longest-serving Minister of Health in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, who managed the COVID pandemic very skillfully and with a lot of difficulty at his feet, Mr. President. In those positions, I think it is important to remember that we have a system that was under massive pressure; massive pressure. And it is incumbent upon us now as managers of a country, those in government now, to be conscious of the realities of where we go. I expect to hear all sorts of allegations and “ah ha's” and out of context statements, et cetera, that is par for the course, that is politics. At the end of the day, the good news is that there is court of law that can treat with these things.

1.15 p.m.

As I mentioned those things about expired drugs and payments due to other authorities et cetera, I would say to Sen. Zakour, that it is a fact when we are looking at the parts that VMCOTT held, that we must have regard to the fact that multiple series of buses were being maintained by the VMCOTT facility for the PTSC. And the parts which are in issue as raised by the hon. Senator, have to be factored in the context that the vast majority of multiple buses bought for which you had to have inventory of parts were bought under the UNC and you cannot not have parts for those buses.

Mr President: You have four more minutes.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. What we attempted to do , Mr. President, in our tenure, was to streamline the suppliers so that we have more consistent buses that had stocks of parts et cetera but I would invite Sen. Zakour to go back and have a look at where the source of the problem originated. It is not his

problem, he did not create it but he has to manage it. There may be inventory which is old but we have to treat with the inventory fairly.

So Mr. President, to the Government I say beat away, song and dance. Espouse all the wonderful ideas that we have, talk about rights and positions but come and at least reflect upon the difficulties to CEPEP workers 'nah'. 7,000 in one place, 11,700 in another place. It cannot be that there is no regard for people because the pledge that everybody is now mocking is that when UNC wins, everybody wins. When UNC wins you get fired, when UNC wins you get blamed, when UNC wins you get no home, When UNC wins you get evicted.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: When UNC wins you forget what a politically exposed person is, you forget your whole law degree. When UNC wins all of these things happen. It seems to be almost an irony from the Lord Almighty telling us, "allyuh want that take that".

Sen. the Hon. P. Alexander: The PNM lose.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: So Mr. President, enjoy the spoils of victory. To people like the hon. Phillip Alexander, who I welcome to this House, enjoy the spoils of victory. Pump up your chest, make noise, castigate people all you want, just remember time is longer than twine and you will have to recon for your deeds at some point, Mr. President. And therefore with that in mind, as we all suffered that fate, all of us suffered that fate, it is important for us to remember to have a little clemency and a little mercy for particularly the issues that I have reflected upon. Let us get context, let us get accuracy, let us get value for money, let us be fair.

In my record as a parliamentarian, Mr. President, I have worked with you not to bring you into this debate, but I think it is fair to say that in all my debates in this Parliament I have never been derogatory towards an individual, I have

provided balance. As Attorney General, I would circulate marked up amendments of the Act that was going to be amended to all persons etcetera. It is a matter of courtesy, because today the shoes are on one foot and tomorrow it would be on another. So, Mr. President, I think that that wraps up my contribution and I thank you for this opportunity.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Okay. I would like to suggest that we take a break at this time for lunch and we come back exactly at 2.20. This sitting is now suspended until 2.20.

1.20 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.20 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. President: Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs (Sen. David Nakhid): In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful and may his blessing be upon his prophet and the prophet's family.

Mr. President, as is the norm, I would like to thank you for my invitation and of course to comment on your elevation, having worked with you for five-years under your esteemed guidance—I can reaffirm the words of Sen. Kama Maharaj, that there is no one more worthy, more “meritous” than you to ascend to that office.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: I am happy to join the debate at this point in time, especially after that last contribution from the hon. Sen. Faris Al-Rawi, because I was thinking that this could be “National Irony Day”.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*].

Sen. D. Nakhid: Because there stood a man, irony of ironies, and funny enough the Greek word for irony is *eirōneia*, which has a more in-depth meaning than what we know it as. It can mean feigned ignorance, feigned arrogance. But that encapsulated everything about that contribution. The seemingly outraged Sen. Al-Rawi at the plight of poor and working people escapes no one, in Trinidad and Tobago when we put things into context which he asked for, he continues to ask for context, well let me give this champion of the poor and the working class some context.

One Alexandria Place, \$600,000 a month, \$7,200,000 a year. Three Alexandria Place, \$575,000 a month, \$6,900,000 a year. What a champion of the people. 45 to 45 C, St. Vincent Street, \$159,000, a month, a \$1,900,000 a year. Corner of Agra Street St. James, \$356,000 for this battler for human rights, a year, \$4,272,000. Yearly, Mr. President, this modern day Uriah Buzz Butler collects \$20,208,000 a year.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, 46(6).

Sen. D. Nakhid: Mr. President, they opened the conversation completely and I am responding.

Mr. President: Continue please.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: And I am glad that Sen. Browne, I was waiting for him to interject at some point. This self-anointed Sai Baba who seems to be giving everyone advice lately and we wonder why in nine-years, he failed to give his own team advice because he has been lifted from here, where the hon. Sen. Allahar sits and escorted to over there.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: I wonder how his advice faired with his own party. Irony of ironies since that seem to be the theme. We might soon hear that he gave advice to people who suffer from domestic abuse. I say no more.

2.25 p.m.

Back to Sen. Al-Rawi, who seems to go on and on about how we treat with CEPEP workers. Well, simple, Sen. Al-Rawi, through you, Mr. President, donate that sum of \$200 million over 10 years. Donate a quarter of that to those poor and grieving workers that you so care about. Donate that instead of spending it on things to tighten face and all “kinda ting”.

Anyway, I thank you, Mr. President. I now join the debate. I will spend no more time on people who come here being the epitome of political hypocrisy. And when we look at all the discourses throughout their history of debates in the Senate, when we look at our predecessors in ancient times, there were three things that they never tolerated in the Senate. One was irony because I described it before; the second was hypocrisy, and the third was not being humble when you had contempt, when you were contemptuous. And, I think in the person of all those Senators, not the newly elected, of course, I loved their contributions. Well done, Senators. But those older, ensconced in their PNM political trickery, I say to them, not only shame, but you deserve to be where you are and time is longer than twine.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: So, Mr. President, in examining this mid-year review and the allocation and so, we have of course inherited what I like to call scorched earth. The PNM never leaves a place for anybody with anything in the till. We know that. “Dey hands long and sticky.” Not a programme, not a programme you could find. So I will deal with somebody who might feel he might get away, but he was

dealt with condemnations from my young senatorial colleague to my right, Sen. Daniel Rasheed.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: He dealt with it quite well, eloquently, well researched. I will continue there, Sir.

So, I am being appointed to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and I had, of course, the distasteful assignment of looking through some of those so-called programmes. There are about 38 of them. I think some of them were conceptualized by my senatorial colleague, Foster Cummings. Well, let me tell you something. If any programmes were meant to make Frank and Jesse James blush, they were there, those were those programmes. Frank and Jesse James himself could conceptualize it better.

I saw a programme—Mr. President, do you know?”—called the FUSE programme. It was a programme that was two-tiered. One, where people had to act like Sen. Al-Rawi, clear bush from the line. “Minister ah puja, he hata clear bush”. And the second part of that programme was to lay lines for T&TEC. Well when I looked at the budget for that programme, “I say well Harvard University giving out that programme”. Harvard University came down here and was the service provider to “clear line and lay line” because it was costing \$74,000 per student for three months; \$74,000 per student for a three-month programme and they graduating to go where? To T&TEC, which is saturated for workers. Make that make sense.

So all these programmes that I looked into—and you had others, and we have five years and time is longer than twine, I will look into more and more—we realized that I was able to find, Sen. Swaratsingh, I was able to find a systemic flaw in the system that the PNM capitalized on. And you know what that is? I do

not even know and before I go into it, I would really like to be magnanimous and give Sen. Foster Cummings the Floor for two minutes to apologize to the youth of this nation for abusing them under all these programmes that he conceptualized. I will give him two minutes.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Two minutes to apologize. Okay. Under advice from the man who likes to give advice, he refused. Let me tell you why he should apologize. Through you, Mr. President, why he should apologize. This pretense of being Patrick Manning has done quite well under the PNM. As a matter of fact, if you look at him forensically or his achievements—and I am not talking about him personally, I do not know the man—he is virtually unemployable. We will go so far as rumours of plagiarism and all of that.

I would like to ask this honourable Senator what was the intent and purpose of all these programmes that only matriculated our people, our young people, with certificates of completion or participation. Very few of those programmes could allow any of those young men and women to enter the job market. There was no CVQ. There was no direct entry. Well, I do not know if to blame him directly, the Senator, or to blame his lack of intellectual depth. “Ah doh know.”

Hon. Senator: Mr. President?

Sen. D. Nakhid: “No, I ain tell yuh yuh duncy.”

Sen. Cummings: This is the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Well, I am glad he mentioned that. Thank you very much for mentioning this is the Senate and I wish it had a jail right outside. Because, this man, this Senator, did not realize within the system, there needs to combine with these programmes something with the Ministry of Education. So I approached the Ministry of Education, I said: Were these programmes designed and appropriate

for entering the job market of Trinidad and Tobago? They said no. So I said: How were we able or how is it possible for a Senator, now Senator, or a Minister, 10 years, 10 years with control over thousands of people and budgets of millions to only graduate people for the optics—I was told for political optics—with certificates of participation? What a betrayal of the youths of Trinidad and Tobago. What a betrayal. Someone with some compassion or with some understanding and that is why it was not derogatory, it was a question: Is it a lack of intellectual depth on the part of the Senator or was it intentional?

Now, when I heard Sen. Al-Rawi's concern for CEPEP workers, then I believed his intention and I will tell you why, Mr. President. Two hundred and seventy-three out of the 330-odd contracts were in PNM constituencies; 273, that is not a small number. Then we have to ask yourselves if they have so much love for black people and Indian people who are the majority shareholders of this country, why then not have a programme with CEPEP that could possibly make these people graduate from just cutting grass and painting stone into something more meaningful for their lives, something more sustainable that will give them some kinda generational wealth? But no, you made sure that your family is fixed with generational wealth and you made sure that yours is fixed also. This will not be accepted by the UNC at all.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: What we are about in the UNC is to make sure we break the monopoly of the PNM mafia that controlled a programme that was meant to help poor and working-class people but has come to enrich their friends and their financiers. We will not let that happen now, we will not let it happen then. We will break that and that is why you are so upset. That is why he is so upset, \$20,280 is not enough for him and I know that from a personal anecdote that his

family was crying “Kamla take food out we mouth”.

So from \$20 million a year, it will give us how much, Daniel, in 10 years? Two hundred million. “Allyuh coulda save ah 2 million to eat some—you crying about food out people mouth and then complaining about you representing poor and working class?”

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: “You go on with policies, I going ahead, I going ahead, because anytime ah talk more about it, ah go get passionate and if that happen, plenty more go come out about who really own gas station, about who really own gas station and where.”

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Go through. Fix up.

Sen. D. Nakhid: I will. “Buh you fix up yuh family, ah know that.”

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Yes, go ahead. Mr. President, I rise on 46(6).

Mr. President: All right. I know this debate, you had your turn, you said what you had to say, the hon. Senator is responding so I am a democratic and I am allowing some flexibility in this debate. Continue, please.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Mr. President, typical PNM, they could give but “they cyah take”. They could give but they cannot take. He came and made some allegations about Minister Zakour who spoke about things and “hear what”, quoted it by always prefacing it, “he is ah good man, ah good man and then yuh bad talk the man”. No, we cannot do that. If you want to be honourable, be honourable to the maximum. Being hard and firm of conviction is also part of nobility. Do not come here and play sanctimonious, certainly not with me.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Try to tell the truth.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Certainly not with me.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Try to tell the truth.

Sen. D. Nakhid: “Me yuh talking about truth?”

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Yeah.

Sen. D. Nakhid: What I say here, thank God, Mr. President, I say on the outside.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: On the outside, I say it and I say it here.

Let me get back to the Bill. So we have two Senators on that side who purport to care about the poor and working class while having had a good time for 10 years under the PNM. Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman, of whom I quite enjoyed her contribution, spoke about fiscal conservatism. Remember their former leader talked about “wean yourself off the Government” and while we were weaning ourselves off, they were “ham, lamb and jam” all over the place. Like it is only “wean yourself off the Government” and fiscal conservatism when it comes to the children and grandchildren of Africa and India.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: When it comes to them and their family, carte blanche, carte blanche. Not like Blanchisseuse, some people cannot spell that, it is carte blanche.

I even heard Petrotrin mentioned and I would like to excuse the hon. Sen. Roberts-Ragdman for mentioning Petrotrin. I do not know if she was in Trinidad and Tobago, I certainly was here. I heard testimony as our brother, Sen. Baptiste, Minister of Labour mentioned. I heard directly how that affected, not only 10,000 workers, but whole fence-line communities, the trickle-down effect. How people were displaced, people who used to sell small—had little groceries, mini marts. So the multiplier effect in economic terms would have been much more than 10,000. “Yuh looking” at upwards of 22,000 to 25,000. That was clear.

Hon. Senator: Forty.

Sen. D. Nakhid: “Forty ah hear by all accounts.” We had the Sen. Roberts-Radgman coming to talk about 10,000. We even had numbers where Sen. Al-Rawi mentioned 10,000 and then 7,000 somewhere. Not to belabour the point. We have been here in Government—a month? Two months?

Sen. Rasheed: Two months.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Two months. We have to fix—all their wrongs, we have to make those right. I understand their haste in wanting to portray the Government in a certain light, “dais they job”. That is a job.

2.40 p.m.

But what I cannot take, Mr. President, are the lies and the hypocrisy as they go about doing their work. I cannot take that. Why? I remember, as I segue, as people who discourse in debates do, I remember when I got stuck in Trinidad in 2020, and I ended up going into some charity work in my former community of Mt D’or. And I remember carrying up some hampers, as my father and mother used to do, and I remember carrying some hampers up Mt D’or hill. I had about 150 hampers. I was not aligned with any party at that point in time.

And I went up into the community, and in about 20 minutes—I kid you not, Senators, in about 20 minutes, 150 hampers went like that—[*Member snaps fingers*]*—gone.* What was telling, Mr. President, is coming down the hill from Mt D’or after—and I kid you not, it has left an impression on me coming, coming down the hill and the person with me who was driving, Mikey, said, “I look in the mirror and I see about 15 to 20-year-old men and women running down the hill behind the van to get a hamper.”

Sen. Baig: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Falling over themselves, Sen. Baig, falling over themselves—the level of poverty that was happening under the PNM, falling over themselves to get

a hamper in 2020. And they come here to pontificate about their care for CEPEP workers.

“Ah mean, Ah cyah even say shame.” It is beyond shame. It is beyond shameless. And you know, they like to “puff up” and feel like, you know, they deserve to talk about it, well, not here, not with this UNC, not at all. We will fight you here, and we will fight you outside, and we will make sure that the narrative that you all tried to do in 2015, it “eh” happening here this time.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: It is not happening here. Mr. President, moral clarity must have a manifesto. What I mean by that is when you pretend to be moral, you must also be manifest about it. It is what people say, like my mother and they who are Christians to their heart, “Faith without works is meaningless.” That is what it means. “Faith without works is meaningless.” So they come here and “puff up” and pretend like they care, all political gamesmanship.

I will give you another anecdote. We heard someone apologizing here to the AG, a big apology, political grandstanding. Ask him, did he pick up the phone and call the AG to apologize to him? No, but full of political grandstanding. “Look meh boy”—[*Member holds out document and looks at it*—we had enough of that. Faith without action is meaningless; meaningless. Get some truth within yourself. To thine own self be true”—Father Kennedy grew up in the church with me. We went to the same church together. “To thine own self be true, and it follows, as the night the day, and thou cannot be false to any man.”

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: I grew up hearing these things from my parents. They had one of those poems for everything in your life, and that was instilled in me. So, you know, you could find a million and one sins about me, the one sin you will not find

is hypocrisy.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: [*Laughter*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: How I talk, how I see it—you could see it on my face, never hypocrisy. And I like the laughter from the next side, and I would laugh too if I were benefiting \$20 million. I would laugh too, Sen. Maharaj. I would laugh too.

Sen. Baig: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Yeah, I would laugh too if I were benefiting \$20 million, but anyway.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Go through, you go through.

Sen. D. Nakhid: I am going all the way through.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Yeah, man, go through, fix up.

Sen. D. Nakhid: The next part about this PNM, which left us in a hole, was when it came to agriculture. Because we are dealing with poverty and food insecurity, which they created to no end. We have to look at agriculture, which they never dealt with. They have always kept agriculture at about 1 per cent of GDP. We know that. So we find ourselves having to fix it, when we have to allocate, because of the condition of the economy, recurrent expenditure, all the time. But it is a noble man who plants a tree that he knows he will never benefit from the shade of.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: And we find ourselves in that position where we have to be planting trees that we do not know if we are going to sit in the shade of it. We do not know. But as I said, because they have left Trinidad and Tobago in such a scorched-earth position, we have to do everything from scratch.

And very well, we do not know how the tide will turn, especially as we have such a maddening crowd, politically, in Trinidad and Tobago. We do not know.

We do not know. We do not know if the Senators on that side, who seem to be quite vocal in their defence of people, we do not know if that might take hold. But I do not think so. I think people have awoken. They have awakened themselves to the hypocrisy of this Government. They have realized that every single economic hole we are in—I mean, we have a former Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs who seems to have a serious tabanca about losing that work. All his questions today about CARICOM and all that, “doh matter how it was answered”—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Big point.

Sen. D. Nakhid:—by the Leader of Government Business—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: “Yuh coming good.”

Sen. D. Nakhid:—by the Leader of Government Business—you have something to say?

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Yes.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Well, keep quiet.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Sure. Big point, big point. Go through, go through.

Sen. D. Nakhid: The Leader of Government Business answered him. “Now he seems to be quite perturbed, doh geh yuh face out ah whack.”

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: The Leader of Government Business answered him and he keeps trying to—as a matter of fact, he even suggested to our Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs what he should be doing, and suggested advice.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Mr. President, I rise on Standing Order 48(1), questions time has passed and we are not allowed to revive any of this, for your consideration.

Mr. President: I think he is just making a point. He is moving on. Continue.

Sen. D. Nakhid: I was going into the point that—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: The Minister, who seems to freely want to give advice, under his watch, our visas to the UK were rescinded; rescinded. Our students were threatened by the US and were not even able to go and study in the US under his watch; all of this. We were on a serious watch when it comes to the European Union, where we do not know if that visa too, that Schengen visa will be instated.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, Standing Order 46(1), there is no allocation for the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs in this appropriation.

Mr. President: Listen, if we want to be rigid in this debate, I could have stopped endless people. I have some flexibility in this debate. So, continue.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: And what I am surprised at, is that they feel somehow, like in times gone past, they can say what they want on that side and we cannot respond. I do not know why they have the impression that this country belongs to them, and you hear it in their utterances when it comes to CEPEP—and I go back to that. They feel that that CEPEP programme was theirs to do with what they want. But they are now faced with a Government who is firmly putting them in their place and letting them know, you have five years to sit there and listen to our policies.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Baig: They were rejected.

Hon. Senator: Fired.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Of course, my pet peeve, as you would know, Mr. President, over the years, has been how they have treated with health. Because he who has health has everything. I mean, there is nothing you can enjoy in this world unless we have our health, and it is one of the things that this PNM Government, they neglected.

So we had to have an allocation of \$728 million. Unfortunately, most of that we might be in recurrent expenditure. Because what have they done? Here is what this PNM was so good at doing. Sen. Alexander, here is what they are so good at doing: Building buildings and useless car parks, wonderful with that. So, right in Skinner Park, where we had a hospital in dire need of help, they built carparks worth \$130-something million.

I mean, if I tell that to anybody, any neutral observer, from a First World country, and then take him into Port of Spain, where I went about 10 days ago—one of my friends got in an accident from Mt D'Or—just walking through that place, Port of Spain, just walking through—"I eh getting tuh de Central Block yet".

Hon. Senator: Virtual hospital.

Sen. D. Nakhid: "Ah talking about de real hospital. De one with people all up in de walls, on de sides, on de ground, ah talking about dat hospital". When you watch that hospital and look at what they have done—I make the point that they are quick to ask you, "Where allyuh getting de money from?" "Well, we know where we getting de money from, but we also know where de money gone"; \$145 million for Skinner Park, a useless field that they keep for their "Stink and Dutty" parties. A government rudderless, visionless, that they could not even control their own internals—

Mr. President: You have 10 more minutes, eh.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Thank you, Mr. President—but coming here to give us advise and to ask us questions about "where we getting de money from". Not once, in their 10 years, did they have a new revenue stream that we could have depended on. Until now, they owe businessmen over \$6.5 billion in VAT refunds, and then they are talking about "where yuh getting de money from".

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Yeah, they have all the answers, except for themselves, \$6.5 billion. You know what these businessmen could do with that? You know how that could be investments in businesses and keep the economy growing? No. What they offered them? Bonds. So, deferring the payment. Which becomes what?—with that interest? A burden on whom? The taxpayers. That is what they do. That is all they know how to do. But make themselves—I do not want to say “rich” because I might get pulled up for that, but make themselves comfortable. That is what they know how to do.

So, Mr. President, I must mention education because I also shadowed that as an Opposition Senator. We had to come and get \$455 million. Now, I remember doing a press conference, where the *Guardian* had an exposé talking about how much money they allocated over the years for school renewals, to rehabilitate schools and school repairs; millions, hundreds of millions of dollars. And when the *Guardian* looked at it, not a school rehabilitated, renovated. We are asking you, “Where de money?”

And I did a whole press conference about that, and there was a school in Piccadilly that I was able to go and cover—Piccadilly and St Philip’s. They promised, four years ago, to have that school rebuilt. I passed by that school up to a week ago, Piccadilly Government, a school that serves a catchment area that has increasing crime, increasing problems with gang violence, and we know, once you have a school that is properly run, probably built, adequate for the growing needs of a community, you mitigate against crime, you increase the opportunities for people to be properly employed, they have not rebuilt that school.

You know what they did? Because I went inside the school and exposed them. They put up now some big galvanize all around the school. The security guard, unfortunately, I heard, was fired because he had let me into the school,

making sure that nobody will ask questions about Piccadilly Government School. And I want to keep repeating that name, Piccadilly Government School that they promised to rebuild, that we now will have to rebuild.

But hear what, they allocated money for that in their budget for five or six years running. And they want to come in here and talk about, they care about poor and working-class people? They care about nothing but themselves. They care about nothing but themselves. As the economy was shrinking, Balisier House was growing.

2.55 p.m.

Not only that, they cut GATE. They cut GATE by almost \$300 million. How can you conceive that you intend to let a people—especially in Trinidad and Tobago, facing rising job losses, programmes leading them to nowhere in the job market, but you go and cut GATE. That alone should signal the intention of a Government that has lost its way. The United Nations, by every metric, they said to us in COVID—and I will get to COVID now—there are three things we must pay attention to, especially in COVID.

One, the first one they listed was education, make sure you increase education. They cut education. Make sure you increase sports. They realized the importance of sports. They cut sports. Under the UNC, for \$100 million to \$10 million, all the football leagues' budgets cut. They cut the budget in the football leagues. What did they do? They immediately put people in the exposed, under-served communities, they put them on the bread line. They gave them a chance to be proper recruitment for who? The gangs. I mean it is such a cluster bomb of stupidity, stupidity, wanton intellectual debauchery from that side that I could talk for a year basically on what they have not done.

I will say before I wrap up, there is a systemic flow. I mentioned briefly

before in the programmes created under Youth Affairs, where most of the programmes did not allow matriculation into the job market or a proper educational system. They did not. As time goes on, I will—outside of the Parliament and inside—indicate what those programmes were, and how they affected thousands of young people who basically ended up going to a programme for three or six months, and basically going home with a piece of paper giving them a certificate of participation and certificate of completion. That does not allow for entry into our job market.

I hope—if they would like to take some advice—while on that opposite side, they reflect on the damage they have done to the young people of this nation while enriching themselves. That is basically what happened. I would not even go into the caravan programme. I will leave that for another day, where millions were made under a programme that started between \$5,000 and \$20,000 budget that ended up, before the elections, with six or seven events at a budget of \$800,000. I remember those figures because I remembered them.

So, this is a PNM, Mr. President, that has not served the nation in any capacity. It was all about Frank and Jesse James. It was all about making sure that they were okay. It was all about trying to convince the public that they actually cared about them, especially among our most vulnerable communities. I would like to say, we, as a party, come with not only a vision for the economy, but we come with a moral clarity. Our mission is clear. We are here to help the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, we are here to help the underserved people of Trinidad and Tobago, we are here to do this in a most transparent and accountable fashion. And we intend to make sure that we keep this country moving and developing. And with those few words, Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Foster Cummings.

Sen. Foster Cummings: Mr. President, I thank you for the—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings:—opportunity to join this debate. Mr. President, it is my second time serving in the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago. I know that the Senate, this Upper House, is usually distinguished by a certain dignity and decorum of the officers who have the opportunity to serve in this House. I would hope that those who had their own challenges in Lebanon, would understand that the prison that they seek to have close by might resemble the one visited in Lebanon.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Nakhid: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Mr. President, I will spend my time treating with some of the issues because I have little time for personal attacks against colleagues, whether they sit on my Bench or on the Government Bench. But I have to correct, for the record, some of the statements made by Sen. Nakhid. Mr. President, the CEPEP programme, which was started under the Patrick Manning Government sometime in 2003 or so—I am sure Prof. Persad remembers that programme—is a programme that was designed for several reasons. One, an entrepreneurship programme to promote entrepreneurship among young persons wanting to get involved in business. Two, to fulfil an environmental requirement of keeping our community clean, I do not think anybody can ill-speak the CEPEP for the magnificent job that they continue to do during the life of this programme. And three, to create employment, particularly for those vulnerable in society.

A large number of those single mothers and many of them depend on this programme for survival, to eat, to send their children to school, and to provide for their family. And that programme, I think, is one of the successes of the Manning

Government, and successive governments have continued that programme. In 2015, when the PNM won the election and replaced the People's Partnership Government, the Keith Rowley-led administration met contractors engaged in that programme at that time, and those contractors were recently given extensions to their contracts. As a matter of fact, it was done, I think the month of the election, for three years. The public should know that all of those contractors, because of all that I said before, the purpose and the merit of that programme, all of those contractors were left to complete their contracts up to 2018, Mr. President, with no interruption.

The reforestation programme, a similar programme, designed for a different purpose. When the Government took office in 2015, all of the contractors in that programme were left in the programme, and when their contracts expired, they were left month to month and performed those duties right up to 2020 without interruption. And what is the reason for that, Mr. President? These are the people at the lowest economic ebb in our country. They should not fall victim to political gamesmanship. This talk about, you know, it is always a smokescreen being thrown up, that corruption in the CEPEP, audit, et cetera, et cetera. How does that answer the cry of the mother who has to buy schoolbooks for her children, we are approaching July/August? How does that answer that? Whether a Minister has buildings rented to the State or not, how does it answer the question that this Government has summarily dismissed 11,000 workers in this country over the last few weeks?

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: And you campaigned on, "When UNC win, everybody wins." That was a fraud. You campaigned on love. You said that once you were given the opportunity—I am sure many of those CEPEP workers probably voted

for the UNC at the last election. You have fired some of the very people who caused you to be on that side, as you keep boasting, and have us on this side, as you remind us. And therefore, when you campaign, you campaign hard because you want to convince people to give you the opportunity to govern. But when you get into office, you have to govern for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, including me.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Including every PNM Member. You are now the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. But you are still behaving as if you are in Opposition. I took great comfort, Mr. President, in listening to Sen. Maharaj. Not that he did not knock the Opposition a bit, but, you know, I am from central Trinidad and Tobago, so I know of the business. But when I listened to him, I got from him—in spite of the buff here and there for the former Government—that he had an intention to contribute to the development of Trinidad and Tobago in a holistic way. If what the Senator says comes to pass, all of us will benefit from that.

I listened to Prof. Persad, whom I have known for a long time. I only learned today that he was a foundation member of the UNC. He always, you know, he always sort of impresses me as this kind of “rel Trinbagonian” kind of person who—I did not know, I did not know that he was a foundation member of the UNC, you will forgive me for that Prof. Persad. But I listened to him and, you know, a lot of what he said I could connect with. And, of course, from “good ol’ PNM stock”, loaned to the UNC comes Sen. Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh. But when he spoke and, you know, you can get that he wants to make a good contribution. I cannot commend you for where you have landed, but certainly I can associate myself with some of what you have said.

Mr. President, as I said, in this place we have to operate with some dignity. Yesterday, my colleague asked me to return my PBR pass, and I most humbly returned the pass as requested by my colleague. I brought it here, I will leave it with the parliamentary staff. You know because—

Sen. Roberts: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Cummings: No, I returned it. I was asked to return it and I—

Sen. Roberts: [*Interruption*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Mr. President, I was asked to return the pass because I collected it two days after the general election. I do not know when the courtesy of a PBR pass, you know, has become an issue. It is only under recent times under this Government. But I was asked publicly—

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. F. Cummings: I would gladly have privately returned it to my colleague but since he publicly asked me to bring it, I want Trinidad and Tobago to know that I have complied.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Roberts: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Cummings: I have now returned the Priority Bus Route pass. But what I want to say, you know, I am just going to spend one minute to make a comment, and this has nothing to do with the integrity of Sen. The Hon. Eli Zakour. I met him, I spoke to him for the first time today, and what I am going to say has nothing to do with his integrity or anything like that.

Mr. President, I came into politics as a businessman. I have been in business for the last 30 years. I started in the market actually, selling with my mother, so I was taught to be a merchant very early in my life. Some people would like to believe otherwise, I leave that up to them and God. But I am a businessman by

profession, and I came into politics as a businessman. And so I understand that Senator is also a businessman. We might be in similar types of business as well, as one Senator tried to allude, as though there was “some mark to buss”. But when Senator—the business that my colleague referred to the Senator being involved in, one of those establishments took place in 2015, the PNM was in government.

3.10 p.m.

The second one was in 2024. The PNM was in Government. And notwithstanding that the Senator who contested against the PNM in a general election, nobody said in the PNM, that is Zakour, who is a UNC former candidate. He cannot get this, we cannot get that. He is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and therefore he is entitled as any other person, notwithstanding his political affiliation. And he is an upstanding businessman. He must be allowed to prosper in Trinidad and Tobago.

But you have people with the impression that—and somebody spoke about it today, Mr. President, I think it was Prof. Persad—notwithstanding whether governments change, as governments will change all the time. You may like to think that you will get a run like Eric Williams for 30 years, but it is not going to happen. There is going to come a time when you are going to return to this side and we are going to be on that side. And if we are seriously interested in the development of this space called Trinidad and Tobago, then there are certain things that we will not sabotage. There are certain policies we will not seek to score cheap political points on, particularly, Mr. President, the young people of this country who I have a great passion for, particularly the young people.

And I know Prof. Persad is very much involved in education. He has a history in education in this country, at UWI, NIHERST, UTT; a son of the soil. And therefore, there are certain things that we do not score points on. One of them

was mentioned by Professor, sorry, Sen. Nakhid. I am probably speaking in the future. Maybe you are going to do some further studies.

Notwithstanding, there was a programme because, you see, when you want to justify taking action to shut things down because you are now in Government, you have to give some sort of justification to the country to prevent them from coming at you for stopping progressive programmes. So there was an apprenticeship programme, two apprenticeship programmes in the Ministry that I did with the Ministry of Public Utilities. And how did those programmes come about? Discussions were held between the two Ministries and the two agencies, one WASA, one T&TEC, to develop two apprenticeship programmes, nothing new. These programmes existed before but somehow became dormant. And what was the purpose of the programmes? In the first case, the programme referred to by the Senator, a programme called FUSE was done in conjunction with T&TEC to train young persons for the job market in overhead line clearing and laying of the lines, and so forth.

Mr. President, that programme provides opportunities for employment, not just for T&TEC, because you have several other telecommunications companies in this country operating, looking for persons with the skills. You have private contractors who are contracted by T&TEC, and therefore you want to provide a pool of persons for them who at least have been trained, properly trained, by T&TEC officials. And you hear the Senator, taking a programme like that, that has impacted the lives of young people to provide them with possibilities for employability and seeking to score political points with it.

Mr. President, another programme called PIPE, similar intent, an apprenticeship programme, where young persons are being trained in pipe laying, where they can then possibly get work with WASA and if not with WASA, other

private contractors and people in that industry. A lot of research went into these areas because we were training persons so that when you complete the training, there was an avenue towards employment. It was all part of our youth policy. A plan that was put in place as to how do we create training opportunities in a rather short space of time, because you wanted to treat with an immediate problem. You have the option of leaving them to be absorbed by the criminal element or providing opportunities for them to give them an opportunity for employment, and meaningful employment outside of CEPEP or URP.

Another programme, and I heard the Minister of Agriculture, I am sorry he is not here, ill-speaking a programme called YAHP, the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme. Mr. President, the newspapers had it to say, I think it was the *Guardian* newspaper, that the Minister launches a probe into youth farming programme, asking: where are the homesteads? Now, I do not know whether the Minister did not get a proper brief from the public servants. But we spent significant time, because you see, food security is important. I see the Ministry requesting an allocation of an additional nine—how much was it? I will get the figure from my colleague, \$9 million because we all have to prioritize agriculture and the complaints about food prices and the supply of food and the use of foreign products.

This programme was designed by the public servants, with some policy direction from the Government, to treat specifically with bringing on a new generation of farmers in the country. Who could ill-speak that? It was done in conjunction with UTT, the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Professor was the President of the University at the time. I remember engaging with him on this programme. And the UTT ECIAF campus executed a two-year training programme for the young people in this homestead programme.

So one of the first areas is training and certified training. So that at the end of the first year out of UTT, they move on to a farm, a model farm, where they get that kind of training, on-the-job training, so to speak, from a master farmer. And following that, the Government would put some idle state land to use. Now it is not magic. All of these things have processes. You have to first locate the land, you have to get all the approvals, you have to get the infrastructure in, you have to build the homestead. And, therefore, the first programme, the pilot area that was selected was Chatham, because Petrotrin had this idle estate that became available.

If the Minister, who is not here with us today, but I am sure somebody can convey to him, travels down to Chatham, he would see the pilot project there, infrastructure work being done. Now we had some challenges. You know, in this country now, some people like to interrupt government work and try to gangster contractors, et cetera. We had to get the military and the police on site for that work to continue. But the programme was progressing apace.

I saw in the *Newsday* on Sunday, I cannot wave in the Chamber, but the Sunday *Newsday*, I see that they went down there, based on this first article, to talk to some of the farmers on site. And Mr. President, I would not display it, but I can read, there is one young farmer, already on his lands there on his homestead, one called Mr. Borneo, and he has a business, a seed innovation hub. This young man, coming out of this programme, has started this business where he is producing seeds for the other farmers. And his intention is to expand. As a matter of fact, he has already done it. He has expanded this business to several other Caribbean countries, providing seeds for them. And there are several other farmers who they met, male and female. I will not detain the Senate with all of them, one, Patrick Aquing, several of them already engaged in the first phase of the programme.

I would really hope, for the benefit of this 1,000 young persons, because it

was the policy then, that we would train at least 1,000 young persons, because there is an ageing farming population in the country. That these young persons will be given the opportunity, notwithstanding the change in government, Professor, as you have mentioned, notwithstanding that, but these young farmers will not become victims of the change in government and that the Government will look at this programme and continue this programme, if only for the benefit of these young people, who spent two years at UTT, many of them, and are anxiously awaiting to provide all of us with food.

But, Mr. President, I want to assure Sen. Nakhid that in his research at the youth division, notwithstanding the many young persons who in the other place, unfortunately, Mr. President, many of these young qualified persons, who manage some of these programmes—now, you see, politicians can—I really do not take personally anything Sen. Nakhid just said. I mean, you know, I would not do it, but I do not take it to heart. I can sleep comfortably in the night. And it is okay if politicians throw jabs at each other. But when we stand in the Parliament and call innocent citizens' names in a derogatory way, they have no room to defend themselves.

It pains me to listen to a contribution in the other place from someone who succeeded some of the work that I was doing, to hear the names of citizens, highly qualified, who were doing their best as young persons to contribute to this type of youth work, names being called as though they were unqualified, many of these persons, Master's degree, BSc, well-certified, all of them, every single one, and doing the work, and just to score some points, you have their names being called out as though somehow they are doing some illegal thing. I feel the pain for them, and wherever they are, I want to—you ask me to apologize? I apologize to those persons whose names were called in the other place as though they were

unqualified to do the job. Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, trained and certified, I apologize to them, on behalf of all the politicians who choose to go that route, Mr. President, because it is not fair to them.

They still have a life ahead of them. And even if the UNC Government finds—because only today I got a message, that at the place where Sen. Nakhid is now engaged, that other temporary workers who should have been—who have contracts up to September, were given letters that they must go home at the end of July. One young lady messaged me. Well, I cannot say in tears because it was a message. But surely the message was very emotional. These people have obligations, they have mortgages, they have cars to pay for. When we campaign, we campaign hard, but when the responsibility of government is thrust upon you, you have a responsibility to govern for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: And the five years will come and go and we will campaign again, and we will take our best efforts on this side to remove you from office. That is our objective. We are the PNM, we are an election machine, 70 years old in January. We exist to be in government and to keep you in opposition. So when the next five years come, we are going to do our best to get you on this side. But in the meantime, while you have been entrusted with governance, please govern for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I am not trying to be Pontius Pilate, you know. I am saying to you, the citizens demand that from you.

That special majority that you have gotten, that popular vote that you receive, some of the people that you are persecuting voted for you to be where you are. Consider that in your policymaking, that you are in fact damaging the lives of some of the very people that put you in office. And somebody sometimes has to stand up. In my own political journey, there are times when I stood up, contrary to

what might have been the popular position. It is publicly known. Somebody spoke about—I think it was Sen. Leroy Baptiste, who chastised us on this side about the closure of the border to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago during COVID. It is no secret. I was part of the Government. And what my position was on that became public, not by my hand. But it certainly was public, what my position was on that.

So sometimes, it is not only to go with the popular view within, it is only the popular view.

3.25 p.m.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Check the *Hansard* in the lower place, it was read into the record by a Member from your Bench what my position was on that matter, which did not coincide with my colleagues at the time.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Go and read the *Hansard*, do your homework. Go and read your homework. It is public on the *Hansard*.

So, Mr. President, we are here to debate the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill, 2025, and I am very grateful for the latitude that you have given me to respond to some of the matters raised on the other side and to set the record straight.

The Member, Sen. Nakhid, made a comment that many of these programmes that were conceptualized by me, he said, did not offer these persons opportunities for employment. It was either certificates of participation or certificates of completion, there was no CVQ, et cetera. Let me just correct the record, please. And I just hope that Sen. Nakhid, who I know to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, who I know to have a track record in sport in this country, will understand

that, yes, sport is critical and important, but just as important is youth development, and that is why the Government chose to set up a Ministry specific, with a specific objective to treat with youth development, not a division of the Ministry. Because usually, in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, sport is the child, and youth is the stepchild. That is why you probably got a stepchild to take care of, and came in a bit late in the Government. We were wondering whether you were going to get anything at all but, of course, finally, you are inside. So youth division, usually, is a stepchild in the Ministry, and that is why the Prime Minister set up a specific Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

And let me say to you that these programmes that you say were conceptualized by me, I take no credit for that. I do not reinvent the wheel. We may have given them catchy names as a marketing strategy. All of these programmes are programmes designed by NESAC, by MIC, by UWI, by UTT, by COSTAATT, or by YTEPP.

We spoke about Ministry of Education. In the former Government, all of these agencies fell under the Ministry of Education. So there was a relationship between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, where we utilized existing agencies that had programmes. We had consultations with different groups involving employment, the construction sector, the marine sector, et cetera, and where we found shortages or gaps, we designed programmes to suit that. So we are not just training persons. We did our research.

And Sen. Nakhid, in order to attract the young people to it—because when you look at the extension work aspect of it, a lot of the young people, although these programmes exist in these agencies I spoke about, are unaware of their existence. So to attract them, we gave some of them a name that we could market.

So that you will find, for instance, that the PLAR Programme is a programme that exists at UTT. It is not Foster Cummings' brainchild. It might be called something else there. What does the programme do? If you are skilled and you have no certification, the programme will take you, assess your capabilities, you might need some remedial inside of there, and take you towards CVQ certification.

There is a category of young persons that the UN refers to as NEET, N-E-E-T. They are neither in employment, any formal education, or any formal training programme. They just exist in society. You meet them on the block. You spoke about going into certain areas and giving out hampers. You meet a lot of young people, they are just not productive. So we focused on that category and gave them some additional attention. It is like the weaker child in the home. Some of them may not be able to go to the CVQ level, some of them left secondary school without a full certificate and some of them have literacy issues. So some of the programmes you spoke about were designed to capture that category of persons. You can take them—

Sen. Nakhid: To what end?

Sen. F. Cummings: How do you mean to what end? If you get a skill—I mean, how many labourers can a labour market employ? If you get a skill, you become a little more employable, you are more marketable and therefore, some of the programmes that you see here, do not knock them because you want to knock it. Take a deep dive into it for the young people—whenever I engage in the public space, I meet young people all the time, saying to me, “Thank you for this programme. I now have an extra hustle.” And therefore, once you give them that skill, you give them an opportunity to engage in productive behaviour and activity. That is the opportunity that you give them.

Now, many of these programmes are CVQ level, especially the ones

executed by NESC and MIC. Some of the softer skills—so we train people in barbering and you might get a certificate for that. You have some people, we train them in nail technology, I think they call it, but you know to do nails, et cetera. Those are soft skills, and you might get a certificate of participation or completion for that. But when they are finished with that, they can apply to the programme, now under Minister Leroy Baptiste, and get some aspect of a grant. The higher level, the ceiling is \$20,000 at the time, but your business might only require \$5,000 after the NEDCO people, who are all quite good I must say, do their evaluation and they give you some training in financial literacy, how to keep your books, et cetera, et cetera. You get a grant, so you are not starting off with a loan requirement.

So some of those persons—and you said, “To what end?” Not all of them will go looking for a job. Some of them will equip themselves as small businesses and get that support from the Government to start up their own, because you will never be able to provide all the jobs to everyone.

And many of those persons have accessed that programme. The last time I checked, I understand that applications for that programme exceeded 5,000 applicants. Of course, we do not have budgetary situations to treat with that, but many persons have accessed that programme and there are a lot of success stories coming out of training towards entrepreneurship. I have taken all the knocks and blows that you have, but the young people have benefited significantly from the work that was put forward by the former Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Mr. President, there is a particular programme that I want to speak about, and it is—you know, Sen. Nakhid sort of caused me to change up my

contribution a bit. And I will share with the national community—because you see, we may look for some of these things and they may disappear in time to come. There was a particular programme called A.L.L. S.E.T., Alternative Learning and Life Skills Enhancement Training. It trained 100 young persons every cycle. And what is that programme, Mr. President? It deals with an area of heavy equipment operation. This is not an area that people, usually, will walk off, leave their home and say, “I want to be a backhoe operator.” The programme existed in NESC all the time. But to market it, we put that handle on it, Mr. President.

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

Sen. F. Cummings: Oh, only? That time has flown so quickly, Mr. President, I am now warming up. The A.L.L. S.E.T. Programme is heavy equipment, is bulldozer, excavator, backhoe, dump truck, skid steer. And that programme, when they complete the programme at NESC—it is not a fly-by-night organization. That organization has been around for a very long time, very experienced. You go there, you go down to the Chaguanas where the training takes place, you meet some of the trainees, you talk to them.

When they complete there, there is a relationship and discussion with the Ministry of Transport, under the licensing department, to make sure that they get their licence for the particular equipment. And when they are finished with that, contractors—when I was there, contractors were contacting the Ministry to say, “Listen, we have a project to start. We want some of your trainees to come on and work with us.” Of course, it is an apprenticeship arrangement. You have to go out there and do the work. You have to go out and seek out the contractors.

The Ministry of Labour has a division there that does similar work. And you collaborate with the Ministry of Labour and together, you all will get the job done. You are no longer in Opposition. You are now in the Government. Forget what

you think was not—if you feel it was not 100 per cent, you take it to 100 per cent.

Sen. Nakhid: That is what we are doing.

Sen. F. Cummings: Okay, do that, but do not spend the time destroying the foundation that was laid for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. They are not going to forget you for that. This was no picture opportunity. This was serious work being done to help change the lives of young people and direct them away from a life of crime. And therefore, if you have that concern, look deeply into these programmes because it was all with good intentions.

To look at agriculture as a career opportunity, we did not know that there were so many young people interested in agriculture. Sometimes the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is only when we advertise the programmes, that we saw the number of young people coming forward to take part in these agricultural programmes, because persons had the perception, Mr. President, that agriculture is a kind of hard work that they do not want to get involved in.

Many of the farmers, their children are not going into agriculture. Their children are moving on to other professions because, obviously, a farmer—my mother was a market vendor. You think she wanted me to be a market vendor? My father worked Caroni (1975) Limited, cutting cane. You think he expected me to stay there cutting cane and not be making a contribution to what I am doing here today? Parents want the best for their children—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings:—and they may not think that they want them to continue in the vein that they were in. And now we see where new technology is making agriculture attractive to younger people. We develop programmes to attract them to that.

So that, I hold on to the point and the hope expressed by Sen. Persad, by

Sen. Maharaj, by other Senators here, Sen. Dr. Swaratsingh and others, that there comes a time and there come certain issues where some bipartisan discussion and collaboration needs to take place for the good of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr President. You have been in this for a very long time, Mr President. I congratulate you again. You have served, you have given of your time and all of us, we give of our time because we have an interest in Trinidad and Tobago. Some citizens do not understand why we will sit here for 14 hours, making, sometimes, valuable contributions.

Mr. President: Senator, you have one minute.

Sen. F. Cummings: One minute, I will wrap up now, Mr. President. But I want to say to the Government, particularly Sen. Nakhid and my former associate out of La Horquetta/Talparo, the young people of this country need not be played politics with. Let us get down to serious work and make sure that they have an opportunity for self-development and to become the best version of themselves. I thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: The Minister in the Ministry of Housing.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Housing (Sen. The Hon. Anil Roberts): Thank you, Mr. President. I want to congratulate the hon. Sen. Foster Cummings for spending six minutes trying to tell hon. Sen. David Nakhid that the programmes that he spoke about did not give certificates of participation, and was going around in a circle and admitting that those programmes, after being completed, 74,000 for three months, all the children got was a certificate of participation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: That was a good seven minutes.

Sen. Cummings: That is not true.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: I would like the PNM, please, please, “ah beggin, ah beseechin y’all”, when a situation occurred in a country where 5,000 citizens have died, stop calling it a success. Stop calling COVID-19 a success. We are two islands surrounded by pristine saltwater. No COVID infection came through our airport, not one, yet 5,000 people died. Why? Because you failed to secure the border. You shut out the whole country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Citizens could not come home. You closed down open pyre cremations, but 5,000 people died. Stop claiming it was a success. That really irks every citizen of this country. That is really unfortunate, and I beg you all to stop it.

3.40 p.m.

I am glad Sen. Foster Cummings—I am sure former principal of Fatima College, the honourable former president of TTUTA, the former Minister of Education, the hon. Anthony Garcia would love that you referred to him as young, in that youth programme.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: I am sure he was listening. Sen. Foster Cummings stood there, and I sat in amazement. There is one of two things, Sen. Cummings. I took your presentation in word for word verbatim. I do not think you were being disingenuous. I could see some passion and some heartfelt feeling about your trials and tribulations. Well, if you were not being disingenuous, then it must have been very hard to sit in a government that treated our nation’s children so badly because you sat in a Cabinet that took away laptops.

They took the cut GATE from 726 million down to 285 million. They took away computers, they took away textbooks, they took away food cards from

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

people. They took away school feeding, cut it from 76,000 by two meals per day down to 48,000. They took away pan in schools. They cut funding to UTT, COSTAATT, MIC, NESC. They closed TTHTI that we cannot even train people to work in hospitality. They took grants from the differently-abled. They took the baby milk grant, and they kept the children's hospital closed. These things must have pained you to sit in that Cabinet, in a government that hurt people like that, because if I am to take you at your word today, I would believe that you would not want to be on that side anymore.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: That you could not stand to be in that PNM. That you could not fathom to be in a government that treated people and citizens so poorly that produced and pushed a philosophy of a new society—wean yourself off the Government. So, I understand and I feel your pain hon. Sen. Foster Cummings.

Sen. Farris Al-Rawi, he stated conclusions today—it was amazing—about VMCOTT from a report that he had not seen. Quoting that the report came to conclusions that he never read. This is an amazing place to be in a Senate where people could just come here and debate anything that pop in their head.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: And then after that, he said—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Point of order, 49(2).

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—and then he said, I have heard—

Mr. President: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—he wants to clarify after that is fine, he does not have to disturb me. Then he said, if he had the report, well read it.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: 42(9).

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Yeah, not 49(2)—42(9) yes. Anyway, he also made arguments about he has heard. So while he is invoking 42(9), I want him to tell this Senate what he heard, where he heard it about forestry workers being fired and other workers being fired. What is the standard of debate in this Senate, this honourable Senate about what we heard? I heard plenty thing about the hon. Senator. You want me to come here and talk that? I will not, I will talk it outside.

The hon. Sen. Faris Al-Rawi, is really the new Adrian Cola Rienzi. I see it here today.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: A man fighting for the rights of labour, the downtrodden. He can go and stand alongside Basdeo Panday and Uriah “Buzz” Butler and all of those who were beaten and battered for the rights of the poor and downtrodden. I was inspired by his care and love as he stood in his very expensive tight suit and talked about poor people while he was in a Cabinet, recusing himself “ah hundred times”.

Sen. Nakhid: “Ah” 100 times.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: “Ah hundred times, over ah hundred times, recusing”. And here I have to hear that he was there to fight for the poor people. Well, okay.

He also, the hon. Senator, did some mathematics and I know after being—it must hurt him that someone replaced him at the Attorney General’s office who never took mathematics, who failed mathematics at O’Levels and never took the exam. But he tried to say that the United National Congress, this Government, is talking about contractors. And when he added up the contractors across the country, he reached up to about 600 or 700 because there are only 360 contractors. What he failed to tell the population and I will tell them as it is live, that every contractor has a minimum of two crews to three crews. So what the numbers are is

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

the number of teams that are deployed to work in a constituency. So when you see 12, it might be six contractors with two teams, or it might be four contractors with three teams. So, the numbers that are out there, are factual numbers about teams of human beings in the CEPEP programme.

Sen. Al-Rawi also did an amazing thing today. I now know that the PNM is divided more than a Lego set that a five-year-old finished building and throwing it on the living room floor. Because the Senator went through to defend his legal fees. He dissected the PNM's term of office the 9 ½ years. He extricated himself and started to talk about legal fees and value for money and so on, leaving his other Attorneys General in the lurch. The other one who followed him and the other one who only had a little corbeaux sweat. I could not understand that because when they went for election, I thought it was team PNM. But it looks like team PNM has disintegrated, because the people has rejected all different parts of the PNM.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Now, let me move on a bit to Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman, good name, Senator. Let me just say first and foremost. If you are talking about efficient use of taxpayers' money and you mentioned Scarborough Hospital, how beautiful it is. Say thank you, UNC—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—thank you, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, because it was Kamla Persad-Bissessar and her Government that finally finished that Scarborough Hospital where material was just disappearing to build apartments. And if GATE is good, Sen. Roberts-Radgman, then say thank you, Basdeo Panday, because it started with Dollar for Dollar.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Before that, only rich people could go to university. And if you say that the sea bridge, the PNM finally fixed the sea bridge through procurement from Ministers, whether it was purchasing a slow ferry called the Galleons Passage for a port yet to be built in Grande, Toco/Sangre Grande to go to Tobago, that slow boat to China called the Galleons Passage, \$120 million wasted by a PNM Cabinet committee, or whether it is prime ministerial and ministerial procurement of vessels from Austal and Incat, you must remember that the sea bridge collapsed and Tobago was cut off from the rest of the world in 2017 because of decisions taken by the PNM, to remove the Canadian company that was maintaining the *Express* and *Spirit* purchased by Patrick Mervyn Augustus Manning that were functioning beautifully, to replace it with a PNM contractor of a member of the board of the Port Authority, Magellan.

Then these two vessels started to break down and Tobagonians had to put their goods on a barge. When the bananas green fig went on from Trinidad by time the barge reached, is ripe plantain. If you recall that, then you would understand the torture that Tobagonians went through under PNM because I am half a Tobagonian if you do not know, I just say it proudly. You said, Senator, that this appropriation, Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 2025, shows no love for Tobago, none whatsoever. Well, I must say I agree with you. This appropriation really shows no love, no respect, no thought for Tobago. I see Sen. Dhanpaul laughing because he “kno exactly where ah goin”.

Sen. Dhanpaul: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Because this appropriation—

Sen. Dhanpaul: Is your budget.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—is the appropriation of the PNM.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Anyone who understands governance understands that when an election is called in the mid of the budgetary process on April 28 with 35 days of campaigning, these numbers, these figures, were all prepared by the previous Government, the PNM Government. So if Tobago is disrespected, that is true, because this appropriation is PNM and that is why Tobago rejected PNM in the THA, rejected them in the constituency and will continue to reject them.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Nobody lives there.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: The other part of it was the hon. Senator and others said: The PNM does not under budget. This is normal. Supplementary appropriation is normal. That is true, but you see again, former Permanent Secretary smiling. He knows where I am going because a budget done by a Ministry of Finance is done by very intelligent people, brilliant people, people with finance degrees, mathematicians, intelligent, they know, especially with recurrent expenditure, they get that nearly exact. Appropriation is really for things that could not be predicted, events that occurred. And you come out of the budget and normally you come for a little appropriation.

Maybe there was some flooding, maybe there was an emergency, maybe there were price shocks in globally, a war broke out or something and the Strait of Hormuz was closed and pressure, so you had to come for a supplementary appropriation. This PNM Government under that PNM Minister of Finance for 9½ years, created a new philosophy and theory in budgeting—underestimate, do not put all what is necessary to give the impression originally at the onset of the budget that the deficit is smaller than it will be, knowing full well that they coming here to appropriate. For example, I would not bore you with 20 examples. Mr. President, 40 minutes is a short time for me, right.

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Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Well, let me give you two examples, and the hon. former Permanent Secretary will know that, for example, Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport Drainage Division, Rental Payments of Vehicles. In 2023, you spend 93.9 million, right? But in 2024, you budget 50 million. You know full well, the vehicles did not just disappear. “Dey eh go”. You have a certain rental. You know that it is going to be closer to the 93 so, you budget 43.9 million short and then come for the appropriation, 49 million. That is under-budgeting Senator. That is games playing. That is the idea of—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—a government who knows that they got an economy in 2015 September, triple A plus rating and they shattered that rating down to triple B-minus, nearly heading to C. They even had to change rating agencies because a rating agency was going to do the truth. They would change a rating agencies and you know, rating agencies they charge fees and so on. So you get a little boost. So you then have different people were questioning, but the hon. Senator, former Minister of Finance for a little time, a little corbeaux sweat—we call that in Trinidad and Tobago. He got a corbeaux sweat. He did not even get to sit in the chair good. The other Minister, he replaced, went by public utilities and fix up a whole floor for one day, 1.3 million.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: He did not fix no floor. He was happy to sit down in whatever chair he get. It is just that he did not sit long. He just sip “ah lil” turmeric tea and next thing you know he out. However, this hon. Minister knows full well that when you are budgeting and you are moving forward, that you should understand what you are doing. And he knows that this Government here, this

appropriation that comes, for example, Head 26 Ministry of Education—School Supplies and Book Grants. These things do not change dramatically.

Every year, we know we have 18,964 children to 19,200 and something taking SEA and that is how we move. Our population statistics have not been—especially since Venezuelan children were not really matriculated and so on. There is no real change. So budgeting for school supplies should be quite simple, a simple calculation. But in 2023, they spent nil—I do not know how Minister Cummings was in the Government, how could you spend nil on children's school supplies and book grant? That must have hurt you. You must have been arguing in that Cabinet. Come on. Come on Cabinet, we must stop renting buildings from our colleagues and give children books. That is what Minister Cummings must have been saying.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

3.55 p.m.

In 2024, nil. In 2024, they came to the midterm, after allocating nil, “dey come to ask for \$20 million, and in 2025, dey budget nil, but come halfway to ask for de 20.” Madam Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman, do you understand now, that that previous government of which you did not know much about used to do exactly what I am telling you? They under-budgeted to give a political picture that everything was okay. Everything was rosy. The country was not crashing. The economy was not crashing. The deficit was manageable, and that they would doing well, when they were mamaguying the population right through, decimating out economy and sucking the Treasury empty.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition said—and it is echoed here by some PNM Members—I do not know which PNM. PNM A, B, C or D. But all of them put together, the whole alphabet “cyar” even fill City Hall.

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Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Hon. Senators: [*Laughing*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: So, the Leader of the Opposition said, “There was no economic crash.” But that is the leader of wimpy, cowardly, conflicted, confused, chaotic and corrupt PNM. Because to say that there was no economic crash—if you really live here in Trinidad and Tobago, if you read the reports from the Central Bank, if you read the economic bulletins and study it, you will have to understand that this PNM did not take us into recession you know. They took us into a depression over the last nine and a half—and I am not talking about depression that you all still feeling. That you all are feeling from April 28. “You doh want to come out”. Before you dress up you had to psych up yourself to walk outside in the hot sun. I am not talking about that kind of depression. I am talking about an economic depression—

Hon. Senator: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—which some people have defined as a 10 to 20 per cent decline in your gross domestic product.

Sen. Swaratsingh: Seven and a half. Seventeen and a half.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Seventeen and a half. Right. Well when you calculate—thank you.

Sen. Swaratsingh: Over the last 10 years.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Over the last 10 years of PNM, our economy has shrunk by 17.89 per cent, putting us into a depression. The Leader of the Opposition comes to say “in 2024, we got two quarters of growth.” “If you have ah big balloon like this and you shrink it down to this size and then you pump it up poof poof and it reach here.”

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: That does not mean you have got growth.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Hon. Senators: [*Laughing*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: And it is unbelievable. Let me now tell you—let me give you some figures to show, that it was not only a crash. It is a crash, bury depression. When you talk about it, I will give you some definitions for the population out there. A depression involves a dramatic decrease in a country's gross domestic product. Its factors are high unemployment. Job losses are widespread and sustained, leading to high unemployment rates; reduced consumer spending.

People have less money to spend, due to job losses and income declines further impacting the economy; low investment. Business reduces—halted investment due to uncertainty and lack of demand. Unlike a recession, a depression can last for years and requires significant government intervention to recover.

The Minister of Trade will let you know that for four years straight we have had negative foreign direct investment. That means people money running away from Trinidad and Tobago, as opposed to coming here to invest. Let me give you some little statistics—because we come here and—Adrian Cola Rienzi reinvented—talking about CEPEP workers. There is an audit going on. Programmes and employment will come. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, does not talk. She believes in labour, when she was Prime Minister before—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: You know statistics and facts are hard things. When Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia was Prime Minister before—the PNM, previously under Patrick Manning—who we saw a little version of him here today—you know not with the facts and so on, but with the movements and the—I, I, I thought I was watching a movie. But they went through a boom, as the hon. Minister of Labour said. In 2004/2005, prices went up 13.89 per MMBtu. Oil

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

price went up to \$145 a barrel, until 2008, and that PNM Government was telling the citizens to “tighten dey belt”. But this situation cannot continue. Because when Kamla Persad-Bissessar came in with lower revenues than 2004 to 2007 and a half, she completed 143 wage negotiations. I see you saying no. But it is absolutely true. Go and check it.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: And in 2001, 18/18, to 2010, they did no negotiation with any labour union. Hilton workers, when we came in 2012 and 2013, were working on 2003 salary. All of this was handled by Kamla Persad-Bissessar. When the PNM came back now, their big thing was—“oh my goodness, the wage bill to pay human beings was \$5 billion.” What a tragedy. It hurt the PNM to take money to pay workers. But today everything is worker, worker, worker. The people do not believe you. They have seen your actions.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: They know who you are and they will not be fooled. So, let me give you some little statistics here. Labour force participation rate for example. Right. In 2014, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, 61.9 per cent. In 2015, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for eight months, and then a little PNM from September, 60.6. Then the PNM really took control of the economy now. Let us see what happened to labour force participation.

In 2017, 59.2; 2018, 59.1; 2019, 57.3; 2020, 55.9; 2021, 54.8; COVID—that was COVID now, 55.9; 2021, 54.8; 2022, 55.1. But, the problem is, they all talk about COVID. You know something? These statistics show that PNM by itself worse than COVID. Because the drop under PNM between 2015 to 2019 was a drop of minus 5 per cent in labour force participation rate. During the COVID

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

pandemic, when things shut down, the labour force participation rate only dropped by negative 2.3 per cent. “PNM worse than COVID.”

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: “Dey say is no crash. No crash. No economic crash. Everything good.” Well, let us check again. Let us check some CSO’s statistics. “Ah shoulda bring meh glasses, dis thing print small.”

Hon. Senator: Here.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Right. The GDP from 2012—2012 constant indicators, right—2012 constant prices. To show an overall drop in the GDP at 2012 constant prices, from 2015 to 2023, a drop from 187 billion in 2014, overall.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: You cannot use constant prices. You do not want to—okay I would not use constant prices. You do not want to use constant prices? So we did not have a crash? The economy did not go down by 17.8 per cent? “Well, leh meh use energy”. Are we not an energy and energy industries and energy economy?—that PNM says, “no matter what, no matter how bright we are, we cannot diversify.” Even though, every time the PNM comes out of office, a government starts to take us along the continuum of diversification and then poof, the magic dragon of blight. The PNM returns and carries us right back down where we were heading.

So, let me try, energy then. Because energy is very important. In 2015, oil production, barrels per day 78,600. Right. In 2023, 53,726; a drop by the PNM of 31 per cent. Natural gas production, BCF per day, 2015—just under UNC, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia; 3.8 Bcf per day. PNM after a long run, 2.6 BCF, billions of cubic feet that is “eh”. That is a huge drop.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

LNG production, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister, Siparia, 28.9 million cubic metres per year. PNM, half. A drop of 42 per cent; 17.5, ammonium, methanol, drilling activity, rig days—which is work. You would know that. Money, taxation, into the coffers, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar, 2,849 rig days. Under the PNM in 2023, 1,227. “If you doh call that ah crash, I doh know what to call it again.” We have to create it a new adjective for you and the PNM.

Jobs in the energy sector. There are jobs—persons with jobs—because we have—everything here is CEPEP—“this is real jobs”. This job with \$30,000 a month, \$35,000 a month, \$20,000 a month—“this is real high paying jobs”. Let us see what the PNM did with them high paying jobs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia, 2015, 20,500 high paying energy sector jobs. In 2023 PNM, 10,400.

Sen. Nakhid: Half.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Half gone home, at high paying jobs. But we have a landlord here—coming here today to tell us that he “is champion” of CEPEP workers.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: After they force them into a maxi taxi, to go and hear a man who they selected to be Prime Minister bore them to death in a meeting. “Dat is what dem doing.”

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: “And telling me bout dey love people.” Anybody who could force somebody to listen to a PNM meeting could only be very—bordering on criminal. That is mischief. That is wickedness to do people that.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: “But we warn them inno. Mr. President, we warn them, inno. I doh like to do dis inno know, but we had to tell them, because you— ah cyar bring you in the debate, so I had to use mehself, because we warn them. This was in 2024. The 19th of February, we were debating”—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Yes. A \$10 billion increase in the overdraft, loan limit. Because, the Minister of Finance said, “well ah just want to increase this, we eh spending it, we not using it, but ah just want to increase the limit right”. That is why the hon. Member—Sen. Dhanpaul, could smile, because he came here earlier in this week, was asking questions of the Minister in Ministry of Finance, about May and so on, what was the deficit. Nobody knows the deficit better than the “corbeaux sweat” Minister of Finance who was there. He budgeted. He knew it. He knew the numbers. He knows how much we had to borrow in order to keep the economy afloat, because he crashed it.

Hon. Senator: [*Laughing*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: He crash or—“Oh, yuh see what is going on.”

Hon. Senator: [*Laughing*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: He extricate himself. Sorry, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: He did not crash it. His team crash it. You see what going on here today. “Everybody taking out dey self.”

Sen. Nakhid: “Yeah boy.”

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: The former Attorney General say “well not me nah, when I was they, I bring value for money”

Hon. Senators: [*Laughing*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Now with the “corbeaux sweat” Minister of Finance say “I did not crash it, it was the one before me.”

Sen. Swaratsingh: It was not me. It was not me.

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

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: “Oh Gawddd. Well yes. Well boy let me”—Mr. President, let me stay focus, time running.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: And we are told—we are talking about deficits, and we warned you. And the PNM policy of collapse, right? That is where she spent the money—talking about—they always want to know where Kamla Persad-Bissessar, spend the money. They like to come and make up fantasy about this Government going to go to the IMF and so on. The only reason in nine and a half years that they, the PNM, did not go and borrow money from the IMF, was that the former Prime Minister and the People’s Partnership Government left so much money in reserve.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: So much money in the Heritage and Stabalisation—such as high credit rating that they could borrow, they could dip in the Heritage and Stabalisation and they could fund, through domestic and international markets, because of Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: If she had not left the economy so healthy, they would have been in the IMF already, because they were talking about IMF. The PNM implemented IMF prescriptions from since 2017. What are some of those prescriptions? Cut public sector wage bill; contract workers were sent home; 700 from—and 20 from TSTT; 300 IT workers from the Ministry of Education; eTeck

shut down; this one cut here; did not renew; cut OJT, cut, programmes; 75 sport development officers sent home.

4.10 p.m.

Then you know what the PNM said? “Well, we did not send home anyone on the establishment, therefore, we did not send home anybody.” That is illogical and wrong. They fired more people than the Great Depression in 1933.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:

“And when you and the PNM could come and talk...”

—I am quoting for myself, unfortunately, Mr. President. I would have preferred to use you, but I cannot bring you into the debate:

“...today...”—they—“...admitted...in 2022...”—that—“...the deficit was the largest in...history of not only Trinidad and Tobago but the Caribbean at \$17 b-b-billion. The truth drop out his mouth today...”

—not yours, the former Minister of Finance. You were in England eating scones and sipping tea.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:

“...global shocks and COVID-19...all of those things should be dealt with in the budgetary process. You do not just put some numbers together...”

—you see, hon. Sen. Roberts, if you pay attention, you see, you could learn from your colleague, you know. We were telling them that they were manufacturing budgets, bringing fake numbers, playing games, and then coming for supplementary appropriation for recurrent expenditure and things that should have been calculated previously. We were telling them that, so I am just showing them that we are not making this up now.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:

“You have to use your brain...”

—no, no, of course, there will be, but it will not be a mid-year supplemental appropriation in your vein. We will not underbudget on purpose to come back here and do that.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: We will budget properly, and when we come, if we come, it would be for new programmes, for instances that were not predicted before, natural disaster, assistance and so on. It will not be for, “Ah have 23 employees at \$13,000, ah need X amount, buh ah budget half X, and then come halfway for de next half.” It will not be that. That is PNM “mamagism”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:

“...where there are alternate revenue sources and create a budget that makes sense. Peg your budget on somewhere that you can believe.

But when this Minister...”

—not you, the former Minister, Member for Diego Martin North/East:

“...said, that he needed a crystal ball to know that the prices of oil and gas would have gone below where he pegged the budget. He did not need...”—any—“...crystal ball. All ‘yuh ha to do’ was listen to Wade Mark, listen to Sen. Roberts over on this side, when he budgeted at \$91 per barrel and the price was up at \$92 per barrel.”

That brings me to another point, every Minister in the history of Trinidad and Tobago would always leave a gap, a buffer. So when the intelligent people in the Ministry predict oil and gas prices, they will budget—if they feel it is going to

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

stay up at \$85, they will budget somewhere at \$65, \$70, but not this PNM. This PNM “crennah”. You see, when you budget properly, anything 10 per cent above—any time you budget and it goes 10 per cent above what you pegged your budget at, that has to go into the savings for children. “PNM doh want de children ha no savings”. They wanted to spend out every cent because they had to have recusals, they had to build carparks, they had to build useless buildings for health facility without medicine, they had to open a hospital that did not even have gypsum. They fixed up one floor. That is what the PNM had to do.

That is not fiscal responsibility, that is corruption, and that has decimated our economy.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Now, I am going to talk a little bit about some fiscal responsibility here.

Mr. President: Hon. Senator, you have six more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: “Wooo”. I will have to talk fast about it. In my hands here, I hold something that epitomizes what the PNM has done nearly in every Ministry across the board. I have here, a PNM magic potion that a contract that was tendered and the winning bid price was \$3.6 million, it ballooned over a period of seven years, from \$3.6 million to \$35 million. The tender only lasted a year, but the contract was awarded and continued and varied and upgraded for seven years without going back to tender. The project changed so much, it moved from \$3.6 million to \$35 million, but the PNM said, “You won the tender at 3.6, you go ahead.”

Furthermore, it was—let me tell you all what it was. For the Bon Air West Wastewater Treatment Plant, it was budgeted for a certain flow, approximately 1,700 cubic metres per day. While the time wasted and went, and this contractor—

I do not know who is CME, but the Attorney General will find out. As years went on, the scope was then increased, not by the HDC, you know, but by the contractor himself. So imagine a contractor, who has not done the work yet, has not been paid, he won a tender, but the tender period passed. They said that the tender would be valid till January 2018. He then said, “Well, listen nah, de scope, allyuh build some more house there. We have to increase this. Ah would give you all three options.” WASA then comes in—and you would see what constituency this is, eh, Bon Air West, “so allyuh know who to ask, and he not really marvelous, but ask him”.

WASA says that they did testing, and the maximum flow per day is 2,817 cubic metres. So, they asked the same contractor who tendered previously, they said, “Listen, well, this gone up like this.” The contractor then tells the HDC, “Well, WASA say maximum flow is 28-something. I guh give yuh ah project for 3,500 cubic meters per day, and I give yuh ah cost of \$19 million.”

So the contractor is now giving the HDC, under the PNM, the contracted price of \$19 million. You know what the HDC, under this current Managing Director, did? “Well, we see your price, \$19 million, we raise it 10, and we will pay you \$29 million, plus the \$35 million from before, the \$3.5 million, to give you a total award of \$35 million.” It is all here documented, word for word, of PNM fiscal responsibility, you call that, fiscal conservatism, and on top of that, with no kind of concept of propriety, righteousness, value for money.

If a project does not get off the ground, one would suggest, and the procurement rules would suggest, you cancel that, you do a new scope of works and you tender again, and everybody competes. That is normal, but not under PNM. CME must be somebody—“me eh know who is CME”. The police will find out who is CME. But CME won a contract in 2018 for \$3.6 million and ended

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts (cont'd)

up—right now, this Government had to pay some 34—they are paid \$9 million, they have \$24 million more to pay, for what? We do not know, but, of course, the engineers will be sent, a report will be done on what work was done, what was not done, and those who have to pay will pay because—

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

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: One minute. It reminds me of PNM in 2009. The Hasely Crawford Stadium's roof, they bid for a certain size of roof, and they bid a certain price, and then miraculously, the Hasely Crawford Stadium's roof grew and the contractor raised the bid, and the Sport Company under the PNM, "dem" paid it.

Here it is that the flow of water, WASA is saying, is 2,900 maximum—the average is 2,200 cubic metres per day—but a contractor, who won a contract way back in 2018, is saying in 2024, "We will build a flow system for 3,500 cubic metres." Corruption, PNM style. This is why we are here and you will remain here. Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Browne.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Amery Browne: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for recognizing me and affording the opportunity to participate in this debate, which has been going on for some time, for several days, with numerous participants from the Government side, the Opposition Bench, and, to my recollection, one contributor from the Bench of independent voices.

Mr. President, in the last week, we have come together as a Senate and treated with a number of important issues of law. There were points during that period when there was a sense of genuine collaboration, both on the Floor and in

the committee stage. But in this debate, as would have been predictable, as generally is the history of these budget debates, appropriation debates, we moved a bit from law to politics, in the most vernacular use of the word “politics”, where there have been a lot of exchanges, principally from the Government side, some from other speakers, which were really, purely political in nature, a lot of the use of the names of political parties, the names of individuals, and accusations just flying, left, right, and centre. I am tempted to be pleased that the school children who were with us during this session, were with us during the examinations of the law and not for these political presentations—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—particularly the last two from the Government side, Senators David Nakhid, who is Minister in the Ministry of Sport—

The Clerk: Parliamentary Secretary.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Thank you for the correction—Parliamentary Secretary, and Minister in the Ministry with responsibility for Housing, Sen. The Hon. Anil Roberts.

But, Mr. President, before I get into some rebuttal points, I just want to say that I listened to all of the contributions and it is apparent to me, and to a number of others observers, that this Government is suffering from a high degree of newness to office in Trinidad and Tobago.

Very often—and I have been a part of this type of debate on many occasions—the admonition to Government presenters is to use the opportunity to present your plans and programmes and vision for your sector. But, Mr. President, I heard precious little of that, with just a few exceptional examples. In the main, the Government has been speaking in this debate as though they are still the Opposition party in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: I know that is a point that has not escaped many observers. It is almost as if they are still campaigning for the 2025 general election, which has already been decided and determined.

They are now seated on the north side of the aisle, we are seated on the south side of the aisle, Mr. President, and we recognize we this. We embrace the democracy, but we are comforted by their history of never lasting more than five years in the seat of governance in this country—

Hon. Senator: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—any one period of time, and our history in the People's National Movement of always, without exception, returning to government at the soonest possible electoral opportunity. That is the history that we share with respect to the politics of Trinidad and Tobago, and there is no reason to believe that this case will be any different. So that is why I said before and I will say it again, by the year 2030, or before, there will be an exchange of positions once again.

Mr. President, it appear that some of the contributors on the Government side were genuinely unprepared for that type of presentation to give the population, who many would have recently voted for them, installed them into office with high hopes—well, with hopes and expectations of something better, more lofty, more connected to the priorities of ordinary people, and would have been listening in this debate for elements of a vision, a governmental vision for the country. We did not hear much of that at all.

4.25 p.m.

They would have been listening for elements of specific plans and the programmes in key sectors, which they would have complained about when they

were in Opposition. But we did not hear any of that during the course of this debate. I wonder what the observers in the national space, and even our Independent Senators, who, by and large, have been spectators in this exchange, would be thinking about what is in store in the politics of this country over the next five years. So, there was a lot of rhetoric and a lot of what I would diplomatically describe as sloganism. The message to colleagues in the Government is that sloganism is not a substitute for vision. Offering the country sloganism is not a substitute for offering a vision for Trinidad and Tobago. So, let us see how far they get with that.

In contrast, every contributor from the People's National Movement Bench has spoken calmly, with decorum, and with dignity, clearly connected to strong PNM educational backgrounds, very enlightened, and all products, not just of a laptop, but of a legacy of the People's National Movement's development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: I heard several references, including the last presenter Minister in the Ministry with responsibility for housing, of “the economy crash”. We are in a crashed economy, et cetera, probably laying the foundation for excuses a little further down the road. But, again, speaking with the same negativity as they did when they were in Opposition, not recognizing that now in Government, when a Minister speaks the words have a different weight, a different meaning and impact. And in a sense, they are perpetrating a myth, but the myth does more damage when they are in Government. So, it really is a paradox, where now they are the custodians of the economy and are still—it is like a cognitive echo—repeating those damaging myths that the economy is crashed, and basically, continuing to do damage to the economy. It is almost a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Every time those references are made, they find their way into reports, sometimes newspaper articles, and sometimes the Diplomatic Corps would compile reports for their capitals. So, there is a migration of that folly to high levels in other capitals, sometimes capitals that might wish to do business with Trinidad and Tobago. I was very heartened by some of the comments of the Minister with the responsibility for trade, investment and tourism. I got it correct. I am glad to hear those potentials, but that trajectory is not strengthened, in fact, it is rather weakened when we perpetrate those very negative and untrue descriptions of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Sen. Dhanpaul took great pains during his initial response to lay out the truthful position of our national economy. If anything the Government could learn from this exchange, it would probably be to print the *Hansard* of Sen. Dhanpaul's contribution and start to borrow some of the truthful references to our national economy. It would serve us all in good stead.

So, they have been sounding a lot as if they are still in Opposition, still campaigning for a general election that has already been decided, and did not seem to take cognizance that there is nothing new about an appropriation Bill, Mr. President, and certainly nothing new about a supplemental appropriation Bill to make adjustment to the appropriation Act. That is part and parcel of the business of these Chambers, it has happened year, after year, after year, and as Sen. Dhanpaul indicated during some informal exchanges across the Floor, will happen next year and the year after that and then the year after that. So, to posit this as something unusual and the fact that we are here is an indictment on the other side, is just empty political noise with no merit or value whatsoever. So, give your plans, give your vision. This was an opportunity that has escaped the Government. It is my hope that during the actual budget debate in a few months, they may, by then, be in a position to offer the citizens something a little more enlightening.

Speaking of enlightenment, I want to share a few comments in response to the Minister with responsibility for tertiary education, who we have not heard much from before today. I was very pleased to hear him speak at some length on his sector. He was one of the Government presenters who attempted to give some examples of plans and was not as pejorative in some of his utterances. But, I heard him maybe offering something to his cheering section, make reference to—well, he offered a claim that there was—*[Laughs]* oh boy—intellectual bankruptcy in the tertiary education sector under the PNM, if I heard the term correctly. He is smiling. He is not shaking his head. Mr. President, I am speaking to you, intellectual bankruptcy in the tertiary education sector under the PNM. Mr. President, that descriptive is really bad news for him, the hon. Senator, because his good brain was a key part of that sector under the People's National Movement—

Hon. Senators: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Senator: As he professed and admitted to.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—as the President of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, further evidence of our broad national embrace and recognition of talent. For him now to turn around and in—

Hon. Senator: Deprecate.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—yeah—offer such a negative commentary on the intellectual capacity of a sector that he was a key part of, was really an unfortunate choice on his behalf. Rather than use the opportunity to in any way to denigrate the Senator, I would say that he was actually wrong, and his good brain was a part of a great sector under the People's National Movement.

Hon. Senators: *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: And I actually thank him for his service in that regard.

The Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development is now

becoming a veteran speaker in this Senate already. I think he has spoken on every matter that has arisen. I see he is—I would not refer to you, Mr. President—but it is good. We have another trade unionist who is rising in the ranks of the parliamentary system of Trinidad and Tobago. But, again, after offering some useful comments for our consideration, he could not help but yield to the temptation, maybe playing to the desk pounding section to say that, “We are in a good place today. We are in a good place today with the UNC.”

Mr. President, if you open any newspaper in Trinidad and Tobago, it would really cause you to question that characterization of the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development. So, he may be speaking on behalf of himself and colleagues who have recently been elevated to ministerial roles and parliamentary secretarial roles, many for the first time in their lives. Some of them speak as if they still cannot believe that they are in those roles, but fair enough. He may be speaking on their behalf. But for many of the ordinary citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, the wiser ones would expect some time before detectable changes in their circumstance, whether for better or for worse.

But many—let us face it—who would have voted would have had an expectation that, as we stand here on the 1st of July, their lives in some form or fashion. But, I can say without fear of contradiction that certainly, the 11,000 CEPEP workers who abruptly, without notice or a landing pad, or a safety net have found themselves on the breadline, some of them after having voted for this very Government, they are not in a good place today. I can say on behalf of the TTRA staff who have now been negatively affected by the decisions of this Government, they are not in a good place today. I can say on behalf of the reforestation workers, again, finding themselves and their families on the breadline, notwithstanding the pro-worker rhetoric, they are not in a good place today. I can say on behalf of the

many public servants who were expecting as a priority of this Government in short order, first order of business, to benefit from a magical 10 per cent improvement in their remuneration and circumstances, they are not in a good place today. And for many of them, the reality is already sinking in that that was just an election gimmick, designed to extract a vote out of them and the Government has already moved on.

For those who thought the potholes, there would be some programme to fill potholes as some kind of priority action, because that was an election issue, their circumstances have not changed either. That affects all of us. And, of course, the RHA workers, another example, not in a good place today. And of course, the citizens of this country who would have been paying attention to the pronouncements of this Government, who would have been listening to this debate, anticipating in the Senate that there would be due reflection on the number one priority of our citizens maybe for years now, the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago, those citizens are not in a good place today.

If you compile the quantum of reflection from the Government on this priority matter of our citizens, in this supplemental appropriation exchange, it was absolutely nothing at all. That speaks to an early disconnection by a new Government with the priorities of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. How many meetings of the National Security Council has this Government convened? The answer is possibly, none. How many meetings on crime has the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago presided over, convened to treat with this national priority?

So, just because an election has occurred and individuals have been elevated to offices with personal staff and the other benefits, some appear to not have received some of their benefits as yet, but I see that earnest efforts are being made to address that, the question is, for the ordinary citizens, are their priorities,

particularly, with respect to violent crime being reflected in what the Government is saying to them today? My position is that those priorities are not being reflected. So, there is a lot of empty political reportage, rhetoric, a fair degree of personal attacks, but this Opposition is not afraid of them or anything that they might wish to say. We will always respond with the level that we believe this Senate deserves. Sen. Foster Cummings gave a very good example of that, mischaracterized as a Patrick Manning part two by one of the preceding speakers. But I would not characterize the contribution of Sen. Cummings as part two of any former legacy, but really part one of a new great legacy—.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—in the politics of Trinidad and Tobago. So, Mr. President, I want to move on a little bit.

Hon. Senators: [*Cross talk*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—on the issue, you know, in—

Hon. Senators: [*Continued cross talk*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—unfortunately using—not unfortunately—Mr. President, it is difficult to concentrate when a conversation is taking place. So—.

Mr. President: I agree.

4.40 p.m.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: So, Mr. President, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development again, his thing about, we are in a good place. As we were here contributing to this debate, I was sent a piece of correspondence under the letterhead of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. This letter—I will not wave it, but I will refer to it—is addressed to all regional managers, heads of departments and all members of staff of the Unemployment Relief Programme, from the Deputy

Programme Manager of Administration. Dated, July 1st 2025, under the subject:

“Late payment of monthly paid salaries”

Again, in reflection of the dilemma presented in this debate, the personal dilemma presented by the Leader of Government Business, he is struggling to get his salary. It is one of the shortest letters I have ever seen from a Government department. One sentence, so I am quoting now:

“With reference to the subject at captioned, please note salaries for all monthly paid staff of the Unemployment Relief Programme would be late.

Thank you in advance for your understanding.

Respectfully.”

And signed. So, today we have started a new month in July. All of these workers have now received this one line without explanation, without comfort, without remorse, without any banker calling and intervening. This is not from the bank, this is from the employer, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. And I dare say, in addition to all the other categories, we in the Opposition have referred to in this debate, we have to add these unfortunate workers who do not know when they would be able to put a bag of groceries on their table or the payment for whatever obligations they and their family members may have.

So when we speak about connection to the priorities of the citizens, these are some of the things we are speaking about. Not to throw the Government into depression or make them feel bad about the first few months of their service, but to let them know that there is an Opposition that is awake and alive in Trinidad and Tobago, however, they might want to mischaracterize us, and we will hold them to account. We will be a voice, the eyes and ears of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and where appropriate, in the right manner, we will bring these issues

right here to the Parliament.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: And there is nothing they can do about it but respond and react, hopefully to the benefit of the citizens.

So, as we are on, a brief mention of the Leader of Government Business, who gave his—I think it was his maiden contribution in this particular debate. It was brief, as is his sovereign right to determine the duration of his contribution. But the good Senator used much of his time, not to give an account of his ministerial portfolio—because he is a Minister in a very important Ministry. There have been questions as to what aspect of that Ministry falls under the Senator's direct responsibility, what aspects of the Office of the Prime Minister the Senator might be in a position to report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to account for, to present with respect to plans future allocation, what we might expect in the upcoming budget, the next fiscal year. Unfortunately, we were treated to none of that, Mr. President. What we received during much of that time was a detailed recounting of the Senator's personal experience with not getting his salary on time; and I always try to be charitable in my reflection. So I was anticipating at the end of that recounting there would be some grand point to be made. "This has happened and therefore I will be intervening with this other category because I now know how it is." I did not hear that connection and it was not because he ran out of time. So, up to now, I do not know what the point was that was being made, except—

Sen. John-Bates: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Cummings: "Ah want meh money"

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: I want my money now. [*Senator laughs*] He did not get his pay. But again, I am speaking about a maiden, a first contribution, so I do not want

to be uncharitable. What I would say, Mr. President—

Sen. Allahar: Second.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Second. So right, number two. What I would say is that I can empathize. And many of us, when you are in the public service or treating with the public service from time to time—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: 4,700 URP.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Exactly. You would have those experiences, but you have to put that, Mr. President, against the lived reality of many ordinary people who do not have a Permanent Secretary to react and respond to, who do not have drivers and personal assistants to assist with filing or preparing a letter and who, by and large, are left on their own to face letters of delay, to face letters of termination, to face circumstances that the Government has not been speaking to at all, has not been addressing. Even with respect to the Minister of Labour, they are basically left to speculate about their future and that is not what any Government is elected to do, especially in the first few months. So I would not dwell any further on that contribution except to say that I do feel a sense of empathy with the plight and maybe that is part of the newness as well and once the bank settles with respect to the new circumstance of the Senator, I am confident that things will flow properly from there.

Mr. President, one of the lessons coming out of that though is, “who knows it feels it.” And sometimes you have to live an experience to understand the circumstances of others. We had a reflection from Sen. Janelle John-Bates of her experience in the public health sector of Trinidad and Tobago and I would say confidentially that unless you are a participant or your spouse is a participant in the public antenatal service in Trinidad and Tobago you would not really understand what the experience is. And unless your child is born on the labour ward of a

general hospital in Trinidad and Tobago in the public health service, as some of us can attest to, you would not really know what that experience entails. Who knows it, feels it. And, Mr. President, unless you experience discomfort or disquiet or a lack of a salary or speculation about your future as a citizen of this country, your future, your ability to put bread on the table for your family. Who knows it, feels it.

So, Mr. President, we find ourselves in Opposition and right now we are experiencing some of the challenges that politicians experience when in—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Opposition

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—Opposition. So yes, who knows it feels. And sometimes the Government says it as a kind of boast, you know, there is reason you are on the other side. Yes, Mr. President, we are aware of that. But what we are committed to is to take our medicine, to learn our lessons, to build and to come back stronger and better than ever before. To connect fully and fulsomely with the priorities of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure that those priorities are reflected in everything that we do and say and at the next electoral opportunity, we have every confidence that we will be the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: And some who are in the Government would be in the Opposition. Some of them were not even in Opposition before you know, you are aware of that. Some of them were not even in Opposition. But as—anyway I will treat with those matters a little further.

Should I go on to Sen. Nakhid? Yeah. I do not know. It might be too much to expect anything resembling a senatorial tone. It might be too much to expect. But if you are listening for a word on policy toward the youth, or sport in general or a World Cup qualifying campaign to come or any reflection on the state of sport

in Trinidad and Tobago, what we did hear is a comment about UK Visas. I suspect—not related to Bill, but the wide course of these debates may be understandable. But the response to that, Mr. President, is that in the public record on the 13th of May 2025, the now Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, who, yes, probably knows he is the Minister and has no competition for who is the Minister. On the 13th of May 2025, that Minister is reported in all of the daily newspapers self-identifying as having found a solution.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Yeah, former High Commissioner—having found a solution to the UK Visa issue.

Mr. President, it is now the 1st of July. The Minister had said “tomorrow”. On that day, he had said, “Tomorrow I am going to Cabinet with the solution to get it approved.” And here we go. Mr. President, since then, citizens continue to contact current office holders and former office holders with queries and questions. Has the solution been in place? Do I still have to pay for a visa? Do I still have to make an appointment? The media has been asking questions. The talk shows have been asking questions. Do you know how much we have heard from the Minister on that issue as raised by a Senator in this debate? Not one single word. Not even to say I was wrong. I set up some people. I set up myself and there is no solution forthcoming. Or at least, none in the immediate period and which should have been the reference, as we had said before the election, there is a commitment on the UK Government side to review this matter during the course of 2025. So maybe we would file all of that under newness, but I did not think it was wise of the Government to raise that matter in this debate in light of what has transpired since then.

So, Mr. President, if we wanted to talk about the foreign policy of Trinidad

and Tobago as raised, there is a lot that we could say, but I wonder if we should go down that road. There is quite a lot that we should say. But—

Mr. President: Six more minutes.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Thank you. Unusually there was a decision on the Government side to reach back into question time and to try to—I think because they were uncomfortable with the answer as presented by the Leader of Government Business—to try to tidy up some of that with respect to this Government's decision not to in-person participate in a meeting of the COFCOR, to do it via video conference. But, Mr. President, that speaks to a bigger problem, which is the general disconnection of this UNC Government from the Caribbean community at this time. That is being reflected upon and is causing a great consternation and the decision not to send a new Minister on behalf of a new Government to the first possible meeting of COFCOR, which is the Council for Foreign and Community Relations, however, you want to couch it. It is not a good decision and not taken as a good sign by our CARICOM counterparts. So, I hope the Government will think again. Coming out of COVID there were a lot of deliberations within CARICOM as to, should we remain virtual, should we have hybrid, should we revert to in-person. And the position of Trinidad and Tobago along with the majority of other member states is that there are too many benefits to be derived from sitting with your colleagues as opposed to on a video call, particularly when there are issues.

4.55 p.m.

I see the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is now engaging in a very unfortunate exchange with the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines; really bad idea, Mr. President, that will have consequences, over trite matters which should trigger a more diplomatic response. But mistakes are being made

and the Government will be advised to think, again, along those lines. And if the Minister had participated in person, we may have avoided that unfortunate exchange with Prime Minister Gaston Browne of Antigua and Barbuda, and they have been several, so far, with respect to missteps. They raised the issue of foreign policy, Mr. President. We did not on this side. So those are some of the observations that we will have to share.

The disadvantage of going down that road, “Oh, we are just going to save money and we are doing it via video conference,” the result at the end of the day, a founding member of CARICOM, this proud national, always frontal in our leadership, during every administration thus far, is now relegated to not troubling the record—because the record is publicly available of these meetings—not one word, not one contribution from the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs. Are we to assume he was behind the computer or camera participating, or was it just on? Not a single intervention. So that puts those questions and the responses into proper context. So, Mr. President, we are not on the position of “bad talking” Trinidad and Tobago, whether we are in office or we are out of office, because we are patriots of this nation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: So we will always seek the good interest—what you are finding today is we continue to say good about this nation. And ironically, the Government, echoing their words while in Opposition, are still “bad talking” the country and some of the sectors that they are now responsible for. It is absolutely—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—amazing, Mr. President. Mr. President, they had their time to talk and they were undisturbed. They were undisturbed. So, Mr. President,

unlike them, we do not wish Trinidad and Tobago bad when we are not in office. We wish the best for this country.

As I began, there were lots of debate and exchange, mainly of a political nature, and maybe afterwards, at the next sitting, we will return to the examination of law. So the message to the Government, you are now in office. You are no longer in Opposition, please act like it. Offer some plans and programmes and a vision to solve the real challenges facing the people of this country. The foreign exchange challenge is real. We heard no solution being offered. The crime challenge is real. They did not even reference it during the course of this debate.

Our cross-border interests—I heard someone starting to talk about energy, and then what happened? Those cross-border interests are real; a real challenge. We want to hear some solutions. The condition of the roads, et cetera, the housing challenge—

Mr. President: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Thank you—is real. We did not hear any vision for the future of that sector, so there was way too little of that.

Mr. President, it is our hope that there will be opportunities to collaborate as we move forward. The citizens and voters expect that and want that. And my final point is the COVID-19 response, as, again, attacked by Sen. Anil Roberts, the Minister with responsibility for Housing. And it is easy in retrospect to just throw empty talk, but a dome over Trinidad and Tobago, referral to hydroxychloroquine and an anti-vax agenda does not a national response to a pandemic make.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: And, Mr. President, we still owe a debt of gratitude to our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Parasram.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—the then Minister of Health and all the other participants that contributed to our national effort. So, Mr. President, with these few words, I thank you.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Well done.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh): Mr. President, thank you, and thank you to all of our colleagues who participated in this debate. Thank you for your contributions. And, Mr. President, I have been here for—and have debated for about three or four Bills, and every time Sen. Dr. Browne contributes, it is the same thing over and over and over. It is time he starts telling us that we—I mean, we know this is a new Government, but oh my goodness, if he is confused about who is on his side or who he wants to support as leader, he could do like Minister Jeremie and—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh:—and come and join us on this side. The AG and myself chose a leader.

Sen. Roberts: “But we eh wah he”.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: And you know, at least, our leader does not participate in virtual meetings. When they were in government, Mr. President, they had over 400 virtual meetings—

Sen. Roberts: Cabinet meetings, yeah.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh:—virtual meetings outside of—

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: If it is COVID—Mr. President, you have 52 weeks in the year. For 400 meetings, that is over four years of meetings. But like in this debate, Mr. President, their math does not add up.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Mr. President, let me just say that when Sen. Browne refers to a cheering committing on this side, I just want to tell you who formed the cheering committee on this side. We have a titan of manufacturing who have gotten all the awards that anybody could get in the manufacturing sector, Sen. Maharaj.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: At least we know the name of our Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Hon. Senators: “Ohhh”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Up to now, I do not even know who was the Minister of Labour in the last Government.

Sen. Roberts: “Dem doh even know”.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. Roberts: Ask Dhanpaul.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. Roberts: What was his name?

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Mr. President, we have such entrepreneurs as people who owned and operated their own weekly newspaper. We have

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

professors who have served long and hard in the tertiary sector. We have a renowned physician and gynaecologist.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Not a pharmacist. Not a pharmacist. A real doctor.

Hon. Senator: A real doctor.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: We lawyers, youth leaders. We have, Mr. President, my friend, who we grew up in the same village, a famous footballer who represented Trinidad and Tobago all over the world—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Who captained the national team.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh:—who captained the national team.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: But at least he knew how to score.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: So, Mr. President, I just wanted to highlight some of the people who formed this cheering section. And, Mr. President, I will say one last thing. The very person that they spent vilifying for 10 years is the very same leader who has to come now and fix this country in Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: And Tobago.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: I want to say, Mr. President, that over the last 25 years, they formed the Government for almost 19 years, not the last 10 years. But they have had longer successive years of government than the People's Partnership, 2010 to 2015, and that we will have in this five-year term. But that is

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

why, Mr. President, that having spent almost 19 years and have done very little, it is why, just as they spent the last 10 years in government, they are going to spend the next 10 years in Opposition.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: When they want to talk about, “What are plans of this Government,” this supplemental is not about our plans, because we are busy trying to make sense of what they were trying to do. We are busy trying to finish what they started to the best of our availability, and it is so much confusion that we have to now, as the old people say, “Make sense from nonsense”—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh:—hence the vacuousness and the vacuous nature of their contribution, because “dey and all cyah make sense of it”.

Sen. John-Bates asking, why are we spending the same amount of money in the RHAs, it is because we are trying to keep it open. We are trying to extend the hours. We are trying to make that people have access to health care.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: That is why it is the same figure in all the RHAs.

Sen. Roberts: “De hours is de same”.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: But that is why, Mr. President, when the hon. Sen. Roberts-Radgman talked about what they did for Tobago, even the Chief Secretary said that the TPP did more in four years that they did in 10 years.

Sen. Roberts: Correct.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: That is publicly stated.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

So, Mr. President, I just wanted to wind up this debate because I know the hon. Senators had a long day, but they want to talk. So, Mr. President, “leh we talk”.

Sen. Roberts: Yes, man.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: “Drop it on dem”.

Hon. Senator: “Gih dem”.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Mr. President, if it is that Sen. Browne wants to see the plans of the UNC, he just has to read the manifesto.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Roberts: “He cyah read”.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: I will tell you, Mr. President, that when it is time for us to present our budget, we will not be so vacuous. We will not underbudget. We will not leave it to somebody else. But we will make sure and accompany our numbers with facts, figures and fiscal responsibility.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: I just wanted to—you know, when my very honourable colleague opposite talked about “fiscal conservatism”, I must confess, with all my education, I needed to look it up. So I looked up “fiscal conservatism”, and what came up first is fiscal conservatism—and I just want my colleagues to tell me if this sounds like them or sounds like us.

“Fiscal conservatism is an economic philosophy that emphasizes”—Mr. President, through you—“prudence in government spending and debt. It generally...”—favours—“...low taxes, reduced government spending, and a balanced budget.”

—often promoting free market and limited government intervention.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

Sen. Roberts: Oh Lord.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh:

This approach aims to avoid:

“...excessive government...debt...”—and—“...encourage private sector growth...”

I do not know what the last 10 years reflects the “fiscal conservatism”?

Sen. Roberts: Nothing.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: I have absolutely no idea. But then she qualified it by saying, fiscal conservatism, PNM style.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Roberts: That is an original.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: PNM style. Fiscal conservatism, PNM style. That means spend, leave all the bills for us to pay. Mr. President, you know how many Ministries and agencies’ bills that have not been paid for years, now coming out?

Now, they spent and spent now in the last—especially after the—and you know, one thing I do not think—the one thing I know that my leader will not do, my hon. Prime Minister, is she would not put God “outta she thoughts” and call an early election.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Three times they did it, Mr. President, and three times they—

Hon. Senator: “Licks”.

Sen. Roberts: “Stick break in dey ears”.

Hon. Senator: “Licks”.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: But, of course, over the last few months,

they were being fiscally conservative.

Mr. President, one thing I can guarantee you, and I can guarantee this House—you know, just to tell my honourable colleagues that this evening, I had hoped to come out a little early because we had a meeting with the BIR to continue the conversation that we had committed to. But of course, I had to put off the meeting because these folks decided—hon. Senators, my apologies, the hon. Senators decided that they wanted to attack my colleagues on this side. But, Mr. President, under the coach that we have, who has been a national coach celebrated many times over—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh:—this is a team that if “yuh” touch one, “yuh” touch all.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

5.10 p.m

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: So, we will have none of it, Mr. President. We will not be districted by all the things they want to put before us, because you know what Mr. President? Not only do we know who our leader is. Not only do we have a plan to govern, but we will make sure and we will have to excuse. You know the hon. Attorney General in another debate said “when we make a mistake we fix it”. We fix the mistakes we made. We own up to it. We understand. We “doh” do like according to Minister Roberts [*Minister put hands by mouth and blow*]

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: “We ain’t blowing.” We making sure, Mr. President, that we bring things of substance that we could explain what we bring. Right now, what do you think we are trying to do? We are trying to make sure that

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

we honour the commitments that that Government made.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Whether we like it or not, whether we agree or not, we honour their commitment. And you know, I am sorry that Sen. Browne is not here. The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs—

Sen. Al-Rawi: He is in the back.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: My apologies. The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs could not go to the last meeting, because he was busy planning to bring the Prime Minister of India to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: The same Prime Minister of India that they wanted to bring, but he did not want to come.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Senator: He declined the invitation.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Now, he realized that it have a real Government, with a real leader, and so he accepted this Government's invitation to visit Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Roberts: Investment.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: And that is where the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs has been putting his time and energy. We know what is important. We make sure and focus on the things we need to focus on, not the things they want us to focus on. As for the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I know he is quite capable of defending himself, so I would leave him to deal with them.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: I want to go back, Mr. President, to a couple of things that we need to put on the table to make sure—the substantive Minister of Finance has already brought the price of oil down to \$66, to make sure that we are able to capture the correct balance in this budget, to have the moneys to pay for all that is outstanding.

But it would be remiss of me, Mr. President, if I do remind this honourable House what the substantive supplementary appropriation for fiscal 2025 is. And that is, we are here to consider the provision of \$3,143,983,761. The fund, the critical recurrent capital expenditure to September 30th 2025, in areas where insufficient or no allocation was provided. And as a result of the review of the recurrent expenditure on the public sector, Mr. President. The Public Sector Investment Programme, PSIP, which was conducted by the Ministry of Finance, it is necessary to return and to seek approval for the supplementation of the appropriation for this fiscal that will end in September 2025, for 28 Heads of Expenditure totalling \$3,143,983,761. Mr. President, I went through in detail when we piloted the Bill, so I will not repeat it again, but suffice it to say that we seek the approval, the concurrence, and the support of this honourable House, as we seek to appropriate the following figures. The additional sum to be sourced from the Consolidated Fund to meet expenditure under the following Sub Heads:

- Personal Expenditure, \$111,829,980;
- Goods and Services, \$1,212,540,101;
- Minor Equipment Purchases, \$25 million;
- Current Transfers and Subsidies, \$811,212,540;
- Current Transfers and Subsidies Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, \$704,500,140;

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

- Development Programmes, \$278,937,000.

So, Mr. President, these are the figures that we have come to ask for appropriation, and for the support, and the approval of this honourable House.

Let me end by saying, Mr. President, that we are developing plans for all the sectors that have been identified from housing, to transportation, to education, health. And you know, Mr. President, there is one more word of on fiscal conservatism that Minister Roberts alluded to, that we also need to—as we engage with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. One of the things that this Government will not do from a policy perspective is start projects that we do not know how we are going to finish it.

Today, we have so many artifices that stand incomplete. We have 93 schools that are yet to be completed, 25 schools that are housed in community centres. This Government “have rel work” to do.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: And under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, after we finish justifying these figures in this budget we inherited, we will start working on our budget with real plans.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Real programmes, and we will bring a budget through the Minister of Finance, the hon. Member for Fyzabad. When he pilots that budget, and we bring it to this honourable House. We will ensure that the programmes we committed to in our manifesto, and reflect it in our budget that we could all stand to justify, why we put those in budget. How we are going to pay for it, and how they will benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not something that looks on paper to be tenable, but in reality to being practical. We

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

are not that kind of people. We will not bring that kind of budget, and we will make sure that when people talk about the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC in the future, they will do so with respect.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: This Government, Mr. President, is a serious Government. It is full of people who are passionate but competent. It is full of people who are capable and committed, and it is full of people who will ensure that not only will everybody benefit or win, but everybody will have a place. We will take care of all our people.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: We will take care of all Trinidadians and Tobagonians.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: We will make sure that everybody have access to a living wage, not 2015.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Good paying jobs.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: And I want to welcome back the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise, because I am sure we heard more from him in the last couple of Sittings than we heard from their former Minister of Labour in 10 years.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: So, Mr. President, again, I want to thank you all my colleagues for their support. I want to thank all my colleagues for their participation. I want to assure my honourable colleagues that when it is time to

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh (cont'd)

bring our budget, it will be something that we can all reflect on, that we can all talk about, and that we can all be proud of, because it would substantive in nature, and complete in its intent. So, Mr. President, with those few words, I beg to move.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Mr. President: The hon. Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 57(2), I beg to move that A Bill entitled an Act to supplement the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2025) Act, 2024, not be a committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar): Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators—

Sen. Vieira SC: Mr. President.

Mr. President: Yes?

Sen. Vieira SC: Before you move, I wish to raise a matter that has just come to my attention, that is, the matter of privilege. I will need your guidance on it.

UNREVISED

Mr. President: Yeah, yeah. As I said, you drew to my attention a matter. I did indicate I have to discuss that with the Secretariat, it was now drawn to my attention, and I will in fact, address that at the appropriate time. Okay?

Sen. Vieira SC: Thank you for that. I am just concerned that we are about to go on recess. So, what I will be seeking, would be leave. I am not pushing it today, but just to clear that threshold. And I undertake to write formally for the request.

Mr. President: Yeah, no problem. As I said you can write formally as you said. I will nevertheless have to consult with the Secretariat on this particular matter, and of course, and so on, it will be addressed at the appropriate time.

Sen. Vieira SC: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.25 p.m.