

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, September 23, 2026*

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have two sets of announcements. The first is that I will announce those who applied for leave: The hon. Penelope Beckles-Robinson, Member for Arima; the hon. Wilfred Nicholas Morris, Member for Mayaro; Mr. Colm Imbert, Member for Diego Martin North/East; and the hon. Sean Sobers, who have all sought leave of absence. The leave which the Members sought has been granted.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES**(CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the second announcement I wish to make is that correspondence has been received from the President of the Senate dated September 23, 2026. It states as follows:

“Dear Mr. Speaker.

Re: Change in Membership to Joint Select Committees.

Reference is made to the subject at caption.

At a sitting held on Tuesday, September 22nd, 2026, the Senate agreed to the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the Senate agrees to the following appointments to joint select committees:

On the Finance and Legal Affairs Committee:

Mr. Darrell Allahar in lieu and in place of Mr. Satyakama Maharaj.

UNREVISED

And on the Energy Affairs: Mr. Anil Roberts in lieu of Mr. Satyakama Maharaj.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that the House of Representatives be informed of this decision at the earliest convenience. Thank you.

PROTECTION OF NEW PLANT VARIETIES (AMDT.)

BILL, 2026

Bill to amend the Protection of New Plant Varieties Act, Chap. 82:75, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries*]; read the first time.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the year ended September 30, 2012. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]

Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AND DISPOSAL OF

PUBLIC PROPERTY(AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Bill to amend the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015 (Act No. 1 of 2015) and for other related matters [*The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.
[Hon. D. Tancoo] *Question put and agreed to.*

The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo): Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2025 (Act No. 1 of 2025) and for other related matters, be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015, was enacted to modernize the public procurement framework and replaced the Central Tenders Board Act, Chap. 71:91, with a framework based on accountability, integrity, transparency, value for money, efficiency, fairness, equity, public confidence and sustainable procurement. The Act reformed how public bodies buy goods, services and works, or dispose of public assets. It focused on fairness, equity, efficiency, public confidence and sustainable development, Mr. Speaker.

Briefly, some of the key aspects and features of the Act are the establishment of an independent regulatory body—that is the Office of Procurement Regulation, the OPR—to oversee public spending and set operational guidelines. It applies to all Ministries, statutory bodies, state enterprises, regional health authorities and municipal corporations. It requires public bodies to use designated procurement officers and committees to manage planning, tendering and settle contracts. Finally, the Act also contains a number of enforceable provisions, such as public notices for contract awards, rights of review for unsuccessful bidders, and penalties for breaches.

Mr. Speaker, this Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act has been

amended on five separate occasions since its enactment in 2015. The first amendment, done in 2016, provided for the establishment, composition and operations of a Public Procurement Review Board. It also gave the Minister the power to make regulations regarding the disposal of state lands and real property owned by the Government, subject to negative resolution of the Parliament.

The 2017 amendment reduced the term of office for the regulator and other members of the Board appointed to govern the OPR.

The third amendment was done in 2023, and inserted a new definition of “bid rigging”. It also introduced, for the first time, a list of services provided to public bodies or state-controlled enterprises that are exempted from public procurement.

The fourth amendment, also in 2023, sought to validate the non-laying of statutory instruments as required under section 7(7) of the Act. This amendment, Mr. Speaker, also altered the level of parliamentary scrutiny required for orders or regulations made under the Act from affirmative to negative resolution of the Parliament. Further, this amendment inserted a new section 58A, which exempted the procurement of goods and services of up to \$1 million from the procurement requirements of the Act. The amendment also mandated the reporting to the OPR of contracts awarded under regulations made pursuant to section 63(1)(c) of the Act. Mr. Speaker, the Act was last amended via the Finance Act in December 2023, and amended section 58A of the Act by deleting the words “goods and services” and substituting the words “goods, services and works”.

Mr. Speaker, today, this Government also proposes to make several changes to the procurement regulations. I want the listening and viewing population to pay close attention to what is transpiring here today, in particular to what the

Opposition does today. The PNM has already said that they are against the Bill, but I want people to understand exactly what the PNM is against. So before I go into the very specific details, Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the listening population that the amendments before us today are designed to address the practical bottlenecks faced by public bodies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: It is intended to streamline overly rigid procedures currently employed and restore operational common sense to public administration, so that the State can effectively deliver goods, works and services to the population of Trinidad and Tobago without unnecessary delay. How can the PNM vote against that, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: These amendments will stimulate the construction sector, but they will also improve—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo:—but will also speed up the provision of water and electricity services in the event of an emergency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, how can the PNM vote against that? These amendments, Mr. Speaker, will give new life to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises seeking to do business with the State. How can the PNM vote against that, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, over the years, I have had many complaints from small food suppliers in particular, but also from small companies engaged in

painting, maintenance, transport and more, who simply could not afford the costs associated with the registration of their business with the OPR. Our amendments today, Mr. Speaker, will open up opportunities for hundreds, if not thousands of businesses who are now locked out of the economy. Mr. Speaker, how can the PNM vote against that?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: This is a Bill that will directly benefit the small man—directly and indirectly, it will benefit the small man. It will stimulate the economy. It will generate economic growth and increase national output. It will promote the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and entrepreneurs involved in sustainable businesses. It will create thousands of new jobs, Mr. Speaker. How can the PNM vote against that, Mr. Speaker? But you see, Mr. Speaker, for those opposite, PNM means “people never matter”. I start, Mr. Speaker, by calling them out for what they are. They are hypocrites, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: They want the existing status quo to remain because contracts were only for a handful of friends, family and financiers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Make the rich richer. Let the poor suffer, Mr. Speaker. It is time to break that vicious PNM cycle, Mr. Speaker. And this Bill will go a long way in destroying that web of unpatriotic PNM hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, section 7(6) of the procurement Act provides that the Act will not apply to a number of services provided to public bodies or state-controlled enterprises, such as legal services, debt financing services for the national budget, and accounting and auditing services. Further, the section provides for other services as the

Minister may, on the recommendation of the Office, or upon the initiative of the Minister, with the agreement of the Office, by Order, may determine. An Order made under section 7(6)(e) is subject to negative resolution of Parliament, Mr. Speaker. Section 7(6) provides:

“This Act shall not apply to the following services provided to public bodies or State-controlled enterprises—

- (a) legal services;
- (b) debt financing services for the national budget;
- (c) accounting and auditing services;
- (d) medical emergency or other scheduled medical services; or
- (e) such other services as the Minister may, on the recommendation of the Office or upon the initiative of the Minister with the agreement of the Office, by Order, determine.”

Today, the Government proposes to amend section 7(6) of the Act to provide express statutory exemptions for further categories of procurement, namely:

- “(e) energy, including oil and natural gas and oil;
- (f) national security;
- (g) public-private partnership for public housing;
- (h) public utilities for water, electricity and power generation in cases of emergency; and
- (i) the acquisition of goods, services or works...”—as a result—“...of an emergency;”

The purpose of these exemptions would be to recognize that certain categories of government expenditure have operational, commercial, security or developmental characteristics which make the ordinary procurement framework unnecessarily

restrictive. However, these exemptions are so drafted that they do not constitute an unrestricted exclusion from accountability. Appropriate safeguards, reporting requirements, internal approvals, audit requirements and, where appropriate, procurement guidelines will continue to apply.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: I will take them one by one, Mr. Speaker. This Government believes that public utilities, specifically water, electricity and power generation, in cases of an emergency, should be exempted from public procurement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: This is logical, Mr. Speaker, and it is because the procurement of goods and services and works in these utilities is frequently sourced from regulated or designated providers and is driven by continuity of service requirements rather than conventional competitive procurement considerations.

In many instances, Mr. Speaker, in real-life practice, there is either a single practical provider, a regulated provider or an established statutory utility arrangement. Requiring the full procurement process for routine payments in an emergency for such public utilities can create unnecessary administrative expenditure and delay without producing a corresponding procurement benefit. I want to especially emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment specifically states that this access is envisioned in the consequence of an emergency.

In terms of national security, the Government is of the considered view that national security should also be a separate exemption because procurement undertaken for defence, intelligence, policing, border security, protective services and other national security purposes may involve confidentiality, operational sensitivity, urgency and restricted information. Obviously then, subjecting such

procurement to ordinary public procurement procedures may, in particular circumstances, disclose information concerning capabilities, equipment, suppliers, locations or operational requirements which ought not to enter the public domain, Mr. Speaker.

The Central Tenders Board Act Chap. 71:91, which was repealed by section 64(1) of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, also had recognized special procurement arrangements for defence and protective services. So this is not new, Mr. Speaker. The Government notes that even in Caricom, via Caricom's Protocol on Public Procurement in relation to the tendering of national security items, there is an explicit exemption for national cross-border open tendering rules.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the Government proposes that public-private partnerships for public housing should be exempted from procurement in order to facilitate the Government's ability to implement housing programmes through structured arrangements with private sector developers, financiers, contractors and other strategic partners. Mr. Speaker, such projects generally involve a combination of land, financing, design, construction, infrastructure, long-term contractual obligations and social policy considerations which cannot often be effectively evaluated through a conventional procurement exercise based solely on the acquisition of goods, works or services. A specific exemption would facilitate Government's ability to negotiate and structure housing partnerships in a manner that secures value for money, accelerates housing delivery and responds to the national demand for affordable and social housing, while maintaining appropriate legal, financial and development concerns.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, the world is moving towards PPP models. This allows private capital to work with the Government to achieve the national objectives of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, this is a very commendable initiative.

In terms of energy, the Government is also of the view that the award of contracts in the energy sector should likewise be treated as a distinct category because the energy sector is strategic to the economic and fiscal stability of Trinidad and Tobago, and often includes and involves technically complex, commercially sensitive and time-crucial transactions. Energy procurement may involve specialized technology; proprietary systems; long-term supply arrangements; exploration and production requirements; renewable energy infrastructure; electricity generation; fuel supply; and other transactions where the identity and capability of the supplier, the timing of the transaction and the commercial terms may be material to the national interest. A statutory exemption, properly defined and subject to appropriate controls, will enable the State to respond more effectively to changing energy market conditions, secure strategic supplies, facilitate investment and support energy transition initiatives without compromising the Government's obligations concerning accountability and prudent expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Simplified Procurement) Regulations of 2024 were made under the Legal Notice No. 65 of 2024 and came into effect on April 05, 2024. These regulations distinguish between micro-procurement—that is, procurement not exceeding \$75,000—and small-scale procurement, which covers procurement exceeding \$75,000 but not exceeding \$1 million. The policy objective was to streamline

procurement and improve the ease of doing business and the speed with which public bodies could easily obtain low-value goods, works and services. It is to be noted, Mr. Speaker, that notwithstanding the policy objectives underlying the regulations, practical experience since its implementation has demonstrated clearly that the introduction of a separate and highly prescriptive procedural regime for lower-value procurement has not, in all circumstances, produced the anticipated level of efficiency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: It is a well-known fact by those opposite, those on this side and by the general public that public bodies continue to encounter administrative requirements, procedural uncertainty, multiple approval stages and substantial difficulties in reconciling the simplified regime with the wider procurement, financial management and accountability framework. The regulations also contain a number of procedural exemptions and special requirements, including provisions dealing with registration, planned procurement schedules and a Procurement and Disposal Advisory Committee involvement.

The continuing need for clarification itself indicates that a simpler and more coherent statutory approach may be preferable. It is therefore proposed, Mr. Speaker, that the regulations be revoked and that the policy objective of facilitating efficient lower-value procurement be achieved through a more proportionate legislative framework. It should be emphasized, Mr. Speaker, that the repeal will not amount to an abandonment of procurement accountability but rather, it would permit the Government to replace a rigid, one-size-fits-all regime with clearly defined statutory exemptions, appropriate designated and delegated financial authority, strengthened internal controls and risk-based procurement measures.

This approach will also allow the Government to address sectors and circumstances in which the ordinary procurement processes are inherently unstable, while maintaining the overarching principles of transparency, accountability, integrity and value for money, which are expressly recognized in the objectives of the Act.

The revocation of the regulations, Mr. Speaker, is proposed to facilitate a comprehensive review and rationalization of the regulatory framework governing lower-value public procurement. Experience gained since the commencement of the regulations indicates the need to simplify and clarify applicable procedures, to reduce duplication and administrative complexity, and to ensure greater consistency between the requirements applicable to micro and small-scale procurements and the broader framework established by the Act. The repeal will also facilitate the development of a more coherent, risk-based and modernized framework for lower-value procurement, while preserving the principles of transparency, accountability, fairness, competition and value for money enshrined in the original Act.

It is to be noted that a savings provision in the legislation revoking the regulations is not required in light of section 27 of the Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01, which ensures a smooth transition after the revocation by protecting ongoing legal matters, vested rights and criminal liabilities from being suddenly invalidated as a result of the revocation. Mr. Speaker, as you know, when a law is repealed, it does not erase what happened in the past, unless the new law clearly says so. Anything lawfully done under the revoked law continues to be lawful and effective. Hence, existing rights, privileges and debts under the old law are not lost. Consequently, if you breach the old law, you can still be charged, tried and punished. Ongoing court cases, investigations or legal remedies will subsist as if

the old law was still in force.

We also propose that Regulation 7 of the Public Procurement and Disposal of the Public Property (Evaluation) Regulations, 2021, should be amended to reduce the prescribed standstill period from not fewer than 10 and not more than 15 working days to not fewer than five and not more than 10 working days. Mr. Speaker, Regulation 7 currently requires a procuring entity to establish a standstill period within a 10 to 15-day working range. The procuring entity is not allowed to award the contract before the end of the standstill period, as this may render the contract null and void. The standstill period begins when the notice of decision to award is issued to participating suppliers or contractors. The purpose of the standstill period is to provide unsuccessful suppliers or contractors with an opportunity to challenge or seek clarification concerning a proposed award before the procurement contract is concluded. This obviously would avoid the need for an annulment of a contract or framework arrangement which has been entered into force, and they result in additional complications and costs.

Basically, Mr Speaker, the standstill period provides for the unsuccessful supplier or contractor with the opportunity and time to gather relevant information from the procuring entity on its decision to award the contract. Based on the information provided, Mr. Speaker, a supplier or contractor can take the appropriate action to challenge the procuring entity's decision in accordance with section 49 of the Act. Mr. Speaker, the amendment to Regulation 7 would preserve the essential purpose of the standstill period, while avoiding unnecessary delays in the commencement of projects and in the delivery of goods and services.

In many cases, particularly where procurement is straightforward and the evaluation process has been properly documented, a period of five to 10 working

days would provide, we believe, a reasonable opportunity for an aggrieved bidder to raise concerns, while allowing the procuring entity to proceed more quickly with contract finalization. The proposed amendment would therefore contribute to greater efficiency without eliminating the challenge mechanism or the opportunity for unsuccessful bidders to exercise their right. This would be consistent with the rule of law and access to justice, Mr. Speaker.

The proposal is also consistent with the principle of proportionality. The standstill period should be long enough to permit meaningful review and challenge, but not so long that it unnecessarily delays government programmes, capital projects, essential services and contractual commitments. It should also be noted that section 35(4) of the Act already recognizes that urgent public interest considerations may justify proceeding without a standstill period in appropriate circumstances. As such, the proposed five to 10 working day range would therefore establish a more practical, ordinary rule, while retaining the existing statutory mechanisms for genuinely urgent public interest situations.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is of the view that proposed measures will reduce administrative costs and processing times associated with lower-value and specialized procurement. It will improve the implementation of government programmes and projects, and it will give accounting officers and senior public officials a greater ability to respond to operational requirements. The proposed exemptions will also facilitate greater responsiveness in the utility, national security, housing and energy sectors. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the amendments will be accompanied by appropriate financial management, audit, record-keeping, reporting and conflict of interest safeguards so that the greater

delegation and exemptions do not result in the diminishing of accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to a clause-by-clause analysis of the Bill. The purpose of this Bill is to amend the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015. It contains 10 clauses and requires a simple majority vote.

Clause 1 provides the short title of this Act. Clause 2 is the interpretation provision and clause 3 seeks to make a consequential amendment to section 4 of the Act.

Clause 4 of the Bill seeks to amend section 7 of the Act to provide specific exemptions from the ordinary procurement requirements of the Act for:

- “e) energy, including natural gas and oil;
- f) national security;
- g) public-private partnerships for public housing;
- h) public utilities for water, electricity and power generation in...”—cases—“...of an emergency;”

And:

- “i) the acquisition of goods, services or works in consequence of an emergency.”

Clause 5 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, seeks to amend section 44 of the Act to limit the powers of the Office of Procurement Regulation after completing an investigation under Part IV of the Act. The Act is ambiguous with respect to the remedial powers of the OPR under sections 1 to 48, which is Part IV, and which contain investigations by the OPR of its own initiative or upon receipt of a complaint. This is distinct from the OPR’s remedial powers under sections 49 to 52, which is in Part V of the Act, and which deals with challenge proceedings. Section 50(10) of the Act expressly provides for the OPR’s remedial powers in

challenge proceedings. But there is no similar provision for the OPR's remedial powers in considering complaints or investigations under Part IV. Clause 5, therefore, Mr. Speaker, seeks to correct this anomaly.

Clause 6 of the Bill seeks to amend section 50(10) of the Act to permit the Office of Procurement Regulation to award costs in favour of a successful procuring entity in challenge proceedings. Section 5(10)(g) of the Act permits the OPR to award costs to successful suppliers and contractors in challenge proceedings. However, there is no similar provision to permit the OPR to award costs to successful procuring entities in challenge proceedings. The OPR has interpreted this to mean that procuring entities cannot recover cost in challenge proceedings, irrespective of whether they were successful or not. Clause 6, Mr. Speaker, therefore, seeks to correct this anomaly.

Clause 7 of the Bill seeks to repeal and replace section 58A of the Act to provide that:

“...a Permanent Secretary, or the Chief Executive Officer or”—the appointed—“accounting officer of a State-controlled enterprise or a statutory body for which responsibility is assigned to a Minister of Government;”—may approve procurement up to \$2 million for the acquisition of goods, services and works. And a Chief Executive Officer of a Municipal Corporation may approve procurement up to \$500,000 for the acquisition of goods, services and works without reference to the procurement requirements of the Act. These office-holders would be required to report to the OPR any contracts awarded under the proposed section 58A as before.

Clause 8 of the Bill seeks to provide for consequential amendments to section 63 of the Act. It is proposed to repeal subsections (1)(c) and (4). For the

record, section 63 provides:

“The Minister may, on the recommendation of the Office, or upon the initiative of the Minister with the agreement of the Office, make regulations to give effect to the provision of this Act, including regulations with respect to—

- (a) the conduct of challenge proceedings under Part V; and
 - (b) the addition to, or removal from, an ineligibility list under section 58; and
 - (c) the procedures of the procurement of goods and services up to one million dollars under section 58A.
- (2) Regulations made under this section may provide that the contravention of any regulation constitutes an offence and may prescribe penalties for any offence not exceeding a fine of one million dollars and imprisonment for five years.
- (3) Regulations made under this section shall be subject to negative resolution of Parliament.”
- (4) Regulations made under section 63(1)(c) shall provide for the contracts awarded to be reported to the office.”

Mr. Speaker, section 58A was added to the Act in 2023 by the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2023, and provides, and I quote:

“58A. Subject to regulations made under section 63, the procurement of goods and services”—and works—“up to one million dollars are exempt from the procurement requirements under this Act.”

Mr. Speaker, clause 9 seeks to amend Regulation 7 of the Public

Procurement and Disposal of Property (Evaluation) Regulations, 2021, by replacing the existing standstill period of 10 and not more than 15 working days with a standstill, as I mentioned, of not fewer than five days and not more than 10 working days. And finally, clause 10 of the Bill seeks to provide for the revocation of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Simplified Procurement) Regulations, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, the Act, in its present structure, stands as an impediment to our growth and development. The economic and public interest of this country now dictate the need for meaningful reform of the Act, especially given our experiences over the years to further Government's objectives to deliver goods, works and services to the people of this country. Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about what these amendments represent. It is not an abandonment of accountability, but an embrace of reality, agility and national survival.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: It represents new opportunities for micro, small and medium-sized businesses.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: It represents thousands of jobs. It represents thousands of homes. It represents a stimulus for economic growth and development. It unlocks investment potential for people involved in business at every level, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: We simply cannot allow the critical machinery of our nation to grind to a halt under the weight of uniformed bureaucratic processes that fail to recognize specialized time sensitive demands. Mr. Speaker, governance requires the courage to balance rigid oversight with the practical realities of national

development. These amendments strike that precise balance. Mr. Speaker, I expect that those opposite will continue their normal unpatriotic fearmongering and misinformation practice that they have done under every single—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: You could sigh if you want, but the facts are the facts—as they have done time and time again. Instead of opposing for Opposition’s sake, they should join the rest of the country that is aggressively trying to improve the quality and substance of the lives of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. But we expect, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition to do what they have been doing for the last 17 months, opposing for Opposition’s sake, Mr. Speaker. It is just like with the SOB. They opposed the SOB here. They did not want to—they threatened to go to the streets in protest—

Mr. Marcelle: 48(1), please. I rise on a point of order, 48(1). I am not certain what the SOB debate has to do with this, please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Think if you had listened to the sentence which preceded the reference to the SOB, it was a matter of contextual analysis. Minister, continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: As indicated for the clarification of the Members opposite, I will say it slowly.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Do not speak to me. You will get your chance to contribute. Do not contribute yet. You will get your chance.

Mr. Speaker: Members—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Members, a little too early for that. Let us—come on, let us continue.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, I think I just made my case, and he just helped me make my case.

Mr. Speaker, I expect that the Opposition will continue to oppose. It is my fervent prayer, and I believe it is the prayer of many citizens of this country, that the Opposition will get some testicular fortitude somewhere along the lines, if they could figure out who their leader is, and support good legislation. This is good legislation. The practice has been, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo:—that the existing legislation has not worked to the benefit of the country. That is a fact. They knew it when they were on this side, and we know it now that we are here. The difference, Mr. Speaker, is that we have the political will. We have the leadership, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: We have the political will and the leadership to do the right thing for the benefit of the citizens of this country. Mr. Speaker, the facts though, although I am hopeful that the Opposition will do the right thing, whether they do or do not, this Government, led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, will continue to work to elevate the lives and livelihoods of the citizens of our beloved country in keeping with the oath of office which we all swore. Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

VISITORS

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the question, hon. Members, I would like to recognize

the presence of a visiting class. I am not entirely sure which school it is from, but I would ask you all to welcome the school children.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AND DISPOSAL OF
PUBLIC PROPERTY (AMDT.) BILL, 2026**

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And we on this side join with welcoming of the future of Trinidad and Tobago in our public gallery.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Mr. Speaker, I sat here not surprised; not surprised at the speech that was prepared for my friend, the Minister of Finance—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—not surprised at his tone of delivery, not surprised at what we have come to know as a hallmark of the UNC Government now, which is nothing short—and I know, Mr. Speaker, enjoys a game of cricket—of pure spin.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Because what Trinidad and Tobago is facing today is a complete gutting of the OPR.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: What Trinidad and Tobago is facing today by these proposed amendments is yet again, in a very short period of time, one of the most dangerous pieces of legislation that have ever crossed the Floor of Parliament, save for

section 34. Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate for the previous speaker, the Minister of Finance, that he was given the unenviable task of attempting to do nothing short of misleading the population.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Because this is section 34 on steroids.

Furthermore, what we will hear confirmed during the course of this debate, I am sure, and you can immediately see, without a shadow of a doubt by the areas that were specifically chosen for exemption are, once again—and we put it on the record as a responsible Opposition for the population, let them mark these words once again very carefully—what we are seeing here today is UNC Government policy dictated by financiers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The very specific and carefully chosen areas for exemption, which I will get to, are undoubtedly—and I will show via live examples that are currently before the Office of Procurement Regulation, not hypotheticals, not make-believes, not what-ifs, but live examples of what the UNC Government has come here today to once again try to pull the wool on the population, and to once again try to distort what is really before us, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This Bill guts the powers of the OPR. This Bill changes the levels at which the OPR has some level of oversight. This Bill makes it unreachable to the same small people that they talked about and the contractors out there who are being sidelined, who are being bypassed by instructions to those who are in charge of procurement as to who contracts should be given, by a mere one provision as Mr. Speaker would be very aware, being very familiar with the concept of prescribed cost. So, what may seem innocuous, what is an attempt to sell that cost factor by the

previous speaker is a threat to all contractors out there who are already facing victimization—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—and it is a threat to them, do not come before the OPR. You could no longer have any thieving complaints. And I will get to the types of complaints that are being made in the specific areas that the UNC Government has the audacity to come to Trinidad and Tobago with today, once again, in a rush. And it was my friend from Barataria/San Juan who gave us the highlight a few days ago when he made a statement, and he said, “Allyuh feel allyuh could make challenges, and you all could stop what we trying to do, LandmarkTT, with HDC, with the procurement of vehicles, et cetera.” And then the next thing is, overnight, this Bill is put before the House, and it is put before the House in this rushed manner. Trinidad and Tobago, this Bill was presented to us less than 48 hours ago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And that is done for a specific reason. Nothing to do with the 13 of us on this side who would be prepared to get a Bill and, in a short period of time, be part of a debate. It is done to try and avoid the NGO bodies out there who fought hard for transparency, the JCC, the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute, and the other bodies that led the charge from 2010 to 2014 for procurement legislation. That is why they rushed this Bill. And, of course, Trinidad and Tobago, it will not escape you that an important piece of legislation like this, which does the exact opposite of all my friends who spoke before me have said, takes away accountability, destroys transparency, chases persons from challenging—and I do not use the term technically there, but for putting forward complaints and concerns before the OPR, shortens a standstill period. And they

are doing it in broad daylight as they prepare an assault on the Treasury.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing here today, unfortunately, is nothing like of the like that my friend from Fyzabad spoke about a short while ago. Do not for a moment believe a word this kakistocracy is launching on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: What we are seeing here today is an attempt to justify them getting rid of the safeguards and the oversight of the Office of Procurement Regulation. And what that means is that contracts are now going to be awarded in specific areas without proper oversight, because they have done it in a number of categories. By listing exemptions, it takes away the power of the OPR completely in those specific areas that we will come to. I will touch on some, and my colleagues on this side will delve into, in detail, on many others. But it should not pass the population those what were focused on: Water and electricity. Since when has there been a problem in an emergency situation anywhere with procuring water and electricity services in an emergency?

11.20 a.m.

And I want to put the population on alert. The current legislation and the regulations already provide for emergency provisions, but what you are seeing here now, in the parent legislation, is a broadening of that.

We sit here today—and I am not surprised, but the patriotic side of me is shocked because those who are on that side, between 2010 to 2014, faced call after call after call from the population when dealing with corruption for this piece of legislation. They delayed, they delayed, they delayed, because they never wanted any law governing procurement, because we all know what happened during that

period, Beetham Gardens, wastewater, et cetera. We all are familiar with the examples of what happened. So they delayed. And then, in an attempt to fool the population, as they are so good at doing, unfortunately, it was only in January 2014, a few months before an election, that they passed the legislation, after delaying it.

The call for procurement legislation came from 2005, with a White Paper that was laid. And the reason Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Mr. Speaker, for this piece of legislation—not the Bill to amend it, but for the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, is to avoid corruption, to have oversight, to make sure there are less and less attempts by state bodies, state persons, unfortunately Government Ministers, to get involved in procurement, and to send it in a corrupt manner. Because corruption—and not surprisingly, the areas that the UNC have identified for specific exemptions are the billion-dollar areas, not millions, as they like to try now and focus on a rise from a million to two million. It is the hundreds of millions of dollars, as I will show in a short while.

If you have a hundred dollars to spend on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and \$20, \$30 are taken out in corruption, it only leaves you with \$70 for the people, and that is what this legislation was passed for in the first place, to attempt to prevent. And as I will show—the population will not miss, and I am glad my friend used the word, the hypocrisy of those on the other side, who scream bloody murder—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—from 2015, all the way to 2025, with any amendment that was made to this legislation; amendments to bring in place regulations that the parent Bill dictates you must have. They were screaming and shouting, no less than

the Member for Siparia, leading the charge. The Member for Barataria/San Juan stood in this same House and made certain accusations. But you see, the country has learned that every accusation from that side is nothing short of an admission by them.

So, this Bill, this piece of legislation, the parent legislation was put—the purpose of it is set out very, very clearly in the Act. The Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015, is to provide for public procurement, for the retention and disposal of public property, in accordance with the principles of good governance, namely accountability, transparency, integrity and value for money, and the establishment of the Office of Procurement Regulation. Accountability, transparency, integrity and value for money, and these amendments here today do the exact opposite. They gut all of that.

For the population, and for our young citizens, who are in the Public Gallery, it is useful at this stage to outline who this legislation applies to. So you understand exactly who it is now, in the expenditure of public money, taxpayers' money, money earned for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, who are the public bodies now that would be able to run rampant with exemptions, without the oversight of the OPR.

They wanted the OPR, they wanted the OPR, bring the OPR, bring—first thing they do when they come into office, and they are faced with challenges before the OPR, they are faced with complaints before the OPR is, “Eh heh? We go gut it.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: “We will go to the heart of the OPR. Yuh cyah tell us to stay anything, you cyah tell meh ah cyah build Allamby, you cyah tell meh ah cyah award \$3.4 billion in contracts through HDC. You cannot stay, you cannot

suspend. Go from here OPR.” And any citizen, any citizen who cares about the same word that the Member for Fyzabad used, any patriotic citizen who sees something going on and says, “You know what? I am going to the OPR to ask them, investigate that”—not a challenge proceeding that costs money, because you have to get attorneys to take you and now they are reducing the time to bring challenge proceedings.

How could you reduce the time to five days? All of that is a red flag, because a standstill period is the period within which the public body must say, “These are the people, this is the person I am going to award this contract to.” And those contractors who have also bid, have an opportunity to go and challenge it, if they know something is wrong. And you are reducing that to five working days? There is only one reason they do that. They try to fool the population, talk about efficiency and bottlenecks. Rubbish! Complete rubbish! When you are spending billions of dollars—\$3.4 billion they wanted to spend for 10 contractors, you are telling the population of Trinidad and Tobago, five days is enough to get your house in order?

“‘public body’ means—

- (a) the Office of the President;
- (b) the Parliament;
- (c) the Judiciary;
- (d) a Ministry or a department or a division of the Ministry;
- (e) the Tobago House of Assembly, or a division of the...”—THA;
- (f) a Municipal Corporation...
- (g) a...”—RHA;
- (h) a statutory body, responsibility for which is assigned to a Minister of

Government;”

LandmarkTT?

(i) a State-controlled enterprise;”

TSTT?

“(j) a Service Commission established under the Constitution or other written law;

(k) or a body corporate or unincorporated entity...”

So, in other words, it is any of those entities, as wide as it is, that when the hon. Minister of Finance stands up here in the next month—because look at when they are bringing it, eh, in the next month—he stands up and he presents his second budget to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it comes in at billions and billions of dollars of expenditure, Trinidad and Tobago, every good and service to be procured under those billions of dollars, plus whatever is outside, they are looking now to exempt huge categories of that expenditure, the categories we know in this country, energy. The previous speaker spoke about it. The lifeblood and lifeline of this country is energy.

I will show a live example with Heritage: A compressor \$500-plus million, with an instruction given to give it to someone who has never, never, never, never participated in that type of activity before. And what they do is they award it to people and then those people now go and subcontract it to those who can really do the work. The corruption is stark. The corruption is staring us in the face, and the audacity to bring this Bill today, to legalize what they are already doing so that they will not fall foul of the law, is worse than what they did with section 34. Section 34 was a handful of financiers. This one now is “de marish and the parish, who go and kiss de ring”.

This, of course, is strategically being placed before the House, whilst in the other place a debate is going on with respect to an unconstitutional piece of legislation that we debated here a few days ago, and that, Mr. Speaker, is no coincidence. They are good at distracting those who want to be distracted. But we on this side have an obligation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—and we will perform our obligation to alert the population to the pitfalls, the downfalls and the clear track being cut by agouti to run with corruption. It is as clear as day.

In order for the population, Mr. Speaker, to understand exactly what these amendments are intended to do, and how it will not only facilitate corruption, but what it will do is gut the OPR—and I will keep repeating it—it will gut the OPR, take away its specific powers, or powers that they have been applying, and make it more difficult for any oversight, any transparency, and worse yet, value for money.

I want, Mr. Speaker, and I intend to at this stage now, give live examples of what the OPR has been doing; the good work that the OPR has been doing, in just a few examples. The first: Under the legislation, citizens and interested persons, anyone concerned, is allowed to make a complaint to the OPR. That is separate to challenge proceedings, which are legal proceedings where you go before a tribunal, and the OPR has a responsibility to investigate that complaint.

It was sometime in April of this year that the HDC put out notice of decision to award. This is a live example of investigative powers and a complaint being made to the OPR that today, this legislation is taking the whole rug, the whole floor out from underneath the OPR, saying, “You cyah stay, yuh cyah suspend, you cyah say do not award a contract.” That is what they are doing here when a

complaint—a legitimate complaint is made.

This notice of award was for 11 contracts by HDC to the tune of \$3.4 billion. Hakim Hosein Construction Company Limited, \$410 million. This is how the legislation works, or is supposed to work, and after this legislation, this Bill that is before us is passed, disappears. Run wild. Trinidad Pro Construction Limited, San Francique Road, Penal, \$290 million. These are contracts that the HDC was going to award, and I will show exactly how they are amending today to change public-private arrangements, public-private partnerships, and they are coming with this concept of design, construct, finance, and saying that that is not going to affect the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. Rubbish! Motilal Ramhit & Sons Contracting Limited, \$1 billion; CE Management and Services Limited from McBean Couva, \$184 million; California Stucco Company Limited, Charlieville, \$406 million; Keith's Transport, SS Erin Road, \$232 million; Rampersad General Contractors and Equipment Rental Company Limited, \$112 million; Oilfield and Industrial Hardware Limited, \$160 million; Norris Transport Enterprises Company Limited, Princes Town, \$193 million; Bristol Construction Company Limited, \$239 million; Adam's Project Management and Construction Limited, \$201 million; an intention to award 11 contracts, published in accordance with the law, as it stood then.

Immediately upon people becoming concerned, complaints were made, asked the OPR for investigations. I have in my hand here a particular one that was made on the 16th of April, 2026, to the OPR. I am declaring that I was leading the junior attorney, who, on behalf of our client, this complaint was put in. The OPR was asked to look at bid rigging and irregularity in procurement proceedings that have occurred, and a breach of the Act that has occurred. And the OPR got to

work. The OPR commenced an investigation. We are now aware that others may have complained as well. And as a result of those complaints—not a challenge proceeding. As a result of those complaints, the HDC was forced to cancel what they wanted to do and award \$3.4 billion. That, Trinidad and Tobago, is a live, real example of the protection that the current legislation provides, that today those on the other side are coming here to gut in the most shameless manner.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: To quickly follow on—because they were upset that they could not award that \$3.4 billion—the next one that comes along, also in April, on the heels, is an award by LandmarkTT with the Allamby Residential Development. So immediately, complaints are put in again, request for investigation. But this time, as the OPR goes about it, and as the OPR is investigating, “dey vex, dey upset”. So suddenly they say, “Ay, we not stopping, no stay, no stop, proceed, full speed ahead. Because what they will do? Lick down the houses?” And they proceeded. And this piece of legislation today, as I will show, is now to try and legalize that, and to avoid the OPR stopping them in their tracks when there is a concern; hundreds of millions of dollars. And you look immediately at the Bill before you, and you see a direct express exemption now that they are seeking to pass today. They are changing public-private partnership arrangements and substituting it with this new definition.

“‘public-private partnership’ means any agreement, contract, partnership or working relationship between a public body and a person for the purpose of financing, constructing, operating, or managing public property;”

And you now flip to the new exemptions that they are adding, that none of this legislation will apply to. Not the two million limit that they are taking it up to,

nothing. “OPR, you have no say, stay outta here. Trinidad and Tobago, we will do what we want with your money, the taxpayers’ money.”

“...energy, including natural gas and oil;
...national security;

And here it is:

“...public-private partnership for public housing;”

So, in other words, “Leh we give we refinancers the contracts, leave us to do what we have to do. Because we intend to build public housing”—as we heard the hon. Member for Caroni Central indicate yesterday in the prelude, no one on this side has a problem with any public housing being built, but do it in accordance with the law and for value for money.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Build the public housing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago in open tendering, in proper tendering, in proper procurement, and not where now the OPR has no oversight. The whole purpose of the OPR was for instances like that, where billions of dollars, as I have just shown—the OPR prevented via complaints and investigation \$3.4 billion in this type of procurement taking place. And when they say, “Well, it is not going to cost the taxpayers anything, because there is no immediate outlay,” completely untrue. Because ultimately, as we all know, my friend from Couva North, the Acting Prime Minister, spent a number of years at the HDC and she knows the type of persons that you are catering for with HDC public housing, not the Landmark.

11.40 a.m.

So, when they go and they build \$3.4 billion in public housing, “yuh think people dipping in their pocket, taking out their own 3.4 billion without ah

guarantee dat dey going to get dat? Yuh think dey going to go to de open market”—and we all know those of us who have HDC housing facilities in our constituency, that the vast majority of persons, who HDC housing should be provided to, cannot afford mortgages of millions of dollars.

So, when you go with \$3.4 billion and you say, “Well, we doh have to put out the outlay,” okay, true, it is the contractor who is going to do it. But when the house is finished, what is the contract? Who is going to pay the contractor for that house? Who is going to supply the money; the \$3.4 billion? Which bank—although we could see interference taking place at the two state banks, FCB and Republic to come—because we are hearing about what is going to happen at Republic Bank, and that same financier’s hands inside there. Which bank is going to loan \$1 billion—\$1 billion, on a housing project to a contractor without a guarantee that he or she is going to be paid for it? So do not come and try, as you usually do, to fool the population, and unfortunately, on occasion they fall for it.

Let us talk about energy, because the energy sector—and they are quick to jump out, and even the drafting, Member for Fyzabad, the drafting here:

“...energy, including natural gas and oil;”

—what does “energy” mean? We have an understanding of energy, but in law you cannot just say “energy”. What kind of energy? Energizer Bunny? A battery?

Mr. Speaker: You have twelve seconds again, unless you want your 15.

Mr. S. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The energy sector, it is billions of dollars expended on an annual basis. NGC, Heritage, Paria, NP—these are some of the companies.

We are hearing on this side, NGC has not been doing maintenance work. Very, very dangerous, and the suspicion is because NGC has, for over a decade, probably the most sophisticated electronic procurement system in place that takes away human involvement in the award of contracts. They put it up, this is what we want done, maintenance of these pipelines, people are allowed to bid electronically online, put in their tenders, and the system then spits out who it should go to. They want to gut that today. They want to take away the oversight over that.

The suspicion is because they have persons lined up, and that is why maintenance is not going on. Because we hear the shallow boast about how much money NGC is making. So, why are you not maintaining what you are supposed to maintain? It is because they want this legislation passed so that they can give the contracts to whom they want by exempting it. Here is a live, live example again of the OPR's involvement in the energy sector.

A complaint was written to the OPR with respect to Heritage Petroleum Company Limited. Again, I declare an interest. I was leading the attorney-at-law, Randall Mitchell, in this matter on the 1st of June, 2026. What is disturbing about this complaint and the procurement at Heritage? It was for the south-west gas compression facility. Very, very technical. Only two companies in Trinidad who have the type of expertise dealing with this, but it is now going to a favoured friend. That is who the contract was directed to. So, immediately we asked for an investigation.

A procurement exercise reportedly valued in excess of \$570 million, involving a critical offshore production asset of Heritage, the south-west compression facility engagement. Heritage elected to utilize selective tendering limited bidding, as a procurement method, Mr. Speaker, and ended up awarding it to someone who had

no experience in that area, \$570 million. Today, the amendment before us is saying: OPR, you see those complaints, you see those investigations—and I will read it. This is one of the amendments being proposed:

“Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the Office”—meaning the OPR—“shall not, in consequence of a complaint or an investigation under this Part -

- (a) suspend, stay or otherwise restrain any procurement proceedings, the performance of a procurement contract or the operation of a framework agreement;
- (b) prohibit a procuring entity from taking a decision or following a procedure in procurement proceedings;”

It goes on, and they say:

“Any recommendation made by the Office under this Part...”

So, they gut it, take away all the powers of the OPR to stop, unless it is a challenge proceeding where they shorten the time frame by cutting the legs of a standstill period to make it even less. They are telling citizens, “You cannot protect public taxpayers’ money anymore. The OPR cannot tell us what to do.”

Furthermore, when the OPR concludes an investigation, this is what they say:

“Any recommendation...

is”—only—“advisory and shall not be binding upon a public body or any...person;”

So, OPR says, “Hey, there is corruption, you breached procurement here”. “Okay. Hard luck. Dat eh binding on us. We doh have to take yuh on.” That is what they are passing here today.

Let me deal now with this cost provision, where they are now saying that a tribunal before the OPR, in challenge proceedings, could award prescribed costs. Trinidad and Tobago, what that means, the prescribed cost under the Civil Proceedings Rules, 1998, it is percentages of the amount. So, if it was \$3.4 billion, the costs that could be awarded on \$3.4 billion—and it could be on a technicality, you know, because you could not get the documents from the HDC in time, but you were rushing to make this five-day period now. The cost that the OPR can now award against you is in the millions of dollars. Mr. Speaker, \$3.4 billion on prescribed costs? This is being done to discourage persons from coming with challenge proceedings, because you already have to pay your attorneys. You already have now to meet an even shorter time frame and a standstill.

National security: Again, all of a sudden, on the nation's roads—and up to now, we cannot get a proper answer for it—electric vehicles being utilized by the TTPS. No one could find any invitation—as the procurement legislation subscribes, no one could find the public invitation for tenders to be put in there. But when you trace it back to who was awarded the contract for the provision of these vehicles, it is clear. It is clear that the policy of those on the other side is being dictated by a handful of financiers; gutting of the procurement Act.

Mr. Speaker, in my few minutes left—how much more time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: You have around nine minutes.

Mr. S. Young SC: Good. In my few minutes, I would like to remind the population, as the speaker before used the word “hypocrisy,” I would like to remind the population of that period from 2015 to 2025, of a number of utterances when, firstly, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act was not proclaimed in full. Because, of course, remember I said it was in January 2015, it

was finally passed but not implemented. PNM won, and then when we began to look at it and how it would affect public procurement, we then had to do a number of things.

First of all, we proclaimed to allow them to build out the OPR. It was new legislation, and the same areas they screamed about and called “bloody murder” for, ironically and with a great deal of hypocrisy, are the areas they come to gut today.

In 2019, when the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, was the Opposition Leader, she told the country, the Opposition Leader told the country, that if she returns to power and returns to the office of Prime Minister, she would strengthen the OPR’s powers. Today, in her absence, they are doing the exact opposite of that—gutting the OPR, destroying the powers that the OPR has been applying, increasing the exemptions.

The Opposition Leader, the Member for Siparia, in 2021, even started a petition for government to repeal certain amendments. But today—forget the petition, in the dead of night, today they come to find specific areas that would assist their financiers so they could now repay and give the contracts to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: One of the nicest quotes from the Member for Siparia in 2023, with respect to this legislation, screaming: “The Government to kill the procurement Act”. Every accusation is a confession by those on the other side, and that is exactly what the kakistocracy on the other side has come here today to do, Mr. Speaker.

I want to touch very briefly—my friend from Fyzabad spoke about the million dollars. Because the PNM Government had to take a decision as to what

limit to put on, that the full ambit of the procurement legislation and the regulations would not cover. We debated it long and hard at Cabinet, to-ing and fro-ing, some of the same language that was used by Fyzabad, “Well, we need to speed up procurement. We need efficiency. This is strangle-holding. There are bottlenecks,” et cetera.

In order to protect the taxpayer, knowing how sometimes persons’ grubby hands get involved in procurement, we decided to go with \$1 million; \$1 million to Trinidad and Tobago is not a small sum. Today, no proper reason, no justifiable and legitimate reason can be given as to why that is being increased to \$2 million, save that—and they talked about the microenterprise and the micro economy and the small man and the small contractors. They sell it nicely, you know, but as we are seeing with the big contracts, it is going to happen with the small contracts. They already know exactly who they want contracts to go to, and I am sure my friend for Arouca/Lopinot will touch on some of that, because it is happening right now in the public utilities sector with water trucking and these other types of things.

So, what they are doing today, Trinidad and Tobago, is completely gutting the powers of the OPR, and they bring it in the dead of night to stifle people like Afra Raymond and the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute and the JCC from having proper comments, because by the time they wake up and they begin to comment, as they started to try to do today, it is too late. But I heard one of the comments from them, and the question was asked: If they are proceeding with these amendments, why are they worrying to continue to have the costs of the OPR? Because you see, Mr. Speaker, it is clear today for all who want to see—and there are many who may not want to see—exactly what is going on here today.

One of the most dangerous amendments being made now is they are giving themselves, permitting themselves the power in the future, and I am willing to wager a bet—and I am not a betting man—I am willing to wager a bet how quickly they apply this for exemptions, apart from the exemptions of:

“...energy...

...national security;

...public-private partnership for public housing;

...public utilities...

...the acquisition of goods, services...in consequence of an emergency;”

They are giving the Minister of Finance the unenviable power that I am sure they will bombard him with, that he can now exempt in the future:

“such other procurement as the Minister may, by Order, determine.”;

Even that we debated long and hard as a PNM Cabinet, and we said to the Minister of Finance, who at the time may have wanted a similar power, we said, “No.” We said the OPR should have a say, and they you should consult with, as the Government, because you cannot give that. We were not worried about ourselves, you know. Ironically, we were not worried about ourselves. The conversation at the time was, “God forbid somebody comes after the PNM, and they have the power to make exemptions to this legislation, knowing how they operate, what will happen?” Look what has befallen Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are some of the reasons why we reject outright every single one of these amendments here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: This Bill is worse, I repeat, than section 34 and, Mr. Speaker, again I say, now in your presence that you are back, the citizens of Trinidad and

Tobago, we will remember them, and we will remember their corrupt ways and what it is they have done to destroy the OPR. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, for the opportunity to contribute on this very important matter before us, a very critical matter pertaining to the future economic and industrial development of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, may I also welcome you back to the Chair of this esteemed Chamber, and may I also put on record that it is now almost midday, 11.56 a.m. I have heard the last speaker—I do not know if he rehearsed in the middle of the night, and if the script was indeed typed in the nocturnal hours. I suspect it was. But this is midday, and he says that this Bill came—you know, is being debated in like—in the midnight hour, in the dead of the night.

Well, it is in the night in Indonesia, it is in the night in Japan, I suspect. I do not know where you were preparing yourself to speak, but it is not in Trinidad and Tobago. This is midday that we have met, with the national audience awake, alert, to discuss and debate a critical matter. This matter is not in the night.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The PNM, one day when the Opposition walked out, the former Attorney General, the *Suratt* and *Suraj* man, or whatever, he came here and he passed about five Bills when the Opposition—in the dead of the night at 11.00 p.m., the former Member, Attorney General. That was the dead of the night. He

had no difficulty with that. But he has difficulty at midday debating this important matter.

Mr. Speaker, let me get to this issue. I also have a note to welcome the children, but they walked out when he was speaking.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I have to scratch that out of my notepad, Mr. Speaker. They would have had their reason. They have a wisdom of their own. Mr. Speaker, the last Member was howling to the moon, or to “Mooni”, and speaking about “This is corruption,” and “The UNC brings this to their financiers,” and so on. Mr. Speaker, the objective here is to free the economic system, free the industrial system—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—so the small and micro contractor could participate. I begin by telling you that we have been preoccupied 24 hours a day with this matter of the refinery restart. The biggest issue that constrains us and makes us move in a very slow manner is the OPR.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, we could have restarted the refinery already. Five thousand people could have had jobs now while I am speaking.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But every time we move, you know—this OPR is akin—and I am happy to continue the analogy of cricket, Mr. Speaker, to which I know you have a passion. This OPR is really an administrative Duckworth-Lewis system. Every time you make a move, they say, “Check again the scientific formula.” We make a move on the refinery, “Hold on, there is an OPR regulation.”

We make a move again on the refinery to do something, “Hold on, we cannot go there.”

Every day I ask a committee, “what is the update on this refinery?” My Prime Minister is asking me, “Minister of Energy, what is happening? When are we restarting the refinery?” I said, “Prime Minister, listen, I would like to restart that refinery tonight and flare up, but there is an OPR process, and they tell me that they have to satisfy this regulation, that regulation. They have to do this; they have to do that. They have to issue this; they have to issue that. They have to look at the registry here, the registry there.”

12.00 noon

And I say, “But when will we restart the refinery, when everything is corroded, everything rusty? When are you going to restart the refinery, when you plug it on and blow up Marabella?” They did that, Mr. Speaker. The refinery restart is being hampered, hindered and impaired by some of these regulations, which today, we have said as a government, we will have no part of, enough is enough.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He speaks about this small man. Mr. Speaker, I could let you know, just yesterday or so, a small micro-contractor went to register, to seek, you know, small contracts. When we say, “small contracts”, we mean \$50,000, \$70,000, whatever it is, you know; not \$2 million, and then sent me a handwritten note, “I tried, as you advised, to go and thing. They told me go and get insurance workmen compensation, get my financials, bank letter; get the status of all assets in the company.” This is a company with two “wacker”, or something like that, eh. “Then I have to get a health and safety environment policy. Then I have to get the technical competencies, and put a report on technical competency; put a report on

the equipment, details of VAT, references”—hear this, “two wacker to cut some grass”—“organizational chart, NIS letter, income tax letter, your bank statements for the last few years”—if you are not getting work, what bank statement you have?—“audited statements have to come; requests for pre-qualification; identify all your line of business.”

“De fella have two wacker, you know.” And what? You have to be in the *Procurement Depository, Supplier User Guide*; 73 pages to look at. The guy told me, he said, “Boss, I not interested in cutting no grass again. Ask the local government if there is any cutting grass in the cemetery.” He may have to go through the same process. Mr. Speaker, this is where the small contractors, micro-contractors, find themselves, but you know who takes advantage of this OPR right now? The big contractors.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The people associated in many cases with the last PNM Government, because they have a legal department where they have resources, lawyers, administrative staff only to challenge government and go to the OPR. They do not need to put their name up, you know. Political agents do not need to put their name up. “Dey get ah fella on de road, he doh own a pair of pants, or a wacker, and he goes in de OPR and says, I want to object. De fella doh own ah pair of pants, you know.” He goes in the OPR and says, “I want to object a \$400 million contract,” and they say, “Okay, come, come, we want to stop this contract now.”

They get their PNM lawyers to go and accompany them, posing, taking pictures—they posing, taking pictures, they reach the OPR, and they have to stop

this contract, and stop that contract, and while that is happening, people cannot get houses, people cannot get small, micro-contracts—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—people cannot get goods, people cannot get services while that is happening. To see the hypocrisy today—this is the height of hypocrisy. Those on the opposite side, they regale us about the glory of procurement law. This is a law passed in 2014. We had to take them kicking and screaming—

Hon. Members: 2015.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: In 2015. They were kicking and screaming. They boycott the Joint Select Committee on this. They walked out on the Joint Select Committee.

In fact, the reason this was passed in 2015 and not 2012, it is because the PNM opposed this legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They put their name up for a joint select committee and refused to participate, walked out. Every time the committee met, it was only the Government meeting. Then, when we left office in 2015—okay, they are now the paragons of procurement law and the virtue of all this transparency. Between 2015 and—what?—2024?

Hon. Member: '23.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—'23; '15 to '23, five, six, seven, eight years—eight years, they could not proclaim, they could not pass, they could not give effect to. In eight years, you know.

How you could come today and say, “You are so much about transparency, about accountability, about procurement, and the standards of corporate controls and governance,” and for eight years, you could not give effect to procurement law passed in 2015.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: What word can we use to describe that?

Hon. Member: Flabbergasted.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “Flabbergasted” is an overused word, but it must be used. You know, we have to find words. This is what Parliament is about.

So, Mr. Speaker, eight years they could not pass procurement law. When they passed it in 2023, by 2024, they reached—“Let’s go”—they reached to amend it. I have it in my hand here. Look here, Legal Notice, of course, Order No. 270. “We ketch dem with dat.” By this Order— “Act” means, of course, the procurement law:

“This Act does not apply to the procurement of financing services by the Ministry responsible for finance”—the Ministry of Finance—“for—

(a) central government...

(b) a public body, where the financing services are to be guaranteed by the Government.”

They started, I think, a few months after the passage of this Act, proclamation, with financial services.

What was the emergency of that? What was the emergency? This had to do with polluting and poisoning the water system? What was the emergency with financing services? Anyone could tell me that? We know national security, of course. We know emergencies will exist in the energy sector that jeopardize,

undermine the economic health of Trinidad and Tobago. We have a sense of that. What emergency with financing services? Is it because their relatives were going to use this to obtain almost \$10 billion in financial transactions; \$10 billion?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: More will be said. But they come today with the hypocrisy that we have to stop this project in the public interest. “Dey pick up somebody, as I said before, who never own two pair ah suit, two pants, and go to object.”

All we are saying in this amendment is that, “Listen, you can object. There is no removal of the right to object or challenge.” All we are saying, in the clause before us, is that you must have locus. But they are picking up people, “dey doh have no locus.” In fact, they are a “locus”.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They have no locus in law, but they are locus, and they go to object. We are saying that if you are a party to a particular arrangement and you feel aggrieved, you are bitter, you did not get the contract, and so on, you were not awarded, you have now an interest in that, you can go. We have put in the law as well—listen, I think in the High Court, in the court of law, when you go and you take up a matter, if you lose the matter, what happens? Cost is awarded against you. That is a fact. We live with that every day in the courts of the land. That is the risk of litigation.

So, your lawyer—assuming you have, you know, some lawyer who is not a dunce—I keep on repeating—we have this ongoing argument on this side here. So your lawyer, who should not be a dunce, must tell you whether you have a good case or not.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Your lawyer has to be bright and tell your client, “Look, you have a case, an arguable case. On the balance, there is a probability here we can win.” You are not doing this because you want to stop a government project. So what we are saying now is, when you come with these fellas here who have no locus, and you make a frivolous and vexatious objection, you will now pay. That is the risk. What is wrong with that? Should we continue, every Monday morning, you want to build a box drain, you cannot build a box drain because the OPR says, “Hold up, they have done an investigation and you can’t continue. Go and reissue the contract.” So you will spend five years in government and you will reissue every contract every six months. That is what they want, and there is a cost to that. The Member is speaking, you know, with this gravitas of virtue. I really cannot continue this, you know.

I have in my hand here—I want to remind the Member because I raised it before, Mr. Speaker. Many years—in fact, it is parliamentary—on the record. In the famous CCTV camera procurement issue in September 07, 2018, who was the Minister of National Security? Go and google that, or “googool” that, as the case may be.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Go and google that, who was the Minister, September 2018. A parliamentary record will tell us that there was a process, RFP for re-engineering like an expansion of the national security CCTV network. Mr. Speaker, would you believe this was supposed to close on 1.30 p.m. on the 7th of September, 2018? It records that bidders came in, Cable and Wireless, including Digicel, put in their bids. Seconds before the time was up to end, that process of

tendering, an email was sent from the Ministry of National Security, telling the procuring entity, which we believe was the SSA procurement department, “Please, extend the time from the 7th of September to the 21st of September, 2018. Because the records show that one interested party by the name of Integrated Microwave Technology Limited, trading as Vislink, did not meet the deadline. And then when they stopped, they discovered that technical submissions by Digicel were already received and somehow opened. So technical submission received, opened; National Security sends email to SSA procurement, “Ay, hold on, hold on, we need some more time,” because one interested party did not send in that.

This happened when the Minister of National Security was no other than the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. It is a matter of record.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “He say he doh geh involve with procurement.”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “No, he doh geh involve with procurement.” He would not know where the email from the Ministry of National Security originated from. He would not know, but stay tuned. That was one.

Then under their regime, the former UNC administration had procured helicopters to give aerial support to the police on lease. They left it at Cumuto, abandoned the helicopters. Then one day, in the dead of the night, to use that term, “dey wrap it up like ah roti”, put it behind a truck and sent it down to Point Lisas under guard at PLIPDECO, to send it back to North America, Canada, I believe. Trinidad and Tobago had to pay \$55 million, more or less, to send back a “chopper”, while we needed “choppers”. There was an escape at the prison at that time. They had to quickly go and flag down a helicopter from National Helicopter

Services—like on Curepe Junction, you flag down the maxi, you flag down the helicopter—went up with civilians in the air who were not trained for that type of responsibility, and the “chopper” crashed. That is their governance. That is their procurement. That is how they treated procurement, by secrecy.

What are we doing today—it is before us here, Mr. Speaker. All we are saying is, “Close the timeline with standstill.” What do you want to be? Standstill? Any time I ask an agency, “What is happening with this? What is happening with that? Why are we not moving with this?”, “Boss, we are at the standstill.” I asked him, “What standstill—you marking time? What standstill is that?” And it is the OPR with the “standstill” business.

The Member raised a matter, the Member rubbed his hand, you know, with some sauce, and said, “I’m coming to the energy sector.” Well, we are still waiting, eh—and the matter of a compressor—I do not think the Member meant a compressor per se. I know what he is talking about. It is something called a Mobile Offshore Production Unit—that is the MOPU they call it—a process started under the former administration, not this administration, for procuring that equipment, that asset. That process started under them, not us. Then when we came in, business needs change over time, we wanted to go to the international market as well and rearrange and realign our needs. No contract has been given, and, again, you know, they come, “Watch the—money, money,” everything he is talking about, hundreds of millions. Other speakers, Barataria/San Juan, and so on, will tell us later, that HDC three-point-something billion dollars, that involved not one cent of taxpayers’ money. That is private-sector-driven.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: When they did—you know, and they know what they are talking about, you know, because what the Member is accusing us of is what they did when they were in office. They were building a headquarters in the Ministry of Health, and according to the RFP, you know, the Government was giving no guarantee. You are billing it PPP, private-public.

They took state land, mortgage the state land—the state bank held the state land as collateral so the contractor who did not have to take 10 cents from his pocket could get a loan, to take a loan, over \$200 million and build. So you had a case where a contractor did not spend 10 cents from his pocket, neither had to provide collateral because they were using state land. That is what they did all over, and today now, they want to accuse us of that. The MOPU—the contract has not been given out. The lands that they talk about, the contract for HDC, that is perfectly private sector. The Member said, “Which bank will give their money?”, it is up to the contractor and the banks to negotiate. That is their business.

If they signed up for \$200 million, you need to know where you are getting it from? That is not the Government’s business, that is your business. You need to provide that you have the financing. It was several contractors, not one. We all know contractors have a limit as to how many PPPs they could be involved in. You just cannot go to a bank for 10 PPPs. So you have to share out among several people. They raised that as if a dollar of taxpayers’ money went missing. That is how they raised that, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, these matters I raise to tell you that this is in the interest of restarting the refinery; small contractors who cannot go through the sophisticated process and timelines, lengthy timelines and delay, and they get frustrated.

Because I think Members opposite want the status quo to continue; same large-scale contractors.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You know, we have discovered that a large-scale contractor who would, on the one hand, receive contracts for \$200 million-plus was also cutting grass for \$50,000.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Correct?

Ms. John: Yes.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Acting Prime Minister, Member for Couva North confirms, and will speak more on this. All I can tell the Parliament is, “Stay tuned, Couva North will be here shortly.”

So, Mr. Speaker, when this Bill came to us, and so on, we asked the energy companies and the Ministry to give us their opinion, to share with us, you know, their views on this matter. I have in my hand all the documents here, I certainly do not have time, but we have received from Paria Fuel, from NGC, from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, from Guaracara, written submissions. All these submissions tell us that this Bill, clause 4, for example, I guess, will benefit the refinery start by accelerating the restart timeline by removing potential delays, which are inherent in the current OPR process. It is a procurement timeline that keeps us back due to the OPR. This will ensure that we do not have the prolonged idling of the refinery, which has consequences on asset deterioration. We will not be able to attract investors if we stay too long to restart that refinery.

You know, you ask them, when they were leasing, when they were passing on the assets of Pointe-a-Pierre, the WGTL to NiQuan, what was the process

followed? Anybody know? Ainsley Gill, I think, was the key man. It was a partner, somebody found him and he said, “Listen, we could do that,” and they went and cut ribbon to open NiQuan. One week later, “it blow up”. There was no process followed that was transparent, open that other bidders could have gotten involved. We sat in our homes and watched the newspaper and saw somebody named Jindal came, and he is for the refinery too. I say, “Buh where he come from?”

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Not Roodal, Jindal. He came for the refinery. What process? And today, they talk about “process”. So Guaracara has submitted. This will unlock funds for development projects. It will guarantee government revenue, improve our fuel security. Did anybody note President Trump’s issue in the newspaper just yesterday, where the United States may actually ban export of diesel. If and when that happens, where “yuh getting diesel from”? You have to restart your own refinery. Today, Curaçao is moving ahead as an energy hub in this region, and we have to slow down, because we have the administrative Duckworth-Lewis system. We have to slow down.

12.20 p.m.

So, Guaracara “come in” with their notes. Heritage indicated—and this is an interesting point Heritage made:

Investigation is not adjudication. The OPR retains its oversight investigative function vis-à-vis proceedings and so on.

That remains.

The amendment prevents an investigation itself from operating as an injunction over procurement or destabilizing an awarded contract already

under performance. This provides greater contractual and operational certainty in the energy sector. Remember, energy is not ordinary public purchasing. It involves specialized limited markets, strategic investors, operators, substantial capital, risk, time-sensitive operations.

And we know of that with MOPO, with Jubilee and the South West Soldado and so on.

Excessive rigidity can frustrate viable transactions, even production-critical procurement, such as wellsite services, rigs, key materials and so on.

Sometimes procuring emergency equipment could take six to eight months under the current system, so we cannot do that. And do you know what delays mean in the energy sector? Delay means deferred investment, deferred production, deferred state revenue.

And exemption in this case here, the Members opposite make it out as if, you know, “If you pass this legislation, all hell break lose. There is no accountability, there is no, you know, proper governance and so on.” But I think it was the NGC, in their submission, indicated, that already, even when you pass this legislation, there are substantial control mechanisms in place: Auditing, internal auditing, auditing requirements, financial controls, board oversight, internal procurement controls, proper documentation, regulatory reporting, parliamentary oversight. You have sufficient controls. This is not the end of, you know, anything. This is to ensure procurement flexibility, this is what this is about. This is procurement with accountability and it is proportional because even when you give out contracts and you proceed, you still have to report those contracts to the OPR; you still have to report them. And these exemptions, some of them, this is not the first time. In fact, no speaker opposite—and I challenge any one of them

opposite, tell us the first time. This is the first time they are going to exempt. Because, you know, it is not true, you did it. We know what you did last summer.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You did it. You did it. So do not come today and make out to the population that this is the first time they are going to delegate, “Look, energy sector, national security”—security will speak of the imperatives and so on.

Mr. Speaker: Would you like your 15 minutes?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Sir. Thank you. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: So, of course, he argues that cost will discourage challenges. It will discourage people who have no interest in the matter and are working as political puppets to impede the progress of the Government, this will discourage that. So when you want to go and pose with people by the OPR, just tell them in advance, “Boss, if we loss out on this matter here, we hadda pay, eh.” And, you know, there is an interesting point about that too, I will tell you.

Do you know if you challenge a procuring entity—he likes to talk—well, we will stay with energy; Heritage, for example. You have a challenge, Heritage has to pay lawyers. Who is paying the lawyers, eh? The manager at Heritage? Is he paying the lawyer? It is the taxpayer. Hundreds of thousands of dollars, millions, are spent in the state sector responding to challenges vis-à-vis the OPR; taxpayers’ money, some being completely frivolous, and we have the report here.

We have the report and I will just briefly—this is a big, massive document. I do not have permission to exhibit but it is the Annual Report of the OPR, Office of Procurement Regulation, and I will take one area to point to. When you look—it is

2024/2025. You look at it, Mr. Speaker, and they gave examples—not examples, they actually spell out, in the reported period, all the challenge proceedings. And you look at it—I do not want to call the names, it may take too long, but status, “order of dismissal, pursuant to the Act, rejected and dismissed”, “rejected and dismissed”, “rejected and dismissed”, “rejected and dismissed”, “rejected and dismissed”, “withdrawn”, “rejected and dismissed” for failure to comply with the law and so on. Look at that.

But do you know the companies of the State that are involved in this have to pay lawyers? They have to pay lawyers, senior counsel, junior counsel, whatever counsel. They have to pay. So, Heritage, NIDCO, TGU, the Gaming and Gambling—I “doh” know who will challenge that, it is a gamble— Land Settlement Agency, National Lotteries Control Board, PTSC, Water and Sewerage Authority, North West Regional, all of these companies of the State have to take money, taxpayers’ money, and pay lawyers for your frivolous and vexatious applications. That is unfair to the taxpayer. So if the time comes when we say, enough is enough, then you pay. In this business, you pay to play.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. John: You pay to play.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You pay to play. At the High Court, if you challenge your neighbour that the mango tree “throwin mango on yuh galvanize and making noise in de night”, and you go to court with that, if you lose, you pay. And the persons with an interest, they will pursue it and where they have a sound case. So in the energy-related procurement domain, Heritage is very clear on some of these matters, and they support the amendments as proposed today.

Paria supports this because, as they claim:

This has to do with fuel security for this country since definitions become less prescriptive, bringing a wider range of arrangements within the concept of a PPP as well.

—which we look at for several areas in the energy sector as well. They indicate the importance of the OPR, which will now be advisory and non-binding, cannot stop ongoing matters. If you stop a matter, a contract in Paria, for example, on a vexatious and frivolous point that you raised, you wake up one day, you go by the gas station and “it ha no gas”, you have to drop your children to school—

Hon. Member: Bicycle.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—what do you do? You take a bicycle and drop them? Because somebody went to the OPR, posing with their PNM lawyer friend, and said, “Look, we want to stop this process of importing fuel from a particular supplier, it was not done good, it was done badly, and so on, and they have absolutely no evidence or we can find no substantive underpinning for such a claim,” and they say it. So we have the go-ahead from Paria. We have the go-ahead. For example, they give strong support to the amendments which shorten the standstill period, so that, as they say:

Procurement can proceed more quickly, and persons still have a particular period...

—you know, this a next matter that I think we need to put on the Table because some people may not understand.

When the time is reduced from 10 days to five days, the persons who are the likely complainants and, in this case, with an interest, they would have known about that process before because they participated. It is not that they wake one morning and get a letter that, “Well, you have not been selected,” and you say,

“Well, I do not know anything about that. What process was it? What did I do? What did I submit?” They know what they did. So they can launch a strong case in the event that they have to; five working days. They can do it. Because you do not have to start over a process, you are already in it, you know what is happening.

But if you are a political operative, where you have no interest, no knowledge, no nothing, you have not a clue of what is happening, but you want to just object, then really you have no information and that will become a very weak, arguable case, and this is what the amendments try to eradicate. So, Mr. Speaker, Paria indicated their support of this and the need to remove the financial burden on the State for vexatious and frivolous appeals. You know, and they are aware of some of these matters, you know. They are aware.

In February 2024, I believe it was, the major Tobago oil spill, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs had to mobilize quickly to get contractors and goods on the ground to deal with an environmental disaster and they needed some emergency systems in place, which they adopted. They actually went to Cabinet and used Cabinet authority to take contractors and fast-forward the process. They are aware of this, it is not that they are not aware of it. The NGC sent in a document:

The State must protect the country’s strategic sectors and ensure the critical operations are not unduly delayed if there are procurement issues.

They indicated, Mr. Speaker—the NGC makes a very strong case. They said:

The procurement framework must recognize that not all state activity is the same. The State operates in sectors that are fundamental to the functioning of the country, such as energy, natural gas. This underpins government revenue and industrial production.

So that they agree with the amendments before us, and this is across the board in the energy industry; this is across the board. So:

The reduction in the procurement standstill period—they agree—will ensure continuity of essential services and this additional approval stage, which is now reduced, will not impose unnecessary additional waiting periods before a contract can proceed.

Do you know—and they make an interesting point—the cost of delay is at times higher than the cost of procurement? Think of it, eh. The cost of delay is higher than the cost of procurement because when you delay in this critical sector, you delay the repair of critical equipment, you delay the replacement of essential infrastructure, you will lose hundreds of millions of dollars.

When I toured the Soldado field recently, I was amazed that out of over 900 wells, only 300 are operational, 600 abandoned, where you have proven reserves, where you are sure “it have oil”, so to speak. But 600 are not operating, why? Because outside there is like, “I doh know”, a junkyard in the sea; everything is rotting, falling down, everything—repairs needed, refurbishment, new equipment, technology, and this is the conflict we face. We have to get contractors in the sea—not only on the ground, in the sea, quickly and you cannot have a system that, when you start a project, it stops. So what is happening in the ocean? You think the erosion will stop? If the OPR stops a project in the marine environment, you think the erosion will stop? You think the environmental hazard will stop? It cannot. And this Bill before us seeks to deal with delays that threaten the reliability of energy infrastructure, production, maintenance, project completion and availability of critical equipment, so that we cannot operate in the energy sector on the same timeline that other government agencies may be able to operate

on. We cannot do that.

The commercial and operational realities of the energy sector are different. For example, NGC is required to procure specialised equipment, services. The Member knows—appears and assumes to know a lot about what is happening with maintenance contracts, and so on, and I do not know where he gets the information from. My information is that maintenance contracts have been issued, people are doing their work. It may not be to the extent that it was before April 2025, when everybody associated with Balisier House, old and new, would have a piece of the action. It may not be like that, but I assure you, work is ongoing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Maintenance work in the energy sector is not maintenance work on a building. There are laws, international guidelines, operational windows that you are required to meet. You cannot delay that.

Hon. Member: Certification.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Certification. If you lose certification in something, you could lose about US \$100 million easily in this sector. So we cannot be constrained this way and we will not be compromising operational efficiency and revenue generation. We will not do that, Mr. Speaker; we will not do that. We are very clear that this Bill will help with efficiency; it will help with efficiency. It will help with ensuring that decisions are made in a timely manner and implemented; not taking decisions and absolutely nothing is done.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke already about the current in-built oversight in the energy sector and we operate with international transparency institutes and so on. That remains intact, nobody is changing that. There are reporting arrangements, which, I must say—and we are proud—that it was a Partnership Government, led

by the UNC, 2010/2015, under the Member of Parliament for Siparia, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that brought transparency in the energy sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The energy transparency initiative came in that period, yes? So we are very clear on that, we have the go-ahead there from the gas-based industries. We have the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries speaking about this matter and indicating that they are in support, notwithstanding continued challenges.

And let me make a next point. You know, we speak about the energy sector as if, again, you are opening the door to the stable and all the horses are charging out. Not that, not so. It is not so. This sector is governed, Mr. Speaker, by the Petroleum Act, Chap. 62:01, that provides all the legal framework, the law, the regulations. It is comprehensive to determine the grant of licence in respect to public petroleum rights, production sharing contracts. They deal with issues of procurement; of engaging with national, regional and international entities in oil and gas and managing that process, Mr. Speaker. So to come today to say, “oh, we are undoing this and undoing that,” not at all, the Petroleum Act is in place. All the requirements in law to engage with the international community are there, you are not changing that. All we are saying is, “Listen”—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: All we are saying, Port of Spain North/St. Anns West, is you either lead, follow or get out of the way.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And you are not leading, you do not intend to follow, there is an option. There is an option for you. Mr. Speaker, how many minutes do

I have again?

Mr. Speaker: Three.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Three? Good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to remind my friends opposite that it was the very party and Government they were involved in, where the very OPR had questions for the former administration in a letter dated 13 August, 2025. The OPR sent a letter to the Corporate Secretary, Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited, and indicated that the process they used to lease or sell the refinery—lease or sale—that process:

...had information gaps; it was not comprehensive; there were obscure oversights—“dais de words”, you know—undertaken in relation to the disposal of those assets and related operations.

So, the OPR itself told them that. So they understand—you know, they understand this, you know. In fact, I think one of them will be happy with legislation because they know there will be greater economic activity, industrial development.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Invariably, their constituents will benefit. Because I want to wind up how I began by indicating, Mr. Speaker, these amendments today before us, it is to open the system, to liberate, to bring freedom to an economic sector that was caged. In the energy sector—again, I do not want to drill down too deep, no pun intended here. But in the energy sector, Mr. Speaker, it is traditional operators that continue and they have this monopolistic hug on to all activities. Particularly in large scale high-value activities, there is a sort of a bear hug that a few operators have, and when you try to break it so that others can come in, they stand up and say, “You want to bring in UNC friends.” No, you are opening up the

system so that—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—other operators can come in, not just the traditional people who have made millions and hundreds of millions of US dollars in the energy sector, Mr. Speaker.

Today, we say, freedom, finally, for economic activity in the energy sector and we laud this particular group of amendments because the small man will benefit. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

12.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for Oropouche East in his 45 minutes or so display of comedy, only those sitting in the audience, Members of the Government side, with citizens of Trinidad and Tobago looking on in amazement that the second speaker for the Government, on this critical piece of legislation, is the Member for Oropouche East in this House. And I were the Member, Mr. Speaker, I would have recused myself from this important Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Recused myself. Because, you see, Mr. Speaker, I would have recused myself from this debate is what I am saying, because of the temerity of someone like Oropouche East to stand and contribute for 45 minutes in a debate on public procurement in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: You see, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Hang on, if you are going to make a statement as egregious as that, you are not going to be able to leave it hanging in mid-air to attract some sort of interpretative—I want to be very careful with what I have to say about this, right. Because I do not want to appear as though I am restricting you, but you also have an obligation and a responsibility to observe the scriptures of 48(6). You know what I am talking about.

Mr. M. Gonzales: No, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, you do.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Well, then perhaps you do not know the Standing Order.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker:

“(6) No Member shall impute improper motives to any Member of either House.”

And that is what you are doing.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. Have a seat.

Mr. M. Gonzales: This is my House too. I have a right to speak.

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. Have a seat.

Mr. M. Gonzales: You cannot—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. If you are going to stand there and suggest for a moment that this Member, for some oblique reason which is shrouded in opacity, should have recused himself, you cannot do that. You either bring the facts to say why, or you move along in your debate, and you are skilful enough. You are

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Mr. Gonzales (cont'd)

skilful enough, right? So, either we go down where you condescended to particulars of that to justify such a suggestion—because just as you said that this is your House and you have a right to speak, this is the Member's House as well. He is also elected and he also has a right to speak.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: And I have the right to control the proceedings of this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: And if I tell you to have a seat and you persist, then I have a right to somewhat raise my voice at you. I do not normally do it and every Member here will admit that I have demonstrated a remarkable amount of restraint—

Hon. Member: Remarkable amount.

Mr. Speaker:—a remarkable amount of restraint from those who know me from litigation. But I am not going to have any of that. No one is going to stand here without condescending to particulars and suggest a Member ought to recuse himself from a debate without saying why. Either you, to put it in blunt terms as the Americans say, “You put up, or you shut up.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, let me say that I did not impute any improper motives to any Member of this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]—let us move on.

Mr. M. Gonzales: I am very cognizant of the rules of the Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker, and as I contribute here to represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the people of Arouca/Lopinot, I will do so within the confines of the Standing Orders and exercise my jurisdiction and my right to speak in this House unfettered.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Mr. Gonzales (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Unfettered. But I thank you for your guidance.

Mr. Alexander: Say it again.

Mr. M. Gonzales: I thank you for your guidance.

Mr. Speaker: You are most welcome.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, I would not say that I was flabbergasted, because it is an overused term, but I was utterly astonished by the contribution of the Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: You see, because, Mr. Speaker, tomorrow Trinidad and Tobago will be celebrating 50 years of Republican status; 50 years. And my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, in his contribution, talked about this piece of legislation that is engaging Members of this House is very similar to section 34. I agree with him. Because what is interesting on this particular occasion, Mr. Speaker, is that section 34—very similar to what we are doing here today—was brought into being on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Independence of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: This critical piece of legislation, gutting the powers of the OPR to expose taxpayers' money to financiers and friends of the UNC, Mr. Speaker, is being done on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be so shameless where a Government brings to Parliament, on the day before we celebrate our Republican status, a piece of legislation that will undermine and expose taxpayers to a corrupt few who will have access to the Treasury in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the procurement Act in this country came about after years of advocacy, years of public pressure on both political parties to bring it into being. And it came about, Mr. Speaker, not just out of thin air. It came about because here in Trinidad and Tobago, as an independent country, and as a republican country, as we are celebrating tomorrow, we have had experiences where taxpayers' money has been brutalized and used in ways that undermine the interests of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago during our years of independence and our years of being a republican nation because of the people and those inside and outside of politics, and those involved in civil society, Mr. Speaker, wanting better for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, decided to put pressure upon the UNC and the PNM to bring into being procurement legislation that will protect the people of this country. Because according to them, the old Central Tenders Board Act was no longer serving its purpose.

This piece of legislation that we have here today, as bad as it is, as wicked as it is, Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of an old saying, because I grew up around old people, in a rural community—you may have—let me not bring you into the debate but you know what I am talking just openly. Not you—

Mr. Speaker: I also grew up in a rural community.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Well, you understand what I am saying. I am happy to hear that you grew up in a rural community as well because perhaps, Mr. Speaker, you will understand fully what I am saying because I am accustomed to hearing people that they came to steal and they came to destroy, Mr. Speaker. They are like the devil.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: I am saying that the UNC in Trinidad and Tobago, they came

to steal and they came to destroy, and this piece of legislation that we are debating here today is an example of the UNC coming in the corridors of power in this country to steal and to destroy, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). I mean, we are all Members of the UNC who sit in the Government Bench.

Mr. Speaker: You cannot stand without facts. You see, Members have to understand what the Standing Orders say. Standing Order 48, “Contents of Speeches”, says:

“(6) No Member shall impute improper motives...”

It is a very egregious accusation to make against the entire composite body of a Government that they came to steal, okay? That is for places other than this House, you know that. You could use far—you are capable, and I know this, of using far more skilful language to say exactly what you want to say, all right? So, let us not walk down that road because what you are accusing is the entire composite body of a government of being a den of thieves, a band of brigands.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: That is what you are doing. So, unless you are willing to run the risk of an equally egregious and proportionate response, which I know you are going to jump up with the Standing Orders, you have to be a little more measured in your speech. So, the Leader of Government Business is right. Rephrase that.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, again, I did not impute, and it was not my intention to impute any improper motives on Members of the Government. But I will rephrase what—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: I will rephrase, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Do you want me to read what you said?

Mr. M. Gonzales: I will rephrase. Mr. Speaker, the Members of the UNC will not put their grubby hands on the Treasury of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, I looked at the Member for Fyzabad—

Dr. Gosine: Mr. Speaker, 48(4).

Mr. Speaker: I think, having asked the Member to rephrase, it is a term that has been used interchangeably by both sides. I am not going to stop him from saying that. He has rephrased—the accusations which he made, he has rephrased it, and that is a term that has been used interchangeably, so continue.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Thank you very, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member who piloted the Bill, the Minister of Finance and the Member for Fyzabad, and he was not his normal self. He read from his prepared speech, and he looked not even convinced by what he was telling the Parliament and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I observed my colleagues, especially the Member for Caroni Central, Mr. Speaker, and not he himself was impressed by the contribution by the Member for Fyzabad. I looked at him, hanging his head in utter shame—

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

Mr. M. Gonzales:—from the contribution of his colleague from Fyzabad, Mr. Speaker. And I thought in this current debate that the Member for Fyzabad would have regaled the population on a very important procurement matter that occurred under his Ministry that currently has exposed the taxpayers of this country to a claim of over \$4.4 billion; \$4.4 billion, or perhaps \$4.3 billion, but let us say \$4.4

billion, Mr. Speaker. It is a lot of money. Because we are told that a state agency under the Member for Fyzabad awarded a 10-year contract without oversight from the same OPR; the same OPR that they are busy undermining and watering down. Today, in this Parliament, under his Ministry, Mr. Speaker, I thought he would have put some clarification today. Who awarded that contract to WePay that exposed the taxpayers of this country to a claim today of four point whatever billion dollars? It is a lot of money today, Mr. Speaker. That was done without proper tender, without proper adherence to the procurement regime in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. I thought he would have taken the opportunity, not come here and present a Bill to this Parliament to water down and to kill the OPR. But perhaps he should have been doing something completely different to bring a piece of legislation to strengthen the powers of the OPR to protect the taxpayers of this country—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—so that today they would they not be faced with a major \$4.3 or \$4.2 billion fee. I have heard nothing about that.

Mr. Speaker, today, as we speak, which part in this legislation will recover the over \$1 billion that was awarded to the people of Trinidad and Tobago arising from that Piarco Airport scandal? That project was done under breaches of our procurement laws in this country, the Central Tenders Board Act, as we know it today, that contributed to procurement laws in this country, Mr. Speaker, where Trinidad and Tobago and the circumstances of procurement in Trinidad and Tobago are being told all over the world—where litigants have to go to a court in Florida to protect our country's interest and courts awarded over \$1 billion to the taxpayers of this country, and you have a Government coming to Parliament, not to

tell the people of this country how they are going to recover that \$1 billion on behalf of the taxpayers, but they bring a piece of legislation to undermine the authority of the OPR, perhaps to create more Piarco scandals, as we have had.

Mr. Speaker, the last Member who spoke in this debate, I thought he would have come here and given this country an update on what is taking place in that contract cartel in EMBD, where certain names were being mentioned that we are quite familiar with in this House. Again, this all came about, Mr. Speaker, from alleged breaches of procurement laws that exposed the taxpayers of this country to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. And you would expect that with this experience in the years gone by, that people like the Member for Oropouche East would have come here and introduced legislation—not what they are doing here today, but introduced legislation to protect the taxpayers of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not to gut and undermine and destroy procurement rules in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today, we are told that the Ministry of Public Utilities, T&TEC and WASA will now be exempted in emergency circumstances from procurement legislation and procurement requirements. I thought today the Government would have brought a piece of legislation to account to the taxpayers of this country as to what it is doing to recover the over \$1 billion in a scandal that took place at the Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant. Do not bring legislation to allow this country to go through the trauma of these events anymore, Mr. Speaker. Bring legislation that will ensure the taxpayers are protected, and we no longer live the reality of another major Beetham Wastewater scandal, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And as we speak today, my colleague from Couva South—I

am sure he is fully aware because he has his own challenges with TSTT. He has his lawyers busy, perhaps for good reason, I do not know. I hope he tells us. But as we speak today, Mr. Speaker, there are issues of corporate governance in TSTT all surrounding procurement with the alleged awarding of a \$49 million contract without oversight. The board is telling the people of this country that they were not aware that some senior member in management awarded a \$49 million contract to some company by the name of, what?—Hummingbird Holdings for call centre services. And while we do that, Mr. Speaker, procurement, over 150 employees of TSTT received termination letters to pave the way for Hummingbird Holdings to get this contract.

And today, we are hearing accusations and counter-accusations inside of TSTT regarding the improper award of contracts, Mr. Speaker. Where the CEO is making serious allegations against some of his colleagues inside TSTT, the board is saying that they were not aware, and the Minister is saying that he is not aware. Then who is aware, and who is protecting the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Do not come here to further expose the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is exactly what this Government is doing here today in Port of Spain.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

1.00 p.m.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Well, my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke enough about Landmark. Landmark corruption and now a landmark piece of legislation to undermine public procurement in this country.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that when you look at the provisions of this piece of legislation that exempts certain state agencies or areas—national security for example, public utilities, housing—let me tell the people of Trinidad and

Tobago, Mr. Speaker, that between 2022 and 2026, national security was allocated in the national budget, between that period of time, a total sum of \$30.84 billion; Public utilities, between 2022 and 2026, a total of \$15.09 billion; and in housing, during that period of time, a total of \$4.157 billion. In these three areas alone, Mr. Speaker, a combined total of TT \$50.087 billion; almost the size of a national budget in this country. And the impact of this piece of legislation before us here today is to expose billions of dollars from under the scrutiny and under the control and under the oversight of the OPR. That is the impact of what we are deliberating and what we are debating here today. It is not a simple piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

And when one looks at the utterances of Members opposite, you would never believe, Mr. Speaker, that they would bring to this Parliament a piece of legislation of this nature. Because when the PNM was in government between the period 2015 and 2025, we brought several pieces of amendments to this Act, Mr. Speaker, in order to operationalize the legislation. And in so doing, Members on this side, especially the Member for Caroni Central, and the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and the hon. Prime Minister, I think even the Member for Fyzabad—he was not representing Fyzabad at the time—but I recall at every opportunity they got in this House when amendments were brought to operationalize the OPR legislation, all of them screamed and they talked about watering down the piece of legislation.

Let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, of some of their words. Because when you do so, you understand the hypocrisy of what we are dealing with here today, especially from the member for Oropouche East, who said that what we are doing here today will open up opportunities for small men and small women and small businesses. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. What they are

doing here today is to consolidate and to give access to state resources for just a selected few of their friends and their financiers, Mr. Speaker.

In January 2022, in a debate here, the Member for Oropouche East, this is what he told the country and the Parliament:

The PNM was watering down procurement law.

He accused the then PNM government during a parliamentary debate for the consideration of procurement regulations in 2022, Oropouche East MP, Dr. Roodal Moonilal, argued that successive amendments had progressively reduced the transparency originally contemplated by the procurement legislation. Mr. Speaker, I said a short while ago, I want to go back to the point, but when I said that if I were him, I would not have entered the debate, it is that what I was talking about, Mr. Speaker. That is what I was talking about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: It is because of what you said over and over again that proved yourself to be, according to my friend from Couva South, a sanctimonious hypocrite, Mr. Speaker. That is what I was referring to. I know he was thinking about EMBD. I am not talking about that. You know if I want to talk about EMBD, I will talk about EMBD. I do not have to hide. But the things that he said and he put on the record, Mr. Speaker, that is why I would have recused myself from the debate.

July 2023, Saddam Hosein, Member for Barataria/San Juan: The procurement exemptions being put forward by the PNM administration at this point in time is a “free-for-all”. Free-for-all. It is not free-for-all now, you know. It is free for a few. Before the 2023 amendments were introduced, Barataria/San Juan MP, Saddam Hosein challenged an order exempting goods and services associated with

the CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting from the procurement Act. Hosein alleged that the order was unlawful and argued that it undermined accountability for expenditure. So then, what is this?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And it gets even more interesting, my colleagues. He said:

This is a free-for-all because they could give anybody a contract.

It is a free-for-all because they could give anybody a contract. So then what are you doing here today? Well, you cannot give everybody a contract. You could only give a select few. That is exactly what you are trying to do here.

He argued that:

Expenditure associated with the hosting of the meeting nevertheless had to be accountable to taxpayers.

That is the reason why, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of young people today, they are losing hope in politicians. It is because of people like them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Say one thing when it suits you and say something else when it suits you. No moral underpinning. No principles, Mr. Speaker. They believe in nothing. Say what is politically convenient, once it is convenient at that point in time, and tomorrow will see for itself. That is the kind of politics that this country is fed up of, especially coming from the United National Congress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And then there is one, Mr. Speaker, David Lee.

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have—[*Inaudible*—]minutes.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will take it. Mr. Speaker, I am taking all and I appreciate that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am taking all my time.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I am happy to see you smiling.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, sometimes when you are dealing with serious business, especially dealing with the UNC, it is hard to smile, you know.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: Because according to the old people, Mr. Speaker, “If yuh eh smile, yuh cry.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: “Yuh cry.” When you watch the line of them there, Mr. Speaker, you cry, Mr. Speaker. And hear the Member for Caroni Central, Mr. Speaker, \$1 million exemption. He described it as dangerous. And he, Mr. Speaker, was the Opposition Chief Whip:

Opposition Chief Whip, David Lee, strongly criticized the proposed law that procurement up to \$1 million should be exempt from the Act.

He described it in this House. Because you see, many of your colleagues, especially those behind you, “eh know wat yuh say”. I will remind them, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: I will remind them, Mr. Speaker, especially those on that side down there. They must know who you are. Because you cannot build one house yet, after two years of being a Minister. It is you and two social media bloggers, wasting time in the Ministry of Housing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I know it is lunchtime and you are getting restless. Let us stick to the debate. Recess is close at hand.

Mr. M. Gonzales: This is the Member for Caroni Central. The Member for CouvaNorth was not in this House yet, “so she get away”.

Lee argued that the expenditure below \$1 million should not be removed from

the rigours of the procurement legislation.

Sanctimonious hypocrisy of the highest order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And he further argued that:

The amendment went against the accountability and transparency objectives of the procurement Act and called on civil society and business organizations to oppose it.

Well, today the PNM is calling upon civil society and business interests. Let us get together and mount the biggest protest against this rampaging UNC administration, Mr. Speaker, for their hypocrisy, hypocrisy of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: So today, yesterday, or three years ago, to raise the limit to \$1 million was as bad and dangerous, according to the Member for Caroni Central. And today, he presents a Bill to further raise the limit by \$2 million, but today, it is good. You could take them seriously, Mr. Speaker? “When dey tell you walk, you must run, Mr. Speaker”. Because they are dangerous. You cannot take them seriously, Mr. Speaker, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They say one thing today, when it is convenient to them, and they say something else tomorrow, when it is convenient to them. Because according to them, they subscribe to the politics of yesterday was yesterday, today is today. That is the kind of politics that they subscribe to.

And then there is another one, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia, and she called the amendments at that point in time as “the last nail in the coffin of the procurement law”. Well, if that was the last nail in the coffin, then today her government is now performing last rites over the procurement laws in Trinidad and Tobago

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Because, Mr. Speaker, she is not here to defend what her government is doing, busy in other places—and that is subject to another discussion. But what the Member for Siparia has done today, by introducing this piece of legislation, is putting the OPR on a political pyre to burn it beyond recognition. And it is shameful, especially having regard to the fact, Mr. Speaker, that tomorrow, just as they did when she was leader of the Government between 2010 and 2015, on the eve of our 50th anniversary of independence, today she is doing something almost the exact, by introducing a piece of legislation that will expose the taxpayers and the citizens and people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, national security, billions of dollars over these years. You are now bringing a piece of legislation that will remove scrutiny by the OPR over public funds expended under the Ministry of National Security. Mr. Speaker, you would have heard over that short period of time in this Thirteenth Parliament how many times that the Minister of Homeland Security came to this Parliament and invoked Standing Order—

Mr. Speaker: 27(1)(g).

Mr. Young SC: You know it well, man.

Mr. M. Gonzales: 27(1)(g). Oh, yes, “he must know it good”.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I must help him because obviously he does not know it.

Ignore that. Go on.

Mr. Young SC: Because he never used it!

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Ignore it. Move on.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, let me not be provoked, and I will ignore it—27(1)(g), asking questions relating to accountability and transparency in public expenditure. We saw, Mr. Speaker, as a country, where the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, with a big ribbon opening, celebrating the entrance of 50 electric vehicles for the TTPS. We asked the question, were they leased vehicles, or are they owned by the TTPS? We cannot even get, Mr. Speaker, a response to that. Even as we speak now, there is a question on the Order Paper that is supposed to be answered since months ago. They cannot even answer the question. And today, Mr. Speaker, we are debating a piece of legislation to exempt national security from under the scrutiny of the OPR.

Police posts—some call them mobile posts, we have not seen the wheels as yet, or mobile posts—being constructed. The people are asking simple questions. Who got the contract? How much did it cost? You cannot get a response, Mr. Speaker. Because they have no intention of accounting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the reason why we have this legislation before us. It is to evade and to escape scrutiny. And by so doing, Mr. Speaker, we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, hopefully according to them, will not know about the hundreds and millions and perhaps billions of dollars being spent on behalf of the taxpayers of this country, and a significant proportion of it being under corrupt circumstances, if that is the case.

But when you remove transparency and when you remove accountability,

you are actually laying the foundation for corruption, Mr. Speaker, and to undermine the public interest. And as a Parliament, Mr. Speaker, that is bad law. It is bad legislation. It is bad policy and it will not protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have again?

Mr. Speaker: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. M. Gonzales: Oh, I have plenty of time.

Mr. Speaker: Seven, sorry, seven.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Yeah, that is fine. I am hearing the Member for Tunapuna say “seconds”. I could give you my seven minutes and you still would not be able to speak for seven minutes.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: Still would not be able to talk. So do not come and tell me anything. I heard the Member for Oropouche East talking about what this legislation is going to do is remove puppets and people from asking questions and what have you. So what was Ravi Balgobin? Ravi Balgobin, a public interest litigant, mounted several cases, especially during COVID, Mr. Speaker, to undermine legislation to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. He was a public interest litigant and a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. And that was his right to do. We are not taking issue with it.

But today, the Member for Oropouche East would describe those persons to justify the provision in this Act as puppets and political puppets. And therefore, this piece of legislation should suppress all of these opportunities for those so-called puppets from asking legitimate questions to defend the public interest, Mr. Speaker. That is what we are dealing with. And that is why I am saying that if I was the Member for Oropouche East, I would not have entered into this debate, especially to say the

things that he put on the *Hansard* of this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, let me read out for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago clause 5 of this Bill, and in particular, subclause (2):

“Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the Office”—meaning the Office of Procurement Regulator—“shall not, in consequence of a complaint...”—complaint like the puppets that he referred to, the Ravi Balgobins of today, Mr. Speaker—“...or an investigation under this Part -

- (a) suspend, stay or otherwise restrain any procurement proceedings, the performance of a procurement contract or the operation of a framework agreement;”

So despite the complaint, despite the investigation, allow the procurement entity to proceed with it because the Act is now specifically saying that it cannot stay these proceedings.

The Office shall not be able to:

- “(b) prohibit a procuring entity from taking a decision or following a procedure in procurement proceedings;
- (c) require a procuring entity to take, refrain from taking, reconsider, reverse or substitute any decision or action in procurement proceedings;”

I am wondering, Mr. Speaker, which technocrats drafted this Bill? Was this Bill drafted, or this clause drafted by financial interests of the UNC? Did it come about because of recent experiences, especially under the Ministry of Housing, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, where the OPR had to intervene and defend and to protect the taxpayers of this country to the tune of billions of dollars? And because the OPR was able to successfully do so, Mr. Speaker, we now have a Bill,

a response from the UNC, to protect—not rather to protect, but yes, to protect their financiers. And to remove the powers of the OPR when investigating legitimate complaints, from ordering an entity not to proceed until an investigation is completed.

The provision, Mr. Speaker, it is very offensive, because it says that the OPR shall not:

“(d) direct the re-evaluation of any submission or the recommencement or termination of any procurement proceedings;”

Not:

“(e) overturn, invalidate, set aside or otherwise interfere with the award of performance of a procurement contract or a framework agreement; or

(f) determine that any supplier or contractor is entitled to the award of a procurement contract.”

Nothing, Mr. Speaker, could be as offensive as this provision. It undermines, it has literally killed the Office of Procurement Regulation, and by so doing, exposed the taxpayers and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and to give access to the financial resources of the State by a select few and those who contribute to election financing, Mr. Speaker. That is what this provision does.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And I hate to believe, Mr. Speaker, that any citizen of this country who is a technocrat would have come up with this provision. Because no technocrat working in the state sector will come up with such an offensive provision, Mr. Speaker, that would effectively gut procurement regulations in this country after this debate. Because at the end of the day, the Government will pass this piece of legislation, and after we do so, let us have the biggest funeral for the

death of procurement laws in Trinidad and Tobago and the political death of the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: The political death of the UNC. It has completely emasculated the powers of an independent institution and transformed the OPR, Mr. Speaker, not like a police officer to guard the public interest but like a watchman, only there to watch what is taking place and not have any coercive powers to protect the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And as my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said, it is happening weeks before the reading of the national budget. Very timely. Well-coordinated. Because they know exactly what they are doing, Mr. Speaker. And the Opposition is saying that this piece of legislation is bad, it undermines public confidence and procurement, it exposes the interests of our citizens and our taxpayers and it should be rejected out of hand. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan, I recognize you. But I propose to take the lunch break at this stage. We will suspend now and we will return at 2.30, where I will recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan. Thank you very much.

1.24 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, colleagues. Thank you very much for recognizing

me to contribute on the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026. Mr. Speaker, before I get into my contribution, permit me the opportunity to congratulate the Member for Siparia and the hon. Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar for a brilliant and well-delivered speech at the United Nations General Assembly last evening.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to note that while we were waiting for the House to resume, I saw a beautiful picture of our Prime Minister sitting with Her Excellency the President, Delcy Rodríguez—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and a joint statement was issued, Mr. Speaker, and it is very relevant because I am going to read from that statement. It says, Mr. Speaker:

“In that spirit, they agreed on a work agenda aimed at strengthening exchange and mutual benefit in the areas of trade, energy, security, disaster risk management, environmental protection, agriculture, tourism, air connectivity and culture.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, the Venezuelan side indicated that the Prime Minister was indeed persona grata in Venezuela.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, they will need a very big pipe to smoke that with.

Mr. Speaker, this particular piece of legislation that we are debating here is, I dare say, a landmark piece of legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is a piece of legislation to even the playing field, so that the big contractors are not the ones monopolizing state and government contracts. You must have smaller contractors, smaller businessmen being able and allowed to enter into providing goods, services and works for the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. But my friends opposite have a difficulty with that, because for the last 10 years, the economic power was concentrated in a very small ring of contractors, very small group. So, what we are doing today, Mr. Speaker, is breaking that ring and opening up opportunities for all, all, all, all, all, all.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, they talk about exemptions. I will get into the exemptions. They talk about exemptions, but what they did not tell you is that in 2020, before they even proclaimed this Bill, they had already started to exempt services left, right and centre. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, what the motives behind those exemptions were. I will tell you because that is a very important matter. But then they said—and the Member for Arouca/Lopinot quoted my *Hansard* and so on. I want to tell the Member for Arouca/Lopinot that we had caught them breaking the law with the procurement Act—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—and they had to come and do a validation Act in 2023 to fix their wrongdoings. Because what they did, Mr. Speaker, was spend over \$3 million for an event in the Hyatt to tell the country that crime is a public health emergency. Yeah? They broke the law for that. We had to come to this Parliament in an Extraordinary Sitting to pass a validation Act to right the wrong that they did. So, do not come here with your nonsense and your hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the exemptions—look at the first one—energy. The Petroleum Act already has a procurement regime in the legislation that was colliding with provisions of the OPR. So, therefore, the Petroleum Act already has a procurement regime.

National security: You want us to tell the world what we are procuring for national security, so that the criminals and the bandits will know exactly the technology? No.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You are always coming here to complain about water. You now have a problem with us going for emergency works for water, for electricity. You have a problem with emergency works if a bridge falls down, if there is a landslide and so on. What is your argument with that?

The last one, Mr. Speaker, with the public-private housing, not a cent of taxpayers' dollars was spent in those projects; not a cent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Not a single dollar. I will give you what is taking place in Allamby. So, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, maybe Laing could give you the correct spelling and pronunciation. It is Allamby, not "Lamy".

Mr. Speaker, I am told that as the project started in around May 2026 in Allamby, the first project of LandmarkTT, which is a state enterprise, we are at about 70 per cent completion as we speak, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: There are 70 duplex units and 25 single-storey units that will be delivered by the end of this year, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Not a cent of taxpayers' dollars was spent. Not a single cent. They can say what they want, Mr. Speaker, this entire process was through a competitive bidding process; competitive bidding.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So I want to let the population know—"doh not take chain up from de PNM, yuh know. Doh not take chain up from dem"—not a cent of taxpayers' dollars was spent on that first project, Allamby development in San Fernando, Mr. Speaker, by LandmarkTT; not a single cent, not a single dollar.

But then they come and they start fearmongering and so on.

Hon. Member: Usual thing.

Hon. S. Hosein: Usual thing. It is a simple thing we are doing, Mr. Speaker. "Dey say we gutting". We are gutting nothing. Under the Procurement Act in its original form, there are two streams. One stream is public interest, which is complaints that could be filed. The second stream is challenge proceedings. So, Part IV of the Act deals with public interest complaints. Part V of the Act deals with challenge. What is the difference? If a state enterprise, a Ministry, whatever, a public body is procuring goods and services, the persons within the procurement procedure, all of the contractors who may have tendered and bid, and so on, if they are unsuccessful, they can mount a challenge proceeding, and you can suspend the procurement proceedings. We are not touching that.

With the complaints proceedings, Mr. Speaker, any member of the public can file a complaint with the OPR, complaining about issues with respect to a particular procurement. We are not touching that. A member of the public can still file a complaint. But, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the structure of the Act, in particular Part IV of the Act, we are of the belief that the OPR does not have the

power to suspend procurement proceedings where a public interest complaint is filed, and I will tell you why.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at section 44 of the Act, it says this:

“After conducting an investigation under the Act, the Office shall, without delay, in writing, inform the affected parties, the Minister, the Chief Secretary, or public official having responsibility for that body, of the result of that investigation and make such recommendations as it considers necessary in respect of the matter which was investigated.”

So, it means that after the investigation, all the OPR can do is make a recommendation. But if there is a challenge proceeding, where a contractor challenges, the OPR, under section 50(4), has the power to suspend the procurement proceedings. Any junior lawyer could tell you that. I am surprised the self-appointed Silk did not tell us that; the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Speaker, after the OPR does a public interest investigation into a complaint under section 45, they can still report the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions if there is any wrongdoing. So what we are doing right now with this, Mr. Speaker, is not taking away a power, we are clarifying the powers of the OPR under the original legislation. So it is not taking away a power. It is satisfying and clarifying the powers in which the OPR can in fact exercise. Because if any Tom, Dick and Harry can just file a complaint, do you think that serious investors will get involved in our country? This can cause reputational damage to investors, to developers, to contractors, to suppliers, Mr. Speaker.

So what we are doing is telling, in fact, what the current law is and making it absolutely clear. That is the first point with respect to this entire thing, Mr.

Speaker. We are not touching, we are not gutting, we are not removing any power. In fact, all of the other regulations that deal with challenge, evaluation, ineligibility, prequalification, procurement methods, procurement consultants, all of that remains. We are not touching those.

So where is the “gutting”? I cannot understand the argument opposite that we are gutting. There is no gutting. We are circumscribing and clarifying what are the current powers of the Office of Procurement Regulation, and “dey vex for dat”. You see, “why dey vex for dat” is because they think they get political brownie points by going to the OPR, “posing up” and taking a picture and saying, “Ay, we stop ah government project.” When you stop a government project, you stop employment. You stop delivery of homes. You stop delivery of goods and services. You stop money from circulating in the economy, Mr. Speaker. That is what you do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is exactly what you do.

When you look at the limits with respect to the PS limits and the accounting officer limits, we are suggesting—Dr. Moonilal made the point very clearly of how difficult it is for the small people to get involved in the procurement process in the Ministries. We are saying that anything under \$2 million, the PS can approve. That was the law in the Central Tenders Board Act; \$1 million was the limit. But what we did not go as far as what the Central Tenders Board Act says. The Regulations to the Central Tenders Board Act says that:

“(3) A Permanent Secretary...as the case may require, may without inviting tenders purchase articles and approve payment for the performance of services the total cost of which does not exceed...

(a) ...one million dollars...”

We did not say that in this amendment. We are saying that the PS can approve expenditure up to \$2 million. What does it mean? That the PS could just go and spend the money just so. There must be a record. There must be a level of accountability. The PS is an accounting officer that is tied under the Financial Regulations under the Audit and Exchequer Act.

So, what is the complaint? What is the quarrel? There are checks and balances within the system. Every single year, the Auditor General audits every single state agency, every single body; every single body. The OPR also still has oversight because you have to report the contract. You have to report the contract that was awarded.

So, I cannot understand or buy any of the arguments of my friends opposite, Mr. Speaker, because they spent a lot of time talking about the corruption and “This is section 34 on steroids,” and those kinds of things, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, I think I need to give some examples—

Mr. Lee: Live ones.

Hon. S. Hosein:—live examples of what was taking place under the former administration. I think I need to.

Hon. Member: Yes. Duty-bound.

Hon. Member: Live ones.

Hon. Member: Of course.

Hon. S. Hosein: Because we need to understand the context, Mr. Speaker, I know you would now like us to bring context to the debate.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet Secretariat pulled the list of Ministers of Cabinet who recused themselves from Cabinet meetings for the period September 09, 2015

to April 28, 2025. And, Mr. Speaker, in that document, there is one called Stuart Young, whose name was mentioned 140 times.

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh”.

Mr. Elder: “Nah, man. Ah 140 he say, yuh know”.

Hon. S. Hosein: One called Faris Al-Rawi, 88 times.

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh”.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, point of order, please, 48(1). What does this have to do with the current amendments in this Bill?

Hon. Member: Everything. Everything.

Mr. Speaker: The Member did say he was lending context, and also, when you look at the criticisms which have been levelled, it is a fair and proportionate response to the context. Come on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, if you would like me to, I have taken notes for the purpose of the same proportionality rule and the same context rule. So I have the notes of what has been said before. So, Barataria/San Juan, continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I also go again. Terrence Deyalsingh, 46 times; Randall Mitchell, who is all over talking about OPR, 20 times; Reginald Armour, 14 times; a name Colm Imbert, 15 times; Keith Rowley, 13 times; Amery Browne, 9 times. The list goes on, Mr. Speaker. The list goes on. I think there is one Marvin Gonzales, two times. “He get ah lil bligh”. Right?

Mr. Speaker, you see, when they did exemptions, I said at the beginning of my debate I had to give the context of why they may have done certain

exemptions, and one of them was, in fact, financing for government services. Mr. Speaker, I have a report in my hand generated by the Ministry of Finance in respect of one financial institution that would have lent the Government, or engaged in 23 loan arrangements with the Government.

This bank, Mr. Speaker, is called NCB Global Finance. Mr. Speaker, I want to call out all 23 loans: UDeCOTT loan, Mr. Speaker, was in the sum of \$180 million; Petrotrin, \$25 million; MTS, \$400 million; Government budget financing, \$1.5 billion; WASA, \$125 million; WASA, \$192 million, Mr. Speaker; EMBD, \$124 million loan arrangement, Mr. Speaker, and I am told that was to pay legal fees; NIPDEC, \$200 million; WASA, US \$35 million; ERHA, \$469 million; UDeCOTT, US \$35 million; central government, \$800 million; central government, \$500 million; MTS, \$200 million; CAL, \$25 million; UDeCOTT, \$213 million; MTS, \$269 million; NIPDEC, \$230 million; central government, \$200 million; central government, \$800 million; central government, \$600 million; central government, \$400 million; central government, \$600 million; central government, \$400 million; central government, \$1 billion; central government, \$150 million; central government, \$459 million. Mr. Speaker, the grand total of the number of loans that was taken by the previous administration with NCB Global Finance is \$10.8 “buh-buh-buh” billion dollars.

Hon. Member: How much?

Hon. S. Hosein: \$10.8 billion. Then they come here to say that they are about transparency and accountability. That is the biggest level of hypocrisy, the greatest level of hypocrisy I have ever seen.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: The Member had the gall, Mr. Speaker—because he recused himself every single time NCB's name came up in the Cabinet; every single time. Mr. Speaker, he said what? His patriotic side is shocked. It is shocked because they cannot get any more loans at this time, Mr. Speaker, because they have \$10.8 billion in loans racked up by the last Government.

This is madness, Mr. Speaker, that a Cabinet Minister's family is affiliated with a bank that received \$10.8 billion in loans; \$10.8 billion. Could you imagine that? Then he has the gall to come here and talk about exemptions? To talk about exemptions. Mr. Speaker? That is what the records reflect. That is what the reality is, Mr. Speaker; \$10.8 billion to NCB Global Finance. That is the same bank, Mr. Speaker, that had a crocus bag of US dollars that they found on the tarmac at the Piarco International Airport. Crocus bag of money going away. Crocus bag of money going away, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I want to give—

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]*—the running commentary.*

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I want to also move on to that area, the energy industry, an example there, because that is one of the exemptions that we have under this particular Act here, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are two gas stations: One in Debe—I think it is in the constituency of Oropouche East—and the other is in Chase Village.

Mr. Lee: Two gas stations.

Hon. S. Hosein: Two gas stations. Mr. Speaker, one called Big Q Consulting Limited—

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. S. Hosein: Big Q Consulting Limited—that particular company had some owners, and so on, and there was a takeover of that particular company by one Juliet Modeste and Shantal Cummings; Juliet Modeste and Shantal Cummings.

Mr. Speaker, that particular gas station in Debe operated—and how it works, Mr. Speaker, is that when these gas stations operate, they have to pay in advance for the fuel and then, thereafter, NP will provide the fuel products to the gas stations. So, therefore, you pay upfront. Mr. Speaker, I am told that Big Q Consulting Limited would have tendered several cheques between the period 11th September to the 18th of September, 2026, representing a sum of \$748,000, because they were owing \$1.3 million to NP. So they presented six cheques in the sum of \$748,000.

Mr. Speaker, I am told that every single one of those cheques bounced; every single cheque bounced. Mr. Speaker, do you know who is Juliet Modeste and Shantal Cummings? Do you know? There was a Minister of Government in the last administration named Foster Cummings who recused himself from Cabinet when the increase of fuel was deliberated on. I am told, Mr. Speaker, that one Juliet Modeste and Shantal Cummings is the wife and daughter of Foster Cummings. Wife and daughter. What is the accountability they were talking about? What is the transparency they were talking about earlier, Mr. Speaker? What is it?

So they were presenting bounced cheques to NP. Mr. Speaker, I am told that NP locked off the supply. That gas station is now closed as of the 9th of September, Mr. Speaker. That is what was taking place there. Mr. Speaker, that is what is taking place.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I hear my friend for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West saying that that is a criminal matter. It may very well reach there, Mr. Speaker. It may very well reach there.

Mr. Speaker, there is another gas station—

Hon. Member: A next one?

Hon. S. Hosein:—Chase Village gas station.

Mr. Lee: Owned by the same people?

Hon. S. Hosein: In 2019, there was another takeover, coincidentally of another gas station in Chase Village called Chase Gas Limited, and the two persons who are now the owners are one Donetta Pierre and Oneka Mayers. Mr. Speaker, I am told that these—and the Minister did in fact admit that they are business partners of his because they have another company called Klydon.

Mr. Lee: Which Minister is that?

Hon. S. Hosein: Foster Cummings, former Minister. So you have a former Minister getting two gas stations, Mr. Speaker, now issuing bounced cheques, and today they have the gall to tell us about exemptions and transparency and accountability?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.55 p.m.

Hon. S. Hosein: Man, I want to tell them to “go so with allyuh hypocrisy. Go so, go so with allyuh hypocrisy.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, we are building houses for people. This one Shantal Cummings, I am told, this Shantal Cummings, she was issued a house. There is a lease registered in Real Spring in Valsayn. I believe she did not like the

house again and they gave her one in Eden Gardens. She surrendered the Valsayn house and they gave her one in Eden Gardens.

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I was shocked when I saw that. Then I saw another deed on my desk, Mr. Speaker; another deed of lease, one for Eloise Gonsalves, one for Storm Gonsalves—wait, it is not those I am looking for.

Mr. Speaker, I am seeing a deed of mortgage here, registered, public document, dated the 27th of April, 2023, between Kareem Josiah Marcelle and the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company for a unit in Edinburgh 500. So when they are talking about transparency, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, I rise on 48(1), we are discussing procurement today, not other people's deeds and properties that they own.

Mr. Speaker: Whilst I hear you on that, the speeches of both the Member for Arouca/Lopinot and Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—as a matter of fact, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West put an interesting label of a “kakistocracy”.

Mr. Young SC: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker: Yes. So perhaps for those who do not—Diego Martin West, you know what a “kakistocracy” is? Right? So if you understand what a “kakistocracy” is, you will understand why the Member for Barataria/San Juan has to respond in a proportionate manner.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Young SC: Standing Order 48(6), imputing improper motives to a Member on this side.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. S. Hosein (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I do not think he imputed anything. All he said—

Mr. Young SC: And kakistocracy—

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no, all he said is that he made reference to the existence of a document, not saying anything. That is all. It is quite unlike—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(5), to what end did he mention this document?

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East—

Mr. Manning: Answer my question, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, well, I am going to respond to you. You know what an imputation is? It is where you put a fact and then you ask for an inference to be drawn. The mere statement of a fact is not an imputation. Barataria/San Juan, continue, please.

Hon. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, when they talk about all of these issues with public housing and so on, Mr. Speaker, we are building houses for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They were given the Vincentians houses. Mr. Speaker, Storm Gonsalves, Eloise Gonsalves. Now we see the Marcelles and the Cummings are getting homes also, Mr. Speaker, and they are all affiliated with the PNM Government in high office. They are affiliated, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, they want to talk about corruption and grubby hands? Mr. Speaker, they have no shame to talk about that today; no shame.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: No shame to talk about that. Mr. Speaker, they are making a fuss and a complaint about open tendering, and so on. I have a report here in my hand

with respect to HDC, for the contracts that were awarded post-OPR, between 2023 to 2026. In this single-source procurement, Mr. Speaker, they have procured \$172 million in work; single source. You know what that means, Mr. Speaker? You hand-pick. You say, “I like you. You come. That is the one we want.” Competitive, \$130 million worth of contracts, Mr. Speaker. They have no shame to enter this debate, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—no moral authority whatsoever, Mr. Speaker; no moral authority.

They were single source, hand-selecting their financiers, Mr. Speaker, to get contracts in the HDC. That is what they were doing. When we did it, Mr. Speaker, through the Landmark, Mr. Speaker, that was a competitive bidding process that was done, unlike what they did, Mr. Speaker, with respect to HDC. And let me make it very clear, San Fernando East, the project is in your constituency, nobody stopped us. The project is full steam ahead.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Nobody stopped. Nobody stopped.

Dr. Moonilal: The people in the area are happy.

Hon. S. Hosein: I want to tell—because I know he is listening, and I want to tell Mr. Cummings that the information that I revealed did not come from this side, it may have come from his side. It did not come here, Mr. Speaker. It did not come here, because I realized the Member for Arouca/Lopinot was auditioning for the leadership of the PNM when he spoke earlier, right? I think he was in an audition.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to give an example of PNM procurement style for housing under the HDC. You see, Mr. Speaker, they issued a particular tender for

the construction of townhouses for the blocks at Trestrail Lands, D'Abadie, site 1R, Zones D and E1. And the proposed building works, Mr. Speaker, were envisioned to yield approximately 92 townhouse units.

Mr. Speaker, based on their market research, and so on, this is what the tenders committee decided. They said that they will go out with this particular project on a sole-select basis for 92 townhouses that amounted now to \$72 million; single-source selection. Mr. Speaker, you know who is the contractor, one Ricky Raghunanan Construction Limited, on a sole-select basis; sole select. When you look at the records of the HDC, Mr. Speaker, the internal HDC estimate was \$68 million. On the sole select, Ricky Raghunanan Construction Limited came in at \$73 million, which was about 107 per cent more; 107 per cent within the internal estimates.

The board said that they are not going to award contracts that cross over 105 per cent, but yet they awarded him the contract that crossed the 105 per cent. Mr. Speaker, with respect to this particular project, HDC awarded the contract for \$73 million, but what you need to understand too, Mr. Speaker, is this, the timeline. Do you know that they sent out the tender for this particular project, Mr. Speaker, and it was to be closed in seven days? Seven days. Seven days, Trestrail was closing, seven days, and then you all want to cry, "Accountability and transparency." I want you all to answer that. Answer how Ricky Raghunanan got a \$72 million sole-select contract, and the tendering period was seven days, from the date of the invitation to the date of the closure of the bid. You want to know why?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up, unless you want your 15.

Hon. S. Hosein: Of course, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, with this same Ricky Raghunanan, the houses were so-called constructed, but I have two big documents in my hand here, Mr. Speaker, one is called phase one assessment report of the townhouse, and one is phase two.

Mr. Speaker, these documents are exceedingly heavy, voluminous, but contain serious information. Mr. Speaker, within this project, what they have said, based on the studies, is that you have to break down all of these townhouses really. Mr. Speaker, I want to give you the findings of this report. The findings are, Mr. Speaker, is that when you look at the report, there was no steel—what they call RC beams, RC, in the first-floor decking of the building. All they had, Mr. Speaker, was what you call decking pan. There was no steel in the concrete. They were building houses, and if a hard breeze blow, Mr. Speaker, the roof gone and the building collapse, you know, because the building could not take load. There was no steel in the decking. There was only the decking pan with concrete alone.

Mr. Speaker, the report goes on to say, that the steel roof, there was no ring beam in some of the units. Therefore, this is what it says:

This would involve the removal of existing bolted connections to the RC beams, where they exist, and installation of new bolts, casting ring beams. They could not find proper ring beams, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the concrete testing of this particular site, this is what it says, it says:

The core from Building 35, Apartment C was tested for compressive strength following a particular test, and this core was the only one that could have been tested, as the other samples disintegrated while drilling, suggesting low concrete strength.

Seventy-two million dollars, Mr. Speaker, and not a single person can occupy those townhouses. Then today, you all—all you all there have the gall to come and talk about what the UNC administration is doing. We are building proper homes for the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—with ring beams, with steel in the concrete, with proper concrete. We are building that.

When Laing, the one that was awarded the contract in Allamby to do the infrastructural work, it cost the Government \$17 million. I am told, when the contractor went in, they discovered that there was one inch of asphalt on the road. You had water mains running in the middle of people's lots, so if you put down a foundation, you might get an underground swimming pool; \$17 million, \$72 million for townhouses that nobody could occupy. That is the legacy of the PNM, and today you all have the gall and the tenacity to come and criticize and challenge us?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Man, I say, “You all rock so. Rock so.” That is what the PNM was doing.

There is another contract, Mr. Speaker, one that was given in the constituency, I believe, of Arouca/Lopinot, for the building of several units at Bon Air North, Phase III, Arouca Housing Development to one Pace Construction Services Limited. Pace was given a sole-select contract there also, Mr. Speaker. I want to give you—I have it here—the value of those particular works, with respect to what is going on there. That one, I believe, was about \$32 million in works; \$34.08 million, again, sole select, given to Pace Construction Services Limited.

Who is Pace, tell us? I want any one of you all to stand up and tell me who is Pace Construction Services Limited. You see, you all are vex. You all are vex. You see, when you are in Opposition, you have to stay there for a while because you all committed sins upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You all have failed. Mr. Speaker, I had to walk with a box here today with all of these documents, you know.

I talked about HDC. I spoke about what was taking place in the energy sector, the gas stations. We talked about, Mr. Speaker, what was taking place in other areas of housing and so on. Now, I want to move within a state agency under my Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Speaker, there is a state enterprise called PSAEL. PSAEL is a company that was set up, Mr. Speaker, as a state enterprise to manage the lands of the former Petrotrin and so on. There was a chairman of that particular agency in the prior administration, and, Mr. Speaker, the PSAEL was met with a pre-action protocol letter from one Frank Gittens on the 25th of May, 2026, purporting to represent one, Vilmat Trading Company Limited of Fahey Street, Gulf View, La Romaine. They are claiming that the PSAEL owed them works for four contracts on West Coast Drive in the sum of \$70,000; Fahey Street North, \$71,000; Fahey Street South, \$70,000; and Soogrim Street, Phase 1, \$72,000. The grand total of about \$284,000.

Based on PSAEL's verification and records, Mr. Speaker, it says this, they said that they had done a search on the legal server but could not identify any files related to this contractor or any works. Searches revealed that they could not have been notified of the invoices. There were no board Minutes for this particular

contract being issued. They looked at other records, Mr. Speaker, and they were not able to verify any of the works and/or contracts. Now, Mr. Speaker, the person purporting to be the contractor then sends an email to PSAEL, and in that email they attached a letter on the email. Mr. Speaker, in that letter, it is addressed to the Chairman of PSAEL, and it is signed by one, Junia Regrello, former Chairman of PSAEL. I think he is a former Member of Parliament for the PNM, a former PNM Mayor, and a former Chairman of PSAEL.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read this letter into the record, because I was flabbergasted. I could not believe my eyes, Mr. Speaker, when I read this letter. This is what the letter says:

Dear Chairman,

This letter is to confirm that an emergency job of cleaning drains in Gulf View was authorized by me, the Chairman, and due to heavy rainfall and blockage of drains, which created something of a catastrophe for the residents of the community, and was undertaken by Vilmat Trading Company. The urgency of this task stemmed from multiple complaints from residents, including a board member. Given the sensitivity of the nature of the situation, prompt action was imperative to address the concerns raised by the community. The contractor is a resident of Gulf View and effectively undertook the project. The work was carried out to the highest standards and in compliance with all relevant regulations.

I personally visited the site...

—Mr. Speaker, there is a picture in my hand. I have seen a picture with Mr. Regrello and someone purporting to be the contractor, or so on, and a backhoe in the back. He said:

I personally visited the site, was appalled by the situation and conditions in which the work had to be carried out, which was stymied by heavy rainfall.

This is what he said, Mr. Speaker. This is what I could not believe. He said:

The timing of this project fell smack into the election season. Therefore, it created levels of speculation and hesitance, which resulted in the non-completion of necessary documenting. I humbly apologize for this slip-up and wish to inform the Chairman that this was done for the best interest of the people, which took precedent over protocol. Any assistance given to Vilmat Trading Company will be appreciated.

Once more, I apologize for any tardiness which may have occurred on my part.

Junia Regrello.

Mr. Speaker, you know what this is tantamount to? A Chairman, a political appointee of a board, telling a contractor, “Go and do work, I will pay you,” and then saying, “That is just protocol. Sorry, I slipped up.” That is the law. He has broken the law, Mr. Speaker. That is illegal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Under the current regime of the procurement Act, you cannot procure like that. He is admitting that he is going and hand-selecting contractors and telling them, “Ay, do work there.” There is no scope. There is no estimate. It is in the middle of the election season. There was no confirmation of funding, but he is telling them, “Ay, go and clean dat drain.” That is how you all intend to govern? That is why you all will stay there for the next 10, 15, 20, 50 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: In 10 years, you all have destroyed this country. In 10 years, you all have assaulted the Treasury. In 10 years, you all have allowed corruption and crime to run rampant in this country.

We, on the UNC side—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—are bringing back Trinidad and Tobago to a place of law and order and good governance. Mr. Speaker, this particular piece of legislation will, in fact, enhance that, because we are going to ensure that we break the monopoly and give the small people a chance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I gave the examples. If I did not convince you enough today, Mr. Speaker, I do not know what else will convince you. This is what was taking place under the PNM. This will never happen under a United National Congress Government, Mr. Speaker. We have checks, balances. We ensure that this particular piece of legislation is transparent. We ensure that this particular piece of legislation has the necessary checks and balances inbuilt within it, Mr. Speaker. Because other than just the OPR legislation, there are other pieces of legislation, such as the Exchequer and Audit Act. You have the Auditor General. You have the Ombudsman. You still have all of the procedures available to anybody under the OPR Act.

So when you all say that we are gutting, there is absolutely no gutting whatsoever of the OPR legislation. You see, Mr. Speaker, they could have exempted X, Y, and Z, and expected the country to stay quiet, but they were afraid to do what we did, because they understand the challenges of the OPR. We have, in this one year, understood the challenges of what was taking place. You cannot

deliver, sometimes, a bottle of water in the Ministry. You cannot deliver simple goods and services.

Mr. Speaker, what was happening is that a man who wants to sell doubles had to go under some other company, and so on, that is registered and give those people a little commission. They are making a little money selling doubles just so that they can provide services to the Government, Mr. Speaker. That is what was happening.

We are breaking up that so the small man can get involved.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: But you see, Mr. Speaker, they were only fixated on friends—we see it with the HDC houses—family. Mr. Speaker, we saw it with the bank contracts and financiers. We saw it with the contracts, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if that did not convince you of the wrongs and the corruption of the PNM, I do not know what else will. But the people of Trinidad and Tobago spoke resoundingly on the 28th of April and chopped off their hands, their grubby hands, from the cookie jar. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dominic Romain (*Malabar/Mausica*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate before us this afternoon. But before I address the Bill that we are treating with, Mr. Speaker, permit me to respond to a reference that was made by the Member for Oropouche East in his contribution, as it pertains to a company by the name of NiQuan. It is something that Members

opposite have put in the public domain time and time again, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is time the PNM corrects that record.

I am reading here, Mr. Speaker, from a statement that was placed on *Hansard* by then Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Franklin Khan, in 2018, and it reads:

“On September 25, 2009, Petrotrin placed the Joint Venture Company World GTL Trinidad Ltd into receivership. By that date, the budget had increased from US\$165M to US\$399M. The appointment of the Receiver resulted in the termination of the joint venture and the commencement of arbitration proceedings by WGTL Inc. against Petrotrin for breach of fiduciary duty. The...costs to Petrotrin...”

So:

“The Arbitration Tribunal ruled against WGTL Inc. and ordered the company to pay costs to Petrotrin With the termination of the joint-venture, Petrotrin moved to complete the project. By the end of 2010...”

—who was in power by the end of 2010?

“...Petrotrin ceased funding for the completion of the project. Accordingly, the Receiver shifted the focus to the acquisition of an investor to complete the Plant. Following an open process the Receiver identified NiQuan as the prospective investor.”

—at the end of 2010. The PNM demitted office in May 2010, but they keep blaming the PNM for selecting NiQuan. It goes on:

“By letter dated April 16, 2012, to the Receiver, NiQuan Energy LLC submitted a proposal in response to the RFP, and by letter dated July 6,

2012, the Receiver notified NiQuan Energy LLC that it had been selected as a prospective investor in October of 2014...”

In 2012, 2014, who was in government?

3.15 p.m.

It goes on:

“...the Petrotrin Board approved the Receiver’s recommendation of NiQuan as the preferred investor.

The Receiver then entered into negotiations with NiQuan on commercial terms for the acquisition of the plant. Arising from the negotiations, a price of US\$35M comprising an initial payment of US\$10M and preference shares to the value of US\$25M payable in two (2) equal tranches was proposed. NiQuan reached final agreement on the commercial terms and all other outstanding issues on or about August 5, 2015.”

Mr. Speaker, so all of these things they tried to attribute to the PNM, according to this statement that was placed on *Hansard* by then Minister of Energy, Franklin Khan, it was them—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain:—the People’s Partnership who sold the GTL plant for peppercorn rates and then they seek to blame it on the PNM. But anyway, Mr. Speaker, I just need to put that on the public record. Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us today is entitled the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026. I think perhaps they should have called it the public procurement and disposal of public property repeal Bill, 2026, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. D. Romain: Because when we look at the provisions in this Bill, Mr.

Speaker, contrary to what the Member for Barataria/San Juan said, based on the crocodile tears that they shed for 10 years, shouting to the hills that the PNM gutted the legislation that they passed in 2015, I think you all owe the PNM an apology. Because Mr. Speaker, had the PNM not done what they did in terms of amendments to what they passed in 2015, the procurement process in Trinidad and Tobago would have shackled, handcuffed, based on what they are telling us today. And all of the cries and all of the tears that they shed for 10 years that the PNM watered down the legislation, and gutted the legislation, it is noted that nothing in this legislation before us today seeks to treat with any of the complaints that they had for those 10 years.

I would have thought this legislation would have come here 17 months ago, because they made the actions of the last administration seem so egregious in terms of this procurement Bill, we thought they would have sought to fix it as soon as they got in. But for the last 17 months they have been engaging in procurement, Mr. Speaker, under the same egregious, watered-down, gutted legislation and all of a sudden, they decide, time to fix it. Why? what has changed? Why did you not realise this a year ago? Permit me to quote, Mr. Speaker:

“There is a thrust, Madam Deputy Speaker, as much as they can stop us, we are going to build homes for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So you”—can—“...file how many complaints...”—you—“...want...”—you—“...can file how many challenges you want, we are going to build houses.

They:

“...could try as much”—they—“...like; we are going to ensure that investors start constructing in Trinidad and Tobago...could try as much as

they like, we are going to ensure that the energy sector will have the freedom to operate...”

—the Member for Barataria/San Juan, Mr. Speaker, in his contribution to the Public Health (Amdt.) Bill. And in my contribution to that legislation, Mr. Speaker, I said, any legislation that this Government brings, while on the surface it may appear to be good, well-intentioned, you require:

“...a fine-tooth comb, a pound of salt and a magnifying glass,”

—look below the surface—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain:—the pieces of the puzzle are now starting to come together, Mr. Speaker. So the Public Health (Amdt.) is building out the frame for the puzzle and this piece of legislation before us today is starting to fill it in. We are seeing it. Mr. Speaker, I reference the report of the OPR for the period 2024/2025, and the Procurement Regulator would have made some very interesting observations, it reads:

“During fiscal year 2024/2025, the evidence confirms that the strategic integration of procurement remains insufficiently implemented across the public sector. Public bodies continued to rely on pre-proclamation practices; procurement reporting remained deficient; data quality continued to constrain effective oversight; and recurring procedural non-compliance limited transparency and reduced visibility into procurement activities and outcomes. ‘These findings indicate that the policies, procedures, and governance arrangements mandated under the Act are not yet consistently embedded with organisational planning, procurement, decision-making, and performance management structure...’”

It goes on:

“The continued use of the redress mechanisms”—which they have gutted here today—“is a significant regulatory indicator.”

What redress mechanisms, Mr. Speaker? This is when persons believe, contractors believe, that, “Ay, everything is not above board and I need to reference this to the OPR for them to look into it,” not necessarily making any allegations, but just to satisfy themselves that there was fair treatment and there is nothing untoward in the award of those contractors as was the case suggested, hinted at with the \$3.4 billion HDC contracts, Mr. Speaker, and of course, LandmarkTT Properties Limited.

“Beyond resolving individual disputes, these mechanisms provide the Office with important intelligence regarding recurring compliance failures, governance weaknesses, and matters requiring sustained regulatory attention. They also reinforce a central accountability principle: effective accountability mechanisms are essential to maintaining confidence in the system and enabling the Act’s reform objectives to advance.

At the same time, matters identified through the Office’s oversight functions continue to raise serious regulatory concerns. In some instances, the circumstances of the issues suggest that certain public bodies have directed effort toward circumventing or avoiding regulatory requirements rather than progressing the underlying objectives of the Act. This is unacceptable.”

This is the Procurement Regulator, saying this:

“Public bodies cannot treat compliance obligations as optional, negotiable, or secondary to other priorities. The Act binds the system in law.

These findings should prompt clear reflection across the procurement

ecosystem on whether compliance is being pursued as an end in itself, rather than as a means of achieving stronger governance, accountability, risk management, and public value.”

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely nothing in the legislation before us today to treat with any of that. And I am sure Members opposite, in particular the line Minister, the Minister of Finance, would have been interested in this because certainly he was interested in it, Mr. Speaker, when he was on this side. Oh yes, he went through it.

Mr. Birchwood: What did he say?

Mr. D. Romain:

“UNC wants answers on who got \$5B in contracts”—16th of the ninth, 2024.

“The United National Congress wants to know who got \$5 billion worth of contracts which were allegedly issued in violation of procurement law via ‘excessive use of limited and non-competitive procurement methods.

That’s what UNC Shadow Finance Minister Dave Tancoo called on Prime Minister Dr...Rowley and Finance Minister Colm Imbert to reveal yesterday as he noted the findings of Procurement Regulator Beverly Khan’s recently released report. The report came after the first year that public procurement legislation came into force in the public sector.

‘Who got \$5 billion in contracts and why?...I challenge the Prime Minister and Finance Minister to provide the truth on this matter,’ Tancoo said...yesterday”—during the—“UNC media briefing in...’

He said the procurement regulator’s report noted that in one year, contracts valued at just... \$5B were awarded by government institutions through ‘excessive use of limited and non-competitive procurement methods.’

Tancoo said”—that—“the Procurement Regulator’s report, ‘.. is a damning tale of how this...Government, openly...”—flaunted—“...the”—very—“laws they passed, openly breaking the laws in the award of contracts, are throwing away billions of taxpayers’ money and refusing to account for it.”’

Mr. Speaker, under the legislation that we are dealing with today, oversight has now become an inconvenience and the Government is seeking to provide ways to fast-track, and again, exacerbate what it is that the Procurement Regulator has referenced with respect to public bodies seeking to circumvent and avoid regulatory requirements.

Mr. Speaker, we are not talking here about two pennies, two cents; we are talking here, Mr. Speaker, about billions of dollars in public property. They keep saying, no taxpayers’ money involved, yeah, but we are talking about taxpayers’ assets, state assets, valuable land, Mr. Speaker.

And as I mention the issue of land, I take note that when the LandmarkTT Properties Limited issue arose, in seeking to defend it, the line Minister, Member for Baratania/San Juan, is noted to have said, the Minister defended the public procurement process relating to the Allamby housing site, which has become the subject of scrutiny. He said he had been advised that the selective competitive procurement method was used, he identified the successful developer, as Mootilal Ramhit and Sons Contracting Limited. Mr. Speaker, a name that we keep hearing. There is an HDC development taking place in my constituency of Malabar/Mausica, where some 792 housing units, I am told, are supposed to be constructed, a development called Pineapple Development, Mr. Speaker, and again, that name came up.

The residents of Crescent Gardens which is just adjacent to this development

have been complaining to me constantly about the issues of dust, about the issues of their roads being used by the trucks passing through, and so on, and I had cause to intervene on their behalf and to speak with one of the contractors who was there to ask them what they could do to alleviate the situation and that is where the name was mentioned to me. Mr. Speaker, I enquired, because I wanted to know who do I have to speak to—beside you, who do I have to speak to with respect to this. Because when the construction starts, the problem is going to start up again, the residents and constituents are going to reach out to me and I need to be able to address this or to forestall that issue, Mr. Speaker.

But what was interesting was when the Minister would have mentioned what the process is, LandmarkTT Properties Limited would hold on the funds until the houses are sold, they would take their portion for the land and then they would distribute whatever has to be distributed to the contractors. But what is the process by which they would determine the cost of land, Mr. Speaker? This we do not know. How do you value the land? We want to know. Because the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about PNM's legacy of corruption and we committed sin—well, I was not there—and therefore, we have to stay on this side for a long time. Okay. And one would assume that the UNC's with respect to is procurement is unblemished.

I recall \$6.5 million to retrieve a \$250,000 fire truck; a piece of land called Eden Gardens, valued at \$52 million by Lyndon Scott, purchased by the State for \$175 million, Mr. Speaker. What is now the facility that was used in Santa Rosa to house detainees under the SOE, Mr. Speaker, Jack Warner is on record as having said, he was offered that property for \$17 million. Under them, the State would have acquired it, Mr. Speaker, leased it, and outfitted it to \$330-plus million, Mr.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Mr. Romain (cont'd)

Speaker. Today, it is not fit for purpose when we read the stories of persons who were detained—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh.”

Mr. D. Romain:—and the conditions. All that money spent, \$88million, for a waste-of-time fence outside the prison at Golden Grove. Every day I pass by that, the only thing that fence is guarding is bush.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: As I said before, they could lease it to Trevor Sayers, he could use it, Mr. Speaker. Prison conditions continue to be abysmal, but they found \$88 million to spend on a fence that serves no useful purpose. That is UNC’s legacy—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain:—when it comes to procurement.

Mr. Hosein: “All of dem thing Jack Warner do.”

Mr. D. Romain: Under you all. Mr. Speaker, what is at risk? Again, according to the office of the OPR:

“Key highlights Fiscal Year 2024/2025

\$16.0bn.

Total Awards by Value

141,479

Total Number of Awards Reported

124,909

Micro Procurement Awards

\$13.6bn.

Total payments

9.%

Public bodies Reporting Disposal Transactions”

But yet still, nothing in this legislation before us today, Mr. Speaker, to treat with those deficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, clause 5 is perhaps one of the most egregious in this piece of legislation before us today. Why is that? For the benefit of the public listening and who may not have visited the *Gazette* to read the legislation, this is arguably, Mr. Speaker, the most structurally significant provision in the Bill. Under this clause, Mr. Speaker, the OPR would be expressly prohibited from restraining performance of a procurement contract; preventing a procuring entity from taking a decision; requiring reconsideration or reversal of decisions—all of these are prohibitions of the OPR—ordering re-evaluation; ordering procurement proceedings to recommence or terminate; overturning or invalidating an award; interfering with performance of a procurement contract or determining that a particular supplier is entitled to a contract. Most significantly, Mr. Speaker, the OPR recommendations would become more advisory rather than binding.

Mr. Speaker, the OPR is not simply an administrative department. It is the statutory regulator that is established under the procurement framework to promote accountability, transparency, integrity and value for money. The existing framework also provides for complaints, investigations and challenge proceedings. The OPR’s own handbook, Mr. Speaker, describes investigations as part of the regulatory framework and notes that matters may be referred to the DPP where there are reasonable grounds to suspect an offence.

The potential weaknesses in this particular clause, Mr. Speaker, raises serious questions about accountability, such as, suppose the OPR investigates

procurement and concludes that the evaluation was defective, the tender process was unfair, the winning bidder was improperly selected, or the procurement rules were breached. Under the proposed section 44, the OPR cannot itself suspend or reverse the procurement on the basis of its investigation and its recommendations are merely advisory. Mr. Speaker, the crucial question here to the Government, what happens if the procuring entity simply ignores the OPR's recommendations?

So you are telling us that while the investigation is taking place, the entity could continue to do the work. By the time the OPR is completed doing its work, the project could be so advanced, what are they supposed to do? If we take, for instance, again, LandmarkTT Properties Limited and the Allamby project—I saw the video with the Member for Barataria/San Juan doing a tour; beautiful houses. And he keeps talking about building—and they keep making this about building houses; building houses. And the Member spoke about it is 70 per cent completed and we are building houses for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I will hand it to them, you know, “dey good, yuh know, dey good”.

Mr. Birchwood: “PR like dat, eh. PR like dat”.

Mr. D. Romain: PR. It is all about building houses for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and that is something that is near and dear to the hearts of all citizens, particularly those who are on the HDC list looking for a home for years. I am sure they visit all of us on our office days. That is one of the biggest reasons that people come to see me, Mr. Speaker.

But it is interesting because the tagline for LandmarkTT Properties Limited is, luxury living redesigned. So who are you building houses for? The average citizen that you all are trying to appeal to feel like, “Well, yes, the Government is building houses because it is 160-something persons on the list who are looking for

housing. Yes, and the PNM is just trying to frustrate that, and they want to use that to get back into office”? No, my dear citizens, it is not for you. Those of you who come to visit your MPs every week, it is not for you, you cannot afford to purchase those units at Allamby.

Hon. Member: Last week he said, “our people”. He said “our people”.

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, correct. Our people.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Indeed. Yeah, open market, it was available. I did not see anything. HDC put out any notice saying that if you are not a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, you cannot purchase? But then again—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: As Mr. Gonzales would have informed us recently when he visited, his mother is a citizen of Trinidad, his wife is a citizen of Trinidad and he could apply to get a passport but, of course, he does not want to find himself in the same situation as his colleague now, Prime Minister, who replaced him, that issue of dual citizenship, you see. But what I will tell you, if that is a problem, give him back his money and then you could add those three units to the stock of over 100 that the HDC has been struggling to get sold. Yeah, made it a big issue for the election in St. Vincent. All of a sudden, as the election is over, “they stop talk bout dat”, no investigation. What is going on with those investigations? Almost a year now. We would love to know, please.

Mr. Speaker, we also have concerns with respect to the exemptions, some in particular as it pertains to emergency situations. Mr. Speaker, and why we have concerns about that again is because of the UNC’s history with respect to matters such as those. Mr. Speaker, permit me to refer to an article dated the 7th of the

ninth, 2012:

“Minister in the dark over cost to repair sinkhole

Works and Infrastructure Minister Emmanuel George is admitting that Government hired Junior Sammy Co Ltd to correct the collapsed Sea Lots sink hole, but up to late yesterday he still did not know the cost of the project. Speaking to reporters yesterday at the opening of a \$14.8 million road-paving project at Mohess Road, Penal, George said the contractor had not finalised his price, so he had no clue how Sammy would charge.

3.35 p.m.

As a result, the Ministry will have to pay whatever Sammy asked since the job was already completed; whatever he asked.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, exactly.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Exactly [*Laughter*]. The questions we ask, Mr. Speaker, with respect to these exemptions, are: Who examines whether the price paid was reasonable?—in this case, after the work was done. Who will tell the contractor, “Aye, nah, that is too much money.” ”Work done.”

Mr. Marcelle: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that was before the OPR, and what is it that you all are doing now? How does that change the price of cocoa? It is the same thing. Who examines whether the price was reasonable? Who examines whether the supplier was appropriately selected? Who ensures that emergency procurement does not become a substitute for ordinary procurement? Who reports those findings publicly? Emergency powers may be necessary, but emergency

powers should also leave an audit trail, Mr. Speaker. Clause 5 expressly limits what the Office of Procurement Regulation can do following a complaint or investigation. Mr. Speaker, these are some of the dangers that we have concerns over.

Let me go back again, Mr. Speaker, to the legacy of the UNC as it pertains to housing, since we want to make this about housing. I refer to an article dated 13th of October, 2023:

“Housing Ministry probes 800M ‘ghost’ houses.

The Housing Ministry is investigating issues from 2011 to 2015 concerning ‘ghost’ houses costing \$789 million which taxpayers paid for, and for which the physical structures cannot be found.”

Hon. Members: Wow!

Mr. Manning: Say that number again.

Mr. D. Romain: \$789 million.

“A probe is also underway into a missing \$180.5 million on the repayment of a loan.

Housing Minister Camille Robinson-Regis spoke...”—on—“...the issues during Thursday’s 2024 Budget debate in Parliament.”

She mentioned it in here.

“She said the issues were cited by KPMG, the auditors of the Housing Development Corporation in a 2013 audit report.

Robinson-Regis said one of the ‘bugbears’ of the State enterprises has been the inability to complete or submit audits and the HDC is no exception.

She said the auditors have only just concluded several years of audits because in many instances, ‘we got qualified audits because things were not

found that were claimed and money that was said to be existing was not existing and so we had to get a number of qualified audits.

What was even more alarming was the inability of the auditors to verify the existence of housing units allegedly constructed to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars during the period 2011-2015.’

Robinson-Regis quoted from KPMG’s 2013 audit report.

‘The Corporation has not prepared a comprehensive inventory of its housing units available for sale. There is an unanalysed sum of approximately \$789 million representing cost of housing units that could not be attributed to identifiable physical structures.’

The auditors further stated, ‘We were also unable to obtain underlying documentary support for a sample of the construction cost. Consequently we are unable to perform audit tests to ascertain the accuracy and existence of the reporting inventory.’

Robinson-Regis said, ‘So what this means is that there were buildings allegedly constructed but they...’—cannot be found—So the taxpayer paid for ‘ghost houses’.’”

That is the UNC legacy of procurement.

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

Mr. D. Romain: And as we are still on the issue of exempting services, Mr. Speaker.

When the PNM would have brought amendments to the legislation, legislation that they passed, and they said the PNM gutted it. When it came to exempting services, the then Leader of the Opposition, now Prime Minister, had a position, as characterization for these exemptions, Mr. Speaker, and here is what

she said:

You are setting up a parallel procurement process that will be regulated by the independent Office of the Procurement Regulator under this Act and also one that you want to go back to the status quo that will be conducted by the Cabinet and the Executive by the politicians.

This cannot be right. It cannot be right. So, when this particular legislation before us, we are seeking to give the Minister more powers, Mr. Speaker, to be able to add further exemptions as he sees fit. Whether it is he had a dream, whether it is he came to work one day and got a phone call, whether it is he gets an email, “We having issues”.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: [*Laughter*] We are having issues. See if you can fix that for us.

Mr. Des Vignes: Have him on speed dial.

Mr. D. Romain: [*Laughter*] “I leaving alyuh”.

Mr. Speaker, another issue, another concern with this legislation has to deal with the circular economy. Mr. Speaker, the OPR system requires companies to be compliant with NIS, health surcharge and taxes and if a contractor is not fully compliant and up-to-date, they cannot get contracts. Gutting the legislation removes the incentive to have companies compliant with their statutory responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, permit me to give you, as I have heard today, a live example. Live example. Article dated—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, I like to quote my sources now, the 16th of the 09th, 2026. Just the other day, and the title of the article is:

“Second NIB executive to retire early”

The same exodus that we are seeing at FCB now seems to be hitting NIB. Yes, and we know the concerns we have with NIB. But here is what the report says, Mr. Speaker. I am not going to read it in its entirety. It is just the main parts. The employee alleges:

“An alleged compliance irregularity involving a security company was also raised.

The employee alleges a director instructed a staff member to issue a compliance certificate despite the company allegedly failing to meet applicable requirements. The employee further claims the matter was reported internally but was not appropriately addressed.”

Procurement—

“Procurement and potential conflicts of interest also feature in the concerns, including questions surrounding the cancellation and subsequent re-initiation of a procurement exercise and alleged connections between a company and a NIBTT board member.

Guardian Media contacted Finance Minister Davendranath Tancoo yesterday for comment on the second early retirement, but...up to press time...he had not responded...”

Hon. Member: Nothing yet boy?

Mr. D. Romain: Nothing. Talking about procurement here.

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have a minute. Do you want your 15 minutes?

Mr. D. Romain: Please, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: So, situations like these, Mr. Speaker, again reinforce the need for us to strengthen legislation, not to try and weaken it. Now, we are not against

development, as Members opposite would like to present, Mr. Speaker, because at the end of the day we are all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We want to see our country flourish whether it is that we are on that side or they are on that side. But we understand, Mr. Speaker, that at a time when you keep hearing, “De place hard”, people struggling, issues for jobs, the CPO telling the union, “De Government have other bills to pay, so you know what? You all have to relax for that back pay.” Yes, this is what it is and if you do not want it well—

Hon. Member: Take it.

Mr. D. Romain: Well, take it, lay down close to it, Mr. Speaker. We need to ensure that the public purse is protected. It does not matter what they come and say next door, “Alyuh this and y’all did that, alright.” Mr. Speaker, it is not lost on us that this Government announced last year, around November, a very ambitious development programme called the national transformation programme, is that?

Hon. Member: Revitalization programme

Mr. D. Romain: Revitalization programme.

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, I want to get it correct.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: “Nah”, the 129 projects, Mr. Speaker. Ministers would have travelled abroad to try and court, you know, investors to come to Trinidad and Tobago to invest their moneys here, and that is good. We have heard some projects spoken of that involve, Mr. Speaker, significant state assets. There is a—well for those of us who were—the general public has not yet been treated to, you know, the plan. So, what we would have seen on television and so on and seen on social media.

For instance, there is an intention to turn Carrera Prison into a boutique hotel

among other things, Mr. Speaker. The San Fernando waterfront project that was temporarily stalled because, when we would have asked about it in the budget debate, we were told that it was under review. My understanding is that there has been some activity recently in that particular area. We would have seen some folks come from, I think it was the United Arab Emirates, Mr. Speaker. They were taken all over Trinidad and Tobago to view potential sites where they could invest and so on. So significant public assets are involved.

So, we are concerned. It is 129 projects, Mr. Speaker. And rather than strengthen the procurement legislation to improve public confidence in how the Government is going about disposing of state assets, we are seeing the exact opposite, and we are concerned. The issue of land grabbing is not lost on us because prime sites are being selected, Mr. Speaker, for these particular projects, and that is good. And, of course, we would love to hear a little bit more about these projects. In fact, I know we were told that contracts were supposed to have been signed in June. The timetable was then moved to September. We are in September now, so I imagine perhaps when the Member for Couva North makes her contribution, assuming that she makes one today, that she will probably speak to that issue as well. And we are not casting any aspersions necessarily, Mr. Speaker, but we are simply expressing our concerns with respect to that particular development.

Mr. Speaker, I also just want to touch quickly on the issue of the increase in the limits for PSs and so on from one million to two million. You know, my colleague from Arouca/Lopinot did a very good job of quoting the Member for Caroni Central, is it? Yes.

Mr. Lee: Your good friend.

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, my good friend.

Mr. Lee: [*Laughter*] Yes, yes, yes. I like you. “I does help you”.

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, you do help me. “I eh go lie, yeah, yuh good, yuh good.”

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: [*Laughter*] But, I am happy that we were reminded of what the views opposite were when that figure was increased to one million, and now it is being increased to two million, Mr. Speaker, advocated by Members opposite. Oh my, how the tables have turned.

Hon. Member: Oh boy, oh boy.

Mr. D. Romain: Yesterday was yesterday and today is today. Yes.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Correct, 100 per cent increase. But, Mr. Speaker, concerns, of course, are raised there as it pertains to contract splitting. We know that in a previous dispensation there were concerns expressed with respect to the TTPS, for instance, where contracts were being distributed to stay under that particular threshold of that one million. You know, now we are increasing this figure to \$2 million, Mr. Speaker, \$500,000 for municipal bodies and so on. We know that there is an issue, I think it has not yet been resolved. Some \$300,000 was missing from the Siparia Regional Corporation. Again, I think that is still under police investigation, but hopefully that will be resolved, Mr. Speaker.

But for example, Mr. Speaker, if a project that is \$6 million were to be divided into three contracts with \$2 million or less, what we are saying is perhaps Parliament should know exactly what statutory safeguards prevent that from being used to evade the procurement regime. And again, based on the concerns raised and identified by the Procurement Regulator, Mr. Speaker, with efforts on the part

of public bodies to circumvent and to avoid regulatory requirements. This too presents a concern.

Mr. Speaker, I think I will leave the rest for my other colleagues who are to come. But I just want to say this, in the few minutes that I have left. You know, Members opposite love to accuse us on this side of opposing for the sake of opposing, that we criticize, that we oppose, and we offer no suggestions. Mr. Speaker, recently we heard a very well-performed statement from a man I considered to be a Caribbean statesman said the role of the Opposition is:

“to oppose...propose...expose and...depose.”

Today, my colleagues and I are seeking to expose the deficiencies in this legislation as well, Mr. Speaker, as the dangers that it presents for the public purse.

We propose no amendment because this Government has made it abundantly clear, pellucid as my friend from Tabaguite would say, that they will take no advice from us. In the 16 and a half, almost 17 months that we have been here, they have entertained no amendments from us, Mr. Speaker, and whenever we do proffer amendments, almost invariably the response from Members opposite is, you all were there for 10 years, you did nothing for 10 years, you sat on your hands for 10 years, now you are on this side, and you have the answers to everything, why did you not do it when you were in office? We are not taking any advice from you all. Scripture says, “Do not cast your pearls to swine”. Therefore, we will not offer any amendments, Mr. Speaker. We will oppose any legislation that we believe is not in the best interest of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: No matter how the Government may try to spin it, twist it, turn it, if it is that it is good legislation, we will support it. If it is not, we will oppose in

the best interest of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago. And finally, when that time comes, Mr. Speaker, we on this side will legally, democratically and lawfully, with the assistance of the right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago through the exercise of their constitutional rights and franchise, depose Members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and commit them—I would not even say to Opposition, because even Opposition is too good.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: [*Laughter*] Yes, as the Member for Barataria/San Juan said, the sins that they have committed and are committing now, Opposition is not enough, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity just to make a contribution. I do not want to delve further, lest my colleagues who want to come after me have to face what we endured last week, a barrage of Standing Orders of tedious repetition and so on, in an attempt to deprive us of the opportunity to speak to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as to the legislation that is before us and why it is not good and why we cannot support. So, Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing (Hon. David Lee): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate and welcome back to our jurisdiction. I would like to welcome back the Chief Whip on the other side, Arouca/Lopinot. Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure, as I said, joining this debate. I did not have any intention to join it, but my colleague next to me, Minister Saddam Hosein—I had no other choice after

listening to him to join this debate this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to a lot on the other side, and I will go through in my contribution and rebut some of their responses. You see, the debate before this House today is not to debate between procurement and no procurement. It is not a debate between accountability and no accountability. And, it is not about whether or not the OPR is good or bad, the Office of the Procurement Regulator. The question is, and we should ask, can we design a procurement system which protects the public purse, preserves transparency and accountability and at the same time allows a government to deliver for the people the speed and flexibility that modern government requires?

Mr. Speaker, the question then should be asked. The people must not become servants of the procurement process. I want to compliment the Minister of Finance on his presentation here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: I would also like to compliment my colleagues, the Minister of Energy, and the Minister of Land, Saddam Hosein.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Mr. Speaker, let me start off by saying—and I want to quote the Minister of Finance in his presentation this afternoon or this morning when he started off at 10.30 a.m. Basically, Mr. Speaker, these amendments that are before us this afternoon—and I want to really quote what the Minister of Finance said, and it is about stimulating the economy, Mr. Speaker. It will generate economic growth and increase national output. It will promote the development of micro, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs involved in sustainable businesses, and it will create thousands of jobs for our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. These are

what these amendments will do for our country, Mr. Speaker. I know my colleagues on the other side do not want to see growth happen in our country under the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: They do not want to see that, Mr. Speaker. We have a mandate. The Ministry of Housing has a mandate to deliver houses to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: And we will do that under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar as Prime Minister, and we will deliver the homes that are required for our citizens, Mr. Speaker.

3.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, becoming the Minister of Housing and working with the HDC, there are over—and I got the correct figure yesterday, Mr. Speaker—228,000 applicants/people waiting for homes in our country, Mr. Speaker; 228,000 people on a weekly basis,.

People come to my constituency throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad, not only the constituency of Caroni Central. On a Tuesday, when it is my constituency day, people from all walks throughout—even constituents from my colleagues on the other side, Arouca/Lopinot, he has sent people to my constituency office. Laventille West, they have come, Mr. Speaker. My good friend who just spoke, also his constituents visit me, Mr. Speaker. Then there are colleagues on this side, they write to me on a weekly basis, especially my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. He is always writing me for homes for the people of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. And I always respond to their letters. I always

respond.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: So it is about homes, Mr. Speaker. It is about homes delivering for our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what this amendment is about. And I am sure my friend, my good friend—I know he went quite South Africa and he is back. I am happy to see you returned very safely, Member for Arouca/Lopinot. And I will bring you into the debate. I will bring you into the debate because you brought me into the debate. You quoted something there in a *Hansard* back in 2023. And I will quote you in that *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so really and truly, these amendments are about progress for our citizens of Trinidad. Without these amendments, Mr. Speaker, we will not see the kind of growth that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago want us to deliver for them, Mr. Speaker.

So when I listen to my colleagues on the other side and they are playing—what is it?—paragons of virtue and holier-than-thou and their adjectives go on and on and on, Mr. Speaker, they brought an amendment back in 2023. We were on that side. I was the Chief Whip on that side. They were on this side, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my good friend there, Arouca/Lopinot, took part in that debate, just as how he quoted me when I took part in that debate. And I just want to quote what he said in that debate, being on this side, bringing amendments that are very similar to what we are doing today, Mr. Speaker.

So they were the Government at the time, back in 2023. The debate took place on the 19 July, 2023. And my good friend is aware of that because he has his documents. Mr. Speaker, I just want to quote, at the time, the hon. Marvin Gonzales, as he quoted me, the hon. David Lee. I do not think he was in the constituency of Arouca/Lopinot at the time. There were boundary changes and so

forth, Mr. Speaker. I just want to quote him. They brought an amendment, and one of the amendments was about emergency situation, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the public procurement law is an evolving piece of legislation. It evolves as we grow, as the world grows, Mr. Speaker. We are evolving and we have to move this piece of legislation to keep up with the times of what our citizens require for our country.

And they are well aware of that, you know, Mr. Speaker. Because when they brought the amendments back in 2023, at the time, the Minister of Finance—I think he is on a gondola, Diego Martin North/East, I think he is somewhere in Europe, Mr. Speaker. I think my colleague, the Minister, he showed me a picture of a boat that he is on, somewhere out in Europe, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: He is not on a boat.

Hon. D. Lee: He is not on a boat? He is on a plane coming back? Anyway, wherever he is, Mr. Speaker, when he piloted the amendments back in July 19, 2023, it was the same rationale that they used then, that we are using now. The piece of legislation, the procurement law, has to evolve. They raised it to \$1 dollars exemption, we are raising it to \$2 million. The cost of things has gone up, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Everything has gone up, Mr. Speaker. We have to move with the times. And they very well know that. My good friend, Arouca/Lopinot, knows that because he spoke about that when he debated the amendments. And I will just quote a few words from him, Mr. Speaker, and I quote hon. Marvin Gonzales when he was debating on the amendments, I just quote him, he says, Mr. Speaker:

“...we will conduct ourselves with honour and we are going to use our 22

seats”—at the time they had 22 seats—“in this Parliament to do what we must do to protect the interest of Trinidad and Tobago.”

Mr. Speaker, well, I want to say today they have gone from 22 to how much, 13?—13 and declining. Mr. Speaker, I want to go on to what he said:

“And we are faced with a situation where this public procurement law, if it continues in the way that it was passed,”—which was the original—“it can grind government to a halt.”

Dr. Moonilal: “Who say dat, David Lee? Who say dat?”

Hon. D. Lee: My good friend from Arouca/Lopinot, 19 July, 2023. I want to repeat that. He said, if we do not do these amendments, the government will come—will “grind to a halt”. This is what this gentleman, my hon. friend said, Mr. Speaker. He even went on—let me just quote him. Then he said:

“What do...”—you want us to—“...do in these circumstances? What do we do? Should we allow public servants to continue to dip their hands in their pockets to buy tyres for vehicles, Madam Speaker...”

—at the time, it was not you, Mr. Speaker, it was Madam Speaker.

Mr. Hosein: “Thank God she gone”.

Hon. D. Lee: “Yeah, thank God she gone.”

“...or to buy oil, or to buy paper? Is it that what the UNC is saying? I do not believe that.

Well, we are saying, we do not believe what you are saying here today, Mr. Speaker. We have to move this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Under the leadership of the Member for Siparia, the hon. Prime Minister, we are going to move this country. I know you do not want us to move

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. D. Lee (cont'd)

the country. I know that, or else you would vote for these amendments. You would vote for these amendments. Mr. Speaker, so I leave my good friend Arouca/Lopinot right there.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]—power of recusal as well as him.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: So, Mr. Speaker, it is really about—this debate, really and truly. And we must ask, the people must not become servants of this procurement process, Mr. Speaker. It is about moving the country, Mr. Speaker.

I heard a lot on the other side, starting from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, then Arouca/Lopinot, and even my friend down there, Malabar, and everything that came out their mouth is about HDC. You know, HDC Corporation, everything. And I am sure you do not want me to go into my file on HDC, but I will go into it. I will go into it. Because you see, to use the word, the hypocrisy on that side, they tend to forget what they used to do when they had control of HDC. They tend to forget. But I want to tell you, under my leadership—HDC will not do what they did under my leadership as Minister of Housing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Mr. Speaker, I have a file for them.

Now, my good friend, Mr. Speaker—because you see, they do not like, they forget what they do. They forget what they do, Mr. Speaker. And my colleague on the right of me started to talk about a project in Trestrail, which is part of the HDC. Because you see, Mr. Speaker, one of the amendments we have brought here today is about PPP, public-private partnership. And we changed the

definition of it. And for us to deliver homes—it is a fact; the Minister of Finance and the Government, when they demitted office, did not even leave fumes in the Treasury for us, Mr. Speaker. They did not leave any fumes. So we now have to create revenue, Mr. Speaker, to run this country. And that is where the PPP model comes in.

Mr. Speaker, there are contractors who are able—they have the funding, we have the land, and they are willing to partner with the Government to deliver and build homes for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing is wrong with that. The Government is putting up the resources of the land, and the contractors are putting up their money to design, build and finance the project, Mr. Speaker.

But our model of PPP is far different from their model of PPP under the HDC. There was a project that was a Trestrail project. It was supposed to be over 100 townhouses built. And my good friend on the right of me spoke a bit about it—and I will expand a little bit, Mr. Speaker, because he did not go into certain things of how the corruption took place under their watch at the HDC.

That Trestrail project, and the contractor who got that project was one Ricky Raghunanan. Mr. Speaker, he won that contract to do a design, build, finance for 103 townhouses, to a value of about \$77 million, plus VAT. Mr. Speaker, on that same project, what HDC gave the individual, Ricky Raghunanan, was a free pass. And the free pass was that while Ricky Raghunanan would build the townhouses, he would also do the infrastructure work on the site. And that infrastructure work was worth about \$30 million. And HDC was responsible for paying him this funding on this site for these townhouses in Trestrail, Mr. Speaker.

So you had where he would finance \$77 million to build 103 townhouses, and HDC would pay him about \$30 million for the infrastructure work and the

drainage, et cetera. So what HDC really gave Mr. Raghunanan was some free cash flow to assist him in building the houses. Mr. Speaker, also on that development that failed, Mr. Raghunanan did not even put up a performance bond to build these townhouses. And that is why, when the—I want to use a word but it is not parliamentary. When something hit the fan, Mr. Speaker, HDC had to go into that project and shut it down, Mr. Speaker. That was news. I mean, my colleague on the right of me has a whole report on it from CEP, Mr. Speaker.

And at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, their model of a PPP failed, Mr. Speaker, because they did not know what they were doing. That will not happen under this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: So, for years now, individuals—and you know what is even worse, Mr. Speaker? These townhouses were not even built, but HDC was giving out houses. They were assigning houses to people for this project. So they had over 100 people assigned to these townhouses, and these townhouses were not even built.

It is just like the project that I opened yesterday, and I want to thank the HDC for a marvellous project of over 100—and my good friend, MP For Tunapuna, it is called the Canopies at Caura, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: We finished it, it is a beautiful development, and when I came in as Minister of Housing 18 months ago, people were already assigned these houses, these townhouses; 18 months ago before election of 2025, Mr. Speaker. They were trying to gerrymander the politics in Tunapuna. But I want to tell you it failed because we have our Member for Tunapuna here this afternoon, the hon.

Roger Alexander.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: So they were gerrymandering up and down the East-West Corridor, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is the history of these individuals on that side in housing.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about contracts in respect of inside, HDC was a big slush fund for them, Mr. Speaker. I cannot describe it any other way.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about good governance underneath them. Well, I want to show you—read out some good governance, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are five companies: Klydon Enterprises, Pical Services Limited, Rivulet Investment Group, Costar Transport and Construction. There is one Shiatsu General Contractors—I know my good friend from San Fernando East would love that company. It is called Shiatsu—it sounds kind of oriental, Mr. Speaker. Sounds oriental, it fooled me, you know. When I first came across Shiatsu General Contractors, I thought it was—well, I do not have any family, Mr. Speaker, but I thought some family of mine jumping inside of there. Right.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Shiatsu General Contractors. But when I did the research, you know, who is Shiatsu General Contractors? One, Patricia Alexis from San Fernando.

Hon. Members: Ohhhh!

Dr. Moonilal: “How she reach Shiatsu”?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hosein: “He like dat”.

Hon. D. Lee: I know that. I do not know if that is the same lady that he was fighting with. Well, that is a—that is a strong. Right? They were having some political disagreements, and I do not know if my friend from Arouca/Lopinot was the referee in that room, right? So, there is the Shiatsu.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you the value of these contracts, Mr. Speaker, that were sole-select by the last administration, Mr. Speaker. Klydon Enterprises, in one year, \$1.5 million a contract—sole-select. Pical, over \$3 million, Mr. Speaker—sorry, Pical was \$9 million, Mr. Speaker. Rivulet Investment Group was over \$15 million and counting, Mr. Speaker. Right? All these companies sole-select. Costar, another \$4 million.

Mr. Alexander: “Wah bout de chinee one”?

Hon. D. Lee: Shiatsu General Contractors. Now, Shiatsu, in one year, contracts worth over \$2.5 million, Mr. Speaker. You know what is the kind of work that Shiatsu was doing, Mr. Speaker—my good friend in the constituency of San Fernando East, in Cypress Hills, in HDC complexes, Mr. Speaker? Cutting grass, Mr. Speaker, cutting grass, maintenance, Mr. Speaker. Tarodale, I mean, the Member for San Fernando East always calling me about Tarodale, Mr. Speaker. Right?

Hon. Member: Who did the work?

Hon. D. Lee: Well, Patricia Alexis.

Hon. Member: “She doing all de work”.

Hon. D. Lee: So, Mr. Speaker, there is another company, Mr. Speaker. I know my good friend on the left of me might be aware of that company—another sole-select.

Hon. Member: “Ah next one”?

Hon. D. Lee: You see, when we talk about these amendments, they are really for the small man. We are going to keep our promise. It is really about helping the small and medium contractors, Mr. Speaker, by these amendments to move this country. There is an individual, and I was shocked, you know, Mr. Speaker. I know this individual is a multi-millionaire from Port of Spain. I did not think that individual would have gotten into the small and medium type of work for the small man, Mr. Speaker.

There is a company called Trinidad and Tobago Landscaping Company Limited. It sounds big, right? Trinidad and Tobago Landscaping Company, sounds big. They got, in one year, over \$4.8 million in simple maintenance from HDC, Mr. Speaker. That company is connected to the Gabriel family, Mr. Speaker. Right? Now, the Gabriel family it is out there in public. Some might say they are part of the 1 per cent. I do not know, right? But I know this family is from—they are very well off, and I would not want to think that they would go down in South, Mr. Speaker, in Pleasantville, in Oasis in Chaguanas, in Hubert Town and Lakeview Housing—I think that is my colleague in Point Fortin. Right? Collecting garbage also, Mr. Speaker. Right?

Hon. Member: Collecting garbage?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: I mean, \$4.8 million, sole-select.

Do you mean to tell me that there is nobody else who can do maintenance work in San Fernando, Mr. Speaker? That HDC, at the time, had to bring somebody from Port of Spain to do this kind of work in San Fernando, Mr. Speaker, “eh?” I mean, it is unreal and then they sit down there and play the

paragon of virtue that, you know something—we are—you know, call us all kind of what, grubby hands and all that, Mr. Speaker. Right?

Mr. Hosein: And we chop off theirs.

Hon. D. Lee: Mr. Speaker, there is another company that got a contract, called Citrus Close Housing Development. Citrus Close, Citrus Close, C-L-O-S-E, Housing Development. It is right there, a stone's throw away from here. Right. Mr. Speaker, that contract was to design and construct 191 housing units, apartments. So, it is a big steel structure—four steel structures, just at the end of the—at the start, at the beginning of the bus route. Mr. Speaker, it was to build 156 units in total. That overall cost of that contract was worth \$199 million, Mr. Speaker—\$199 million. Right? The company is called Woodgreen Construction Services Limited, Mr. Speaker—Woodgreen. I am sure, if the Attorney General was here, he might tell us where Woodgreen would end up, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, they were not the lowest bidder. The lowest bidder on this tender was a company called Rainbow Construction. Rainbow Construction came in at a cost of 839 per unit, 839,000 per unit. Woodgreen came in at a million dollars per unit. These are apartment units right there, you see it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Woodgreen won the contract because there was some “simmi-dimmi” that went on. I will use that, “simmi-dimmi.” Well, I do not know how the *Hansard* would spell that. Some hanky-panky went on, Mr. Speaker—hanky-panky went on in the tendering of this contract. The lowest bidder was Rainbow Construction, and they have a track record of building homes. They filed a complaint to the OPR back in—Mr. Speaker, they filed a complaint back in 2023, Mr. Speaker, with the OPR. Up to today, the OPR cannot respond to that challenge, Mr. Speaker. Right?

So, when we talk about the OPR itself, Mr. Speaker, there are issues that are happening in the OPR. For example, in HDC, when we took office under this new administration, there were certain things that the HDC used to file on a quarterly basis. You have to file on a quarterly basis contract to the OPR. When they passed an amendment that anything under \$1 million, you did not have to—

Hon. Member: Simplify.

Hon. D. Lee: Yes, it was a simplify. What the HDC used to report was monthly—not annual contracts. It was the monthly value of the contract, Mr. Speaker. There is a list of so many contractors that HDC would have sent to the OPR, Mr. Speaker, as their quarterly reporting, Mr. Speaker. OPR never picked up, or never seemed to care, about the value of those contracts, Mr. Speaker. So, when it was being reported as the monthly value instead of the annual value, so that when you looked at the monthly value, it all fell under the \$1 million amount, but when you add 12 times the monthly value, it would be over the \$1 million.

There is a list of contractors at HDC in 2024/2025, that HDC was sending information that was erroneous to OPR, and OPR never picked up on that. I would say they never picked up on it, or maybe they did not—I do not want to say they did not want to pick up on it, Mr. Speaker, until this new administration—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, point of order, please, 48(1). Is the Member impugning the integrity of the OPR in this House?

Hon. D. Lee: I did not—

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that is the purport and tenor, of the Member's contribution.

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you. I will tell you more about Patricia Alexis. I will tell you more. Right? So, Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that there are maybe staffing

problems at the OPR, because that was one of the concerns that the OPR Regulator had raised at a joint select committee, about staffing issues, Mr. Speaker. But what we are saying on this side, that the OPR has issues, right? Based on their issues, it is hampering the growth and development of this country under this administration, Mr. Speaker. Because it never seemed to happen when it was the other administration, Mr. Speaker. So, I do not know—I am not saying anything—I do not know if it is by chance, Mr. Speaker, but we are saying enough is enough, and we need to move this country, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Mr. Speaker, there are so many—

Mr. Speaker: Your time is just about up, but you do have your 15 minutes.

Hon. D. Lee: Yes, yes, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, these amendments are critical, as I keep saying, to assist us as a government to move this country. There are safeguards still built in it, Mr. Speaker. They might not agree with the type of safeguards, as you heard the safeguards and the checks and balances from my colleague Saddam Hosein, when he spoke. When the Minister of Finance spoke in his opening, he talked about the checks and balances and the accountability is still there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt, and I am clear about my mandate under my Prime Minister, and my mandate is to build homes for our citizens of Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: We cannot build homes, Mr. Speaker, if every tender, every activity we put out, we are getting challenges from the OPR because maybe certain

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. D. Lee (cont'd)

individuals on that side, like Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, tends to use—although he always seems to be the lawyer for some activist, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: Anand.

Hon. D. Lee: Who name Anand? So, Mr. Speaker, we cannot run our country like that. I know, under my colleagues here in Cabinet, we have one of the brightest set of colleagues here—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee:—to move this country under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. With her stewardship and her leadership, we will move this country like no other, and the people of this country have never seen before. We have spent 18 months playing around with the OPR, and we are saying enough is enough. We have to take, as my colleague Ms. John here would say, the bull by the horn, Mr. Speaker, and we have to do what is required—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee:—what is required to move our country. Because we have a mandate—we were, on April 28th, we were chosen to lead this country, in 29 areas, Mr. Speaker—29 seats, and we will do that. I ask my colleagues on the other side to join in, as I would say, either you get on our boat and our bus, or you wait for your bus, Mr. Speaker.

So, with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I think I am comfortable with the amendments that we have brought here this afternoon and I think that with these amendments, in the coming months you will see a difference in the governance of this country, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Brian Manning: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Mr. Speaker, let me begin by calling a spade a spade. Mr. Speaker, the UNC is a criminal enterprise, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Brian Manning: That is what they are.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Dr. Gosine: 48(6), Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is not going to work, San Fernando East. You are going to have to withdraw that.

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: That is the same thing I told your Chief Whip. You are going to have to withdraw that.

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, we have sat here in this Chamber—

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, let me advise you, I do not need to be reminded of anything whatsoever. I am directing you to withdraw that statement.

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, we have sat here and heard those on the other side claim that PNM had been defending its mafia friends.

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, move along—

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I have withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker:—move along.

Mr. B. Manning: I have moved along, Sir. That we have been protecting our mafia friends. They have said that over and over in this Chamber—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—without presenting a shred of evidence, Mr. Speaker. Nothing, nothing at all. The Member for Barataria comes here over and over and talks about “recusal this” and “recusal that”. Mr. Speaker, a recusal is a mark of integrity—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—it is what you are supposed to do. If you are in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago—

Dr. Gosine: Point of order, 48(6). He is explaining why he is using improper motives. He is explaining why he is using improper motives now.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, a speech about recusal is a far cry from calling an entire group of people a criminal enterprise. Okay. I thought we had moved on from that.

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, [*Inaudible*] I vote for two.

Mr. Speaker: Right.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: Sir, I am simply responding to the statement made by Barataria/San Juan during his contribution.

Mr. Speaker: Right, that is a far cry.

Mr. B. Manning: When he talked about recusals.

Mr. Speaker: So simply let us move on with it.

Mr. B. Manning: Sir, I will try to move on.

Mr. Speaker: At some point, you are going to get to the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. B. Manning: I will try to move on one more time, Sir. I need to respond to some of the statements made by those on the other side. Barataria/San Juan specifically spoke about all of the recusals in the previous government, Sir. A recusal is a mark of integrity. If you are in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, and a matter comes before you that either enriches you, a family member, or a close friend, what you are supposed to do is to recuse yourself from the matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Is it that those on the other side do not recuse themselves?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: So, when matters that can enrich a family member or a friend or a financier come before this Cabinet, they all sit there and say “yes”? Mr. Speaker, I find that hard to believe, but that is what Barataria / San Juan cannot seem to grasp, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Minister of Housing talking about the various contracts coming out of the HDC. The Minister of Housing clearly was not aware of when the Member for Oropuche East was the Minister of Housing in Trinidad and Tobago between 2010–2015, Mr. Speaker. As we heard earlier, almost \$800 million in ghost housing during that period—\$800 million. They will not talk about EFCL, nearly \$1 billion in contracts—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—with absolutely no documentation whatsoever. But they were calling over and over for this type of legislation, the reform legislation for procurement. They brought it here to the Cabinet on the eve of a general election, got kicked out of office due to the wanton corruption while they were there, and

then did everything possible to try to stymie that same legislation going forward, Mr. Speaker. That is what they did.

4.30 p.m.

What this legislation says to this country is that the UNC is back to its old ways, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: This is who they are. This piece of legislation completely guts the Procurement Regulation of Trinidad and Tobago. It renders it useless and meaningless, and that is what they want. The UNC has become synonymous with the word “corruption”, Mr. Speaker. That is why they were kicked out of office in 2015, and that is why they are going to be kicked out of office in 2030, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: As I said, they are not here for a long time, they are here for a good time, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation, these amendments allow them to back up the truck to the Treasury. That is what they are going to do. That is what it says. Right on the eve of another national budget, we had a Minister of Finance deliver a budget in this Chamber here, where he just added taxes to everything. Even the Member for Caroni Central said so. “Every cost has increased”, he said, so that is why they have to raise the minimum from \$1 million to \$2 million, even though the entire time they were in office they complained about this exemption.

Ms. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, 48(1), this is not the Finance Bill.

Mr. B. Manning: No, it is a response.

Ms. Mohit: Totally irrelevant.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I am going to give him a little leeway on this, because I think he is tying it to what the Member for Caroni Central said.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I also want to remind the Member for Barataria/San Juan that because you are a Member of the PNM, it does not exempt you from having an HDC home.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: The Member is coming here, week after week, calling names of family members of people in the PNM who received an HDC home.

Mr. Des Vignes: Bought and received.

Mr. B. Manning: Bought, sorry, paid for it with their own hard-earned money. He seems to have a problem with that. There is absolutely no problem with someone who is in the Parliament or related to a Member of the PNM being awarded an HDC home that they paid for with their own hard-earned money, Mr. Speaker. That is a complete nonsense. They bring it here over and over and over and it makes no sense.

At the same time, this same UNC Government is guilty of the most wanton corruption this country has ever seen during their time in office. This legislation to me, Mr. Speaker, says that they have given up on the farce of governing this country, Trinidad and Tobago. Over the first year, that is what they did. They tried to pretend that they actually wanted to manage and govern this country. But that cannot be true because they came into office after 10 years of Opposition without a single plan. Not a plan for anything, Mr. Speaker, nothing, nothing,

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Mr. Manning (cont'd)

nothing. The Minister of Finance, 30 years of examining this economy, only a budget of taxes, nothing.

The Minister of Housing—

Mr. Speaker: I think you are offending 48(1) there now, so let us move on.

Mr. B. Manning: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, not that. I think you are offending the rule on relevance.

Mr. B. Manning: I will move on, Mr. Speaker. I will move on, right?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. B. Manning: The Minister of Housing, he wants to talk about all of these projects, what he will not say is that when we entered office in 2015/2016, that many of the HDC projects in Trinidad and Tobago were completed so poorly that they immediately began falling apart, because they were issued to their friends, family, and financiers for completion, Mr. Speaker. There is Corinth Close in San Fernando East which started to fall apart almost immediately after completion, Mr. Speaker. They moved people in and it started to fall apart almost immediately.

Mr. Speaker, the Tarodale area in San Fernando East—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Tunapuna is distracting me, please, with his commentary. Please assist.

Mr. Speaker: Alright, so Members on both sides, allow the Member. He seems to require a high degree of quietude, so let us assist him in that regard.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, greatly appreciated. Mr. Speaker, the UNC has had almost the same narrative when it comes to procurement and the People's National Movement. They have consistently agreed that the PNM's amendments and exemptions weaken the OPR. That is what they have said from

day one. Even when it is we were implementing and proclaiming part of the legislation in pieces to ensure that it was properly initiated, it was the first time we have ever had such legislation in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. It took some changes, amendments and customization to ensure that it was properly done. Every time the narrative was the same, that we were watering down the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, if we were watering down the legislation then, what are they doing now? What are they doing? They have completely rendered this office and this legislation inert. It does nothing. It allows them, as Landmark, to give away state lands. It allows them in HDC, to give away \$3.4 billion in contracts to select people who never had any experience in housing or construction, or anything else, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is what the OPR protected us from. The OPR protected us then from their wanton fleecing of the Treasury, and they came here today to ensure that there was no more of that, Mr. Speaker. That there was no more obstruction in their way to stop them from filling their pockets with what is left in the Treasury. That is what they are here to do, and that is the UNC that we all know, and they cannot deny it, Mr. Speaker. I move on.

Mr. Speaker, they claim that it was meant to dilute transparency. All—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the UNC's narrative of the PNM Government—

Mr. Scotland SC: Standing Order 53(1)(e), Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: If we were to insist on a strict adherence to that rule, then no one here is innocent of offending that rule, no one. It calls for silence when any Member is speaking on both sides. No one in this Chamber has the moral

authority to complain about this rule. Right? So let us move on with some silence. San Fernando East, move on, please.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let us take a look at a bit of a timeline of the passage of this legislation. In 2015, the UNC brought this Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, emphasizing transparency and accountability. So they said. The argued it was landmark reform to curb corruption and ensure competitive bidding.

Between 2017 and 2019, when they were out of office, of course, their story completely changed. There were delays in proclamation. UNC MPs accused the PNM of deliberately stalling the proclamation of the Act, which was untrue. It was new legislation, it needed to be customized, Mr. Speaker. I quote here from a Member on the other side:

The Government is dragging its feet because they do not want proper oversight of contracts worth billions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, what would they say about the \$3.4 billion at the HDC that they tried to give sole select to their financiers? What would you call that? Mr. Speaker, the amendments introduced by the People's National Movement, the UNC claimed that the amendments weakened the Regulator's power.

The PNM wanted to water down the procurement and strip the Regulator of teeth and giving Ministers more discretion.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through the amendments to this Bill, you will see that that is exactly what it is they have done here today. They have given ministerial power, more ministerial power over the awarding of contracts. That is exactly what the system was designed to not do. It was designed to not have politicians be able to award contracts to people they like, and not to those they do not like. They came

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Mr. Manning (cont'd)

here to get rid of that, because they know they cannot do what the UNC always does if that legislation remains in place. That is what they are here to do, Mr. Speaker. That cannot be denied.

Mr. Speaker, these current amendments, the UNC MPs argue that the new exemptions to energy, housing, emergencies, thresholds at \$2,500,000, Mr. Speaker, further dilute oversight. Mr. Speaker, previously it was \$1 million, they raised it now to \$2 million. Even though before, while they were in office, they were desperately trying to avoid by breaking down contracts to ensure that they could avoid this part of the legislation. Especially in the Ministry of Public Utilities, we have heard so much about what has been going on there. The Member for La Brea—

Ms. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, 55(1)(b), all of them have the same speech. This was raised by every speaker.

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, I too, I am somewhat concerned about it. I think we are entering into the territory where we have a continuous repetition in the debate. The issues are very narrow, and let us put a new perspective, a new context, a new spin on these arguments, please. But we are getting to the point where each speaker is repeating what the other speaker said. So, come one, you are dangerously close to tedious repetition.

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I do not recall who mentioned “public utilities” on this side.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is one speaker, Sir. How is that tedious repetition with one speaker?

Mr. Speaker: It is tedious repetition—

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I move on.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the clauses of this piece of legislation. Clause 3, the reason for clause 3, to broaden the definition of “public-private partnerships”, allowing more flexible agreements for “financing”, “construction” and “managing public property”—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 44(10), the Member seems to be reading his speech. I do not know if he is quoting—

Mr. B. Manning: Not at all. I am quoting, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hosein:—he is reading a page. There is no source, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Whilst I understand that you are not supposed to read a speech, except your debut speech, I think the Standing Orders permit for Members to have recourse to written notes. So I do not think the Member is actually reading a prepared text.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for assisting Barataria/San Juan. Mr. Speaker, let me give the public and this House what the official definition is for a “public-private partnership”:

A public-private partnership, or PPP, is officially designed as a long-term contract between a government entity and a private party for the provision of a public asset or service, where the private party assumes significant risk and management responsibility and remuneration is linked to performance.

I want you to remember that last part, Mr. Speaker:

...assumes significant risk and management responsibility and remuneration is linked to performance.

This is what the definition was in the previous 2015 Act:

A “public-private partnership arrangement” means any contractual arrangement between a public body and a private party for the delivery of public infrastructure or services where the private party assumes substantial financial, technical, and operational risk in the design, financing, construction, and operation of such infrastructure or services.

Mr. Speaker, that was in 2015. The UNC has now decided to amend that definition to something so watered-down that almost anyone could qualify for a PPP arrangement with this Government, Mr. Speaker, and carry no risk in doing so.

The change has been a:

“‘public-private partnership’ means an agreement, contract, partnership or working relationship between a public body and a person for the purpose of financing, constructing, operating, or managing public property;”

Punto finale, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Punto finale. No discussion of risk, no discussion of compensation commensurate to any work done. All of that has been removed intentionally, Mr. Speaker. So that if their financiers and friends get caught in any malfeasance, they do not have to bear any responsibility. That is the design for changing that part of the legislation.

They removed the official definition to create their own definition for “public-private partnership”, Mr. Speaker, and it is simply built for corruption and graft.

Ms. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, 48(4) and (6), this is the fifth time he is using the word “corruption” against us.

Mr. Speaker: That offends the Standing Order, San Fernando East. The purpose of which you say the definition has been changed from one definition to the next. Nothing is wrong with you commenting on the definition or the adequacy or inadequacy of the definition, which is a matter which is subject to legal interpretation in any event, commercial arrangements, whatever it is. But for you to ascribe an oblique motive for the change of the definition offends the Standing Orders, and I would require you to withdraw it.

Mr. B. Manning: Sure. Mr. Speaker, but the UNC is known for corruption, so that is all we can—

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, this is your last warning. Pursuant to Standing Order 54 and 55, I have directed you to withdraw the oblique intent that you are seeking to ascribe to this, so this is your warning. Consider it a warning.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Withdraw it.

Mr. B. Manning: I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Move on, and kindly refrain from engaging in that kind of oblique imputation without a factual foundation for doing so.

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I will resist the urge to call the UNC “corrupt” in the rest of my contribution.

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, listen, I have had enough of this, have your seat. I have warned you, pursuant to 55(1), have your seat, end of speech.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is a historic day for several Members in this House, including myself who started in this Parliament exactly 11 years ago, but not limited to myself, but also Members on both sides of the House. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to join this debate, but very sad to come after the Member for San Fernando East. Mr. Speaker, after listening to the contribution of the Member for San Fernando East in the last couple of minutes, attempting to rewrite history, to give the impression that the UNC has something to hide, that the UNC does not want to account to the people, that the UNC is associated with all manner of things, one would have thought that the Member for San Fernando East would either be speaking from a soapbox, have some moral authority. But, Mr. Speaker, it is ironic, it is so very ironic to have heard what we just heard from the Member for San Fernando East, especially if you do a Google search on the name, one, Brian Manning, and basketball.

You see, Mr. Speaker, it was the 22nd of June 2010 that an article was published in the *Trinidad Guardian* that dealt with specific concerns with the Trinidad and Tobago Basketball Federation, as it relates—

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, 48(1), I do not know what that has to do with this particular debate.

Hon. B. Padarath: I will tell you.

Mr. Speaker: The Member has assured us that he will show the relevance, let us give him a few minutes.

Hon. B. Padarath: You see, Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East wanted to regale us about procurement and the UNC style of doing procurement. I

will tell you what was the Member for San Fernando East style of procurement that caused one, Courtney Mc Nish, to come out and speak about the one-man show without board consultation or approval, a major administrative irregularity.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, 48(1), what does this have to do with procurement, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Well, it does. Well, the Member is laying the foundation. Port of Spain South, have a seat. The Member is laying the foundation. He has assured us he is going to lay the foundation, and the early parts of the speech for San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: It was in response to that.

Mr. Speaker: Precisely. So when you respond in that manner, do you not think that it is just fair, expedient and proportionate for the other side to respond?

Mr. Manning: Could I ask what he is responding to?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. Member continue.

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am responding directly to the PNM style of procurement. That is what I am responding to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, the article speaks about a one-man show without Board consultation or approval. Today, the Parliament is historically dealing with changes being made to the procurement legislation, and the Member spent a significant amount of time, dancing all over the place, speaking about what he perceives to be UNC's corruption and UNC's style of procurement, where the Member has no moral authority to be speaking about that. Because, on the public

record, there are allegations of the Member's conduct as it relates to public procurement.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, 48(6), I have never received any contract from any state enterprise for any purpose; 48(6).

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, on Standing Order 48(6), this really must be the imputation of improper motive. Mr. Speaker, anybody could come here and say something about you in Parliament and then it becomes a public record. What I do ask, Mr. Speaker, all I ask you to do is to be even-handed, please, even-handed. This is really unfair what is being done to the Member for San Fernando East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: So let us draw upon the—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

4.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Alright, can I have some silence, please?

Mr. Scotland SC: Sure, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Let us draw upon the vein of even-handedness.

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: From the very beginning this morning we had two Members stand up and one described what is known as a kakistocracy. Are you aware of the concept of a kakistocracy?

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am aware of everything. But I can assure—

Mr. Speaker: Well, right. So you know, a kakistocracy is a government populated by morally bankrupt or corrupt people; that is the definition, a classic

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

definition.

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, I did not. I did not. I allowed Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the liberty of carrying—

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East—

Mr. Scotland: Do not interrupt him. Let me deal with that.

Mr. Speaker: You would be well advised not to interrupt me.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: You would be well advised not to interrupt me. Okay? San Fernando East began his contribution by describing an entire political party as a criminal enterprise, which I asked him to withdraw. The entire tenor of his 20-minute—I want to use very neutral terms to describe that. It is a—

Hon. Padarath: Contribution.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, sorry, a contribution. I am sorry, Couva South, I am not going to take up much of your time. Suffice it to say, your objections are entirely without merit given the context of what has been said today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, it speaks to the processes involved in procurement and went on to speak about unauthorized budgets, alleging that budgets were submitted directly to the Government prior to 2010 without board oversight, again, procurement breaches, Mr. Speaker. Unapproved expenses, financial claims totaling \$30,000 for live in training camps—

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48—

Hon. B. Padarath:—player-coach stipends and personal reimbursement.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

Mr. Scotland SC: Once again, I am objecting because what he has just said there again, procurement breaches, there has been no establishment of—

Hon. B. Padarath: I am talking about processes.

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Mr. Scotland SC:—of a procurement breach from the Hon. Member—

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Mr. Scotland SC: That is an allegation of a procurement breach.

Mr. Speaker: It is—alright. Port of Spain of Spain South, I am not going to waste time on that. I have gone through that.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, do not do that because [*Inaudible*].

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Scotland SC: I am making a legitimate point. I am not taking that. Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain South.

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Alright. Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Let me state it clearly, the point is as illegitimate as they come. Continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, when you do that, you make—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, what is happening here?

Mr. Speaker: Alright, yes, okay. Port of Spain South, take 15 minutes outside.

Mr. Scotland SC: I will.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

[Member Scotland exits the Chamber]

Hon. Member: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Member for Couva South.

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, it further went on to say that these issues were flagged for lacking board documentation, that is the legacy of the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: Whether it was under a Patrick Manning administration, or a Dr. Keith Rowley administration that is bolted to the chest of Members opposite, inclusive of the Member for San Fernando East. So, when you want to come here to talk about UNC history, you must come with clean hands, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: Not sanctimonious hypocrisy like the Member for San Fernando East. But you see, Mr. Speaker, I am entirely surprised, eh. I am not entirely surprised. Mr. Speaker, one of the very startling things that was said earlier in this debate came from the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. And I took note, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that I had the exact quotation from the hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker, you know, in local parlance, we say "mouth open and story jump out."

Hon. Members: Tory.

Hon. B. Padarath: The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, told us this, he said, that there was a time when the former Minister of Finance wanted to make additional changes to the procurement legislation, and they were Members of

the Cabinet at this time inclusive of himself that had concerns, but these concerns, Mr. Speaker, did not come from some of them because they were not concerned about themselves.

And it got me thinking, the former Minister wants to make changes to the procurement legislation, however, the former Minister is now telling Trinidad and Tobago that they were not worried or concerned about themselves. Well, they had no right to be worried and concerned about themselves, especially the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, after we heard the contribution coming from the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when you had specific changes being made to financial institutions, then what need was there for the Member to be worried or concerned about himself? When you had specific instances that the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about in other sectors then what did they have to be worried and concerned about themselves? You see, Mr. Speaker, in many instances "themselves" were already sorted out and therefore today what we are doing is following in the vein of the contribution made by the Member for Oropouche East, we are looking after the small people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: You are looking after those that will benefit from tangible changes being made in the legislation and therefore, Mr. Speaker, when you speak about the changes that are being made under Public Utilities, what you are now going to see happen, Mr. Speaker, is that in section 7, an emergency would be expressly defined as an exceptional and unforeseeable circumstance.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in preparation for today's debate, WASA alone, I have been able to pull the data from WASA between the period 2015 to 2025.

Over 399 instances of where WASA had to go for emergency services and therefore required emergency provisions to be invoked. I heard the Member, I believe it was Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, if I am not mistaken, say, but these provisions already exist for utilities, Mr. Speaker, here you will now have an express provision and this is not alien to other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the legislation coming out from the EU, you look at the UK legislation and the U.S. legislation, in particular, in these jurisdictions, there are expressed provisions for the public utilities sector. Mr. Speaker, in the European Union, it deals with infrastructure development and restoration work. Now, our legislation is not as far advanced as theirs. Our society, one may say, is not as far advanced as theirs, but, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the situations that develop especially, with critical infrastructure that impacts on people's everyday living, water, electricity, power generation, that sometimes impacts things like roads, bridges, critical infrastructure across the country, you see the need for this. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy today to lend my support to this legislation that will impact, working in tandem with Public Utilities, Works and other Ministries.

You see, Mr. Speaker, we do not operate in silos like our colleagues across the board. We speak to each other, we understand that there is harmonization across Ministries that require this type of work and therefore a lot of this critical work sometimes takes place particularly with the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes you have two types of disasters, man-made disasters and natural disasters. You may ask, well, man-made disasters? Mr. Speaker, you have seen time and time again, especially over the last couple of

months, where vandals have attacked critical utility infrastructure in the country. You have seen it have severe impact on WASA's infrastructure and sometimes on T&TEC's infrastructure. Sometimes you see valves, pumps, copper wires, fibre, equipment, stations, substations being vandalized and under attack. Mr. Speaker, sometimes this disrupts the service to large swaths and communities not only for domestic use, but also for commercial use. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, the provisions under section 7 will allow for us to go in a more timely manner and bring a greater degree of relief in the shortest possible time to restore service to customers across the country.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier, the EU and UK and their Procurement Act, where in 2023 the rules remain active, but it allows for the fast-tracking of direct awards. And this is permitted for unforeseeable urgency and emergencies. Mr. Speaker, under the U.S., it is subject to the Federal Acquisition Regulation. Utilities can skip forward in terms of open competition but must document an unusual and a compelling urgency. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, precedent exists in several jurisdictions across the globe that allows for the utility sector—you know, the Member Couva North, today our Acting Prime Minister—and we are very proud to say the Member for Couva North—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—is our acting Prime Minister. Someone with decency, integrity, and someone who gets the job done and therefore, Mr. Speaker, when you see the compelling urgency, the Member has been speaking about these data centres, other critical projects for investment, what it would do in terms of the utility sector benefiting from these changes today, we would lend ourselves to a better space and place in terms of the utility sector adding support for several

critical investments projects that we are looking at.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I earlier heard my colleague speak about bureaucracy and yes, there may be the need to cut out the bureaucracy, but we cannot do that at the expense of processes and so on. I heard the Member for Caroni Central, in particular, speak about the OPR and some of the issues that have been raised in the public space as opposed to others that have not been raised and have been languishing before the OPR for several years.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there was once a politically appointed director on the board of WASA. Today, we are dealing with procurement as it relates to changes to the procurement legislation for water and electricity. But there was a time when a director inside WASA appointed by the PNM, is now sitting inside of the OPR when there are matters involving WASA before the OPR that have been selectively cast aside but rushing to deal with matters related to housing, matters related to the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs, and therefore, Mr. Speaker, while we cast no aspersions, one just cannot help but wonder what is so special about dealing with housing when you have so many issues languishing, when you have the experience coming from the water sector, knowing what occurred inside of there, knowing what the reports and complaints are about millions and billions of dollars being reported to in the OPR. And therefore, one might probably ask, Mr. Speaker, why are we being selective, who is being selective, and who is benefiting from the OPR possibly being selective?

Mr. Speaker, I told you about sole-select inside of WASA and the 399 emergency projects. I can go through it one by one; I pulled the data. But, Mr. Speaker, what is very interesting is that some of the contractors who received sole-select contracts between the period 2016 to 2025 under emergency powers inside

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

WASA, it is the same repeat contractors and therefore, if we listened carefully to several colleagues on the Bench opposite, their mantra was contract and contractors and they were throwing out one or two names. But when you see the repeat contractors not only in the utilities sector, in the energy sector—

Mr. Lee: Housing.

Hon. B. Padarath:—in works, in housing, when we hear about the former Prime Minister's best friend, one Alan Warner.

Hon. Members: Former, former.

Hon. B. Padarath: Sorry, the former, former. Millions of dollars in sole-select contracts. If I am not mistaken, the road that leads to the Prime Minister's house in Tobago was a sole-select contract—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—for the best friend of the former, former Prime Minister. And that is the level of hypocrisy—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—we are supposed to stomach and take from Members opposite? This sanctimonious hypocrisy, this holier-than-thou attitude that they adopt and they want to tell us about “friend, family and financier.” Well, “friend, family and financier”, I will tell you about friends, family and financiers, I have a whole file about it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tancoo: “Tell dem.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: I will tell you. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, and you know, Mr. Speaker, they say from captain to crook?

Hon. Member: To cook.

Mr. Tancoo: “Nah in dis case is crook”.

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you there is an old adage that says, “the fish rots from the head.” That is not exclusive to the former administration or the former Prime Minister, or the former, former Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, when you hear this information, you will connect the dots and understand why so many of them have what they accuse us of in their DNA, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, in the utilities sector, emergency works. Today, the procurement provision will provide for emergency works for the Ministry of Public Utilities. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities is responsible, through MTS, for providing the repairs and so on to our nation’s schools and, Mr. Speaker, there is a company that provided work between the period 2016 to 2025 and the name of the company is New Image Contract and Maintenance Company Limited. Mr. Speaker, I will share the directors of the company with you, one, Brandon Beckles; two Bridgette Campbell; three, Lincoln Beckles. Mr. Speaker, for the avoidance of doubt, if you did not hear me the first time, I will repeat. These are the directors: Lincoln Beckles, Bridgette Campbell, Brandon Beckles.

Mr. Speaker, the information I am about to share with you has to do with procurement under the Ministry of Public Utilities. Between the period 2016 to 2025, this is what took place. The Member for Barataria/San Juan told us about real-time examples. I will tell you about more real-time examples, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a statement of fact, it is on the public record. Lincoln Beckles is the brother of the Member for Arima, this family relationship was publicly reported in 2014 by the Trinidad and Tobago *Newsday*. The report described Lincoln Beckles, as Beckles-Robinson’s brother, the hon. Member for Arima. In 2014—criminal charges on March 22nd, 2014—police conducted searches at two

residences in the Malabar area of Arima. This is what they obtained, according to the *Express* newspaper.

5.10 p.m.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Speaker, I am asking—48(1), where does this line up with procurement?

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Speaker, I am not speaking to the Members opposite. I am speaking to you.

Mr. Speaker: I understand. The Member has given his assurance that this has to do with procurement. I suppose he is, as we like to say, using a Jeff Thomson run-up. Let us hear what he has to say.

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—Smith and Wesson revolver and ammunition.

Mr. Speaker, for the period 2020 to 2025 alone—the records provided to me by MTS—42 school repair projects were awarded to New Image Contract and Maintenance Company Limited. That is the procurement, Mr. Speaker. That is the procurement. Under the Ministry of Public Utilities, today, we are dealing with the Ministry of Public Utilities in section 7 in terms of public procurement.

New Image Contract and Maintenance Company Limited, 42 school repair projects. Mr. Speaker, these were the schools: Arima Boys' Government Primary School; Arima Centenary Government Primary; Arima Central Secondary; Arima Girls' Government Primary School; Arima Girls' RC Primary School; Arima Girls' Roman Catholic Primary School; Arima Hindu Primary School; Arima New Government Primary School; Arima North Secondary School; Arima SDMS Hindu Primary; Arima West Government Primary. Mr. Speaker, we are dealing

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

with procurement under the Ministry of Public Utilities. MTS falls under the Ministry of Public Utilities. Mr. Speaker, you connect the dots. So, when Members wants to lecture us about friends, family, family—

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. B. Padarath:—family, and financiers—

Mr. Gonzales:—48(1)—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, the legislation that is before us is specifically referring to T&TEC and WASA, not the Ministry of Public Utilities, as the Member is seeking to do. It is T&TEC and WASA.

Mr. Speaker: The issue with that is that that is a narrow scope. There is a broader issue as to the repeated use of friends, family, financiers, and you know, you said it as well. There is the repeated use of that. So, the other side is entitled to proportionately respond.

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I just described to you was during the period 2020 to 2025, millions of dollars in state contracts, and what was the one underlying theme? The dots that are being connected, Mr. Speaker? All of this happened when the contractor's blood relative served as the Member of Parliament for Arima and as a Minister of Government. That is friends, family and financiers, Mr. Speaker. That is friends, family and financiers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot raised the issue of TSTT; TSTT. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lopinot—for Arouca/Lopinot, my apologies, hon. Member, spoke about a \$49 million contract.

Mr. Speaker: You have one minute. I take it you want your 15?

Hon. B. Padarath: Yes, Mr. Speaker—a \$49 million contract inside of TSTT for a call centre. I am not ashamed, I will say it, big, bad, bold and brave, inside of here and outside, that the decision to award that contract was done unilaterally by one senior person inside of TSTT’s management without the knowledge of the board of TSTT and/or the Minister of Public Utilities.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know the Member for Arouca/Lopinot—and I hear my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s, and I want to remind my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s about an instance in the year 2018. Because I remember he was present in the Parliament that day when the Member for Siparia and I got up, and we asked the then Prime Minister, Member for Diego Martin West at that time, as well as the Member for Diego Martin North/East who served as the Minister of Finance for Prime Minister’s Questions, and then followed up through Urgent Questions, very pointedly—

Mr. Young SC: Supplemental.

Hon. B. Padarath: Supplemental, my apologies.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Well, I remember the Member for Diego Martin North/East also got up—no, it was also for—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—Urgent Questions/ The Member for Diego Martin North/East also got up to respond, and both of them categorically denied knowing anything, anything, about the acquisition of Amplia. I think the Member for Oropouche East was there. The Member for Caroni Central was there in the Parliament with me at that time. The former Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance in the former administration, washed their hands of that entire fiasco, said they knew nothing.

I heard my colleague from Arouca/Lopinot say in another place recently that he is not hearing anything about this investigation that took place with respect to Amplia. I want to tell the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, be careful of what you wish for. Be very careful of what you wish for.

Mr. Gonzales: I am asking.

Hon. B. Padarath: Whether it is your wish, you ask, the result will be the same.

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

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, a lot more will be said about that acquisition of a company that continues to bleed Trinidad and Tobago financially, and points in the direction where many persons, inclusive of the board, will have questions to answer. As I indicated, a lot more will be said about that at the appropriate time.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall the former, former Prime Minister made some very startling revelations where he indicated to Trinidad and Tobago that all was not well with the Ocean Flower procurement. He went on further to say it stinks to the high heavens. Mr. Speaker, and I quote from the *Trinidad Express*, dated August 20, 2017:

“Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley admitted on Monday that something went drastically wrong and was crooked in the procurement of the passenger ferry the Ocean Flower 2. Rowley was responding to questions by the media following meeting in Tobago with the main stakeholders directly affected by the unsuccessful attempt to find a replacement passenger ferry to service the sea-bridge between Trinidad and Tobago. ‘Yes!’ Rowley said emphatically. ‘My yes means a lot to me,’ he added. Sole investigator Christian Mouttet was appointed last week to look into the ‘circumstances surrounding the procurement of the Cabo Star and the Ocean Flower 2, and the entering into

the charter party agreement for these vessels.’ Asked whether Mouttet’s report would be made public, Rowley said he had no doubt that it would be. He said he saw no conflict of interest in Cabinet appointing an investigator to probe a decision made by Cabinet. Told that some Tobagonians felt that the meeting was a waste of time, Rowley said: ‘I could only speak for myself and to those who spoke in this room that they had a very valuable experience because a lot of issues were raised. A lot of issues not relating to the ferry service were raised.’”—in this room.

Mr. Speaker, on September 15, 2017, Trinidad *Express* reported:

“PM, ‘very disturbed’ by ferry report”

It said this:

“Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley says he has read the report submitted to him by sole investigator Christian Mouttet into the acquisition of the Cabo Star and Ocean Flower II vessels for the inter-island seabridge and he is ‘very disturbed’ by its findings. He said he will not only make the report available for Parliament’s Joint Select Committee examining the acquisition of the two vessels but also ‘the Attorney General’s Office’. Rowley made the comment in an interview with TV6...at Diego Martin Boys’ RC School...”

Mr. Speaker, since then very little has been said apart from the JSC on this issue. But at this time, Mr. Speaker, the matter is receiving the attention of the Attorney General’s Office, and I am almost certain that the hon. Attorney General will have a lot more to say about that at the appropriate time.

Mr. Speaker, in summarizing some of the points that I have raised today, our colleagues opposite are kicking and screaming at the changes that are being made

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the procurement legislation. And based on some of the examples that colleagues on this side of the Bench have raised, Member for Oropouche East, Member for Barataria/San Juan, Member for Caroni Central and myself, it is very clear, Mr. Speaker, that colleagues opposite have no moral authority to lecture us on this side of the House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental difference of what we are doing, compared to what colleagues did. There is no Member on this side of the House whose relative, friend, family or financier or otherwise, Mr. Speaker, will benefit from billions of dollars in financing through any financial institution. There is none. Mr. Speaker, there is no colleague on this side of the House that will benefit from millions of dollars in rentals of properties.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, we can categorically tell you that our Prime Minister has no farm, no pig farm, no sheep farm, no goat farm that will benefit—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—from any changes to the procurement legislation or any other type of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, time and time again, we have sat here for 10 years and we have seen where legislation was brought, whether it was procurement legislation or provisions—I heard one set of song and dance about the Minister of Finance. This is one Minister of Finance who can tell you, he has no yacht to benefit from any tax breaks.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: This one Minister of Finance who could tell you, he has no property down in Picton that will benefit from any tax break.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: So, therefore, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. B. Padarath:—when we come—

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Speaker, given the statements that the Member has just made, I rise on 48(6).

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I think all the Member said is this Minister will not do it. Never said any other Minister did it. Continue.

Hon. B. Padarath: You see, Mr. Speaker, I understand very clearly why my colleagues are jumpy, because I have said it before and I will say it again, this dispensation of the UNC is not like any other dispensation that has passed through the country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: We will not be afraid of you. We will be big, bad and bold and in your face and your space.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: And, Mr. Speaker, we will call you out for your hypocrisy, for your corruption, for your self-serving interests—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—where you have ride roughshod over the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and then come to tell them that you have done all of that in their

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. B. Padarath (cont'd)

interest, when you did that in your own interest, not in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: You did it for yourself—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—you did it for your friend, you did it for your family, you did it for your financiers, you did it for your party—

Mr. Des Vignes: 48(6), Mr. Speaker—

Hon. B. Padarath:—and that is why Balisier House—

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, 48(6)—

Hon. B. Padarath:—is the subject of corruption.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Des Vignes: 48(6), Mr. Speaker.

Hon. B. Padarath: That is why—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Des Vignes: 48(6), Mr. Speaker.

Hon. B. Padarath: That is why all of you have questions to answer.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, “All of you have questions to answer”? That is imputing improper motives. “All of you have questions to answer”?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gonzales: Imputing improper motives, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Every Member on this side of the House who has spoken, has spoken about—

Hon. Members: Grubby hands.

Mr. Speaker:—grubby hands, they have spoken about friends, family and financiers. Come on. It is a legitimately proportionate response. It might be passionate, but it is legitimately proportionate. Continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, I give no hesitation to adding my support for the measures contained in this Bill. And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities will be very grateful for the measures to be implemented so that we can continue to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is the water sector, the electricity sector or the power generating sector. Mr. Speaker, it will be done for the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not for a select few that we saw particularly during the period September 2015 to April 2025.

Mr. Speaker, that culture here in Trinidad and Tobago is a relic of the past, and therefore, we commend to this House, this Bill for its support and its passage. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I recognize the Member for Port of Spain South, but I propose to take the tea break now. We will resume at 6.00 p.m. We will take a truncated tea break today, and we will resume at 6.00 p.m.

5.25 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

6.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Keith Scotland SC (Port of Spain South): Mr. Speaker, welcome back. I came here today to debate the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property

(Amdt.) Bill, 2026; a very serious, and we say egregious, Bill. And I came to discuss the issues that this Bill entails going forward.

After hearing the contributions, particularly the last contribution made by the hon. Member for Couva South, I am really wondering, Mr. Speaker, where have we reached here in this Parliament? The name of the hon. Member for San Fernando East was called. The names of relatives of the Leader of the Opposition, hon. Member for Arima, were called. And it was done with some sort of self-satisfaction. And I wondered what about glass windows and pelting stones?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, we all have the information, you know? I do not know if people's relatives signed up for this, so I ask the question in this Parliament here today because I actually feel sorry for the hon. Member for where he has to descend to conduct a debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I do. Because that attack, unwarranted, on people's relatives is really a reflection of where the hon. Member is. So, I ask the question, who was the subject of the *Guardian* investigative report by Mark Bassant on Thursday the 6th of August, 2020?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I ask the question, which alleged that a sitting Member could not have recalled whether he issued two First Citizens Bank checks totalling \$135,000 in October 2014, and who it was issued to; the allegation that it was issued to the hon. Member for Siparia, none other than the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, we have this information, you know? I do not want to descend into that sort of guttural interaction, because that is all that you

can describe that as being, you know. I have the article. I asked the hon. Member, who is the person that the document sheweth—

Hon. Member: Sheweth?

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Sheweth, yes, that is a word in the Privy Council. Mr. Speaker, you like that word.

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Your petitioner is sheweth.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Sheweth, yes—that deposited checks close to \$703,000 from their RBC financial Caribbean bank account on March the 7th, 2016, to their relative's account?

Hon. Members: Who is that?

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Who is that?—that, according to the documents, showed a complex financial trail, and it points to the relative setting up several other bank accounts, including two chequing accounts for that relative's company?

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1). Is the Member tying—

Hon. Members: What?

Mr. Hosein:—this on to the procurement by a public body and so on?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Well, I was wondering when he was going to get there. It must be—alright. Port of Spain South, if you notice the contribution for the Member for Couva South, he was careful enough to relate whatever he said to issues regarding procurement issues in the Bill. Okay? And that is the same thing you complained about, about newspaper reports. So, now what you are doing is referring to newspaper reports without tying it to any provision in the Bill. So, let us—if you

can, let us bring it together to some procurement issue in the Bill, please.

6.05 p.m.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, I ask you to give me a Curtly Ambrose run-up. I will make a run-up. Give me a Curtly Ambrose run-up.

Mr. Speaker: And a Curtly Ambrose run-up is exactly what? A long one, a medium one, a short one?

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I will finish my point very shortly, Mr. Speaker, and I will move on.

The point—Mr. Speaker, in a debate—that is why it is a debate—you answer certain things, and I am answering certain things made by the previous contributor. The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is this. If you live in a glass house, do not throw stones. And I assure you, Sir, because your last—the hon. Member's last contribution is, he will be in people's space. Please, leave my space alone. Leave my space. I will not be in your space, and you, please, stay out of my space.

The other contribution that shocked me was the contribution of Oropouche East. Oropouche East quoted NGC, Paria, Heritage to say he received contributions of support. Who is the Chairman of Heritage? Who is the Chairman of NGC? Who is the Chairman of Paria? How were they appointed? What do you expect to receive from them? Opposition? But what he did not tell this Parliament is what was the position of the independent structures and bodies out there about this proposed amendment. So I would like to tell the public about that.

And the hon. Member for Caroni Central said, "When something hits the fan." What I want to tell you about that something is that sometimes—in fact, all of the times, this Government seems to want to put us on a diet strewn with faecal,

excremental things that we must take as ice cream. Because how could you then come to us and say, “Well, my board says to me, the board that I have appointed, that everyone on that board is obligated to you because you appoint and then you disappoint”?

Hon. Member: “Or dey marrid to them”.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: You understand? And then you say, “Well, look, I have these three reports. What do the JCC say about it? Mr. Speaker, my source is Anna Ramdass and it is today’s *Express*. And here’s what the JCC had to say about this proposed amendment that we are here to debate, as opposed to what was given to himself from himself.

“The Joint Consultative Council for the Construction Industry has raised concerns over the proposed changes to public procurement law, warning that exempting contracts valued up to \$2 million could weaken transparency and accountability in the spending of public funds.

JCC President Fazir Khan in a statement also questioned proposed exemption covering major sectors, restrictions on the powers of the Office of Procurement Regulations...shorter periods for challenging contract awards and provisions allowing costs to be imposed on unsuccessful challengers.

‘The \$2 million...’—this is the quote from Mr. Khan—“‘...is not a minor sum,’ Khan stated, as he expressed concern on the Public Procurement and Disposal Property (Amendment) Bill, 2026. ‘It is a substantial public contract capable of supporting significant work supplies and professional services.’

The JCC said if procurement of up to \$2 million by ministries, State enterprises and statutory bodies is exempted from normal requirements,

there should still be mandatory written quotations, documented evaluation, conflict of interest declarations, value-for-money assessment, public reporting and proper audit trails.

‘Reporting a contract to the Office of Procurement Regulations after it has been awarded is not the same as procuring it through a transparent and accountable process...’ Khan said. ”That is a concern raised by us, Mr. Speaker.

“The JCC is also concerned about proposed broad exemptions involving energy, national security, public housing, public-private partnerships, emergency utilities and other procurements that could be designated by ministerial order.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to move on. He says:

“‘Independent oversight must remain capable of preventing a problem, not merely describing it after the fact.’

Khan also warned that provisions allowing legal costs to be awarded to procuring entities could discourage small and medium-sized businesses from challenging genuinely unfair or unlawful procurement decisions.”

These are not the words of the PNM on this Bench here, you know—although it echoes the submissions made by all the speakers that went before me.

“He said many local contractors and suppliers cannot afford to risk substantial legal costs while challenging a large public body.

The JCC believes costs should only be imposed where a challenge is ‘frivolous and vexatious, abusive or knowingly misleading’—not simply because the challenger is unsuccessful.

The Council also objected to reducing the standstill period for a minimum of 10 working days to as few as five.

Khan said five days may be inadequate in complex construction, consultancy, technology or infrastructure procurement for an unsuccessful bidder to review the decision, seek advice and prepare...”—properly for grounding of a challenge.

“‘Speed is important, but so is procedural fairness’, he said, and called for meaningful consultation with Government, Parliament, the OPR, business organizations, professional bodies, civil-society stakeholders before the amendments are enacted.”

These are not the words of the People’s National Movement. They echo the words of the People’s National Movement, but what I have quoted here is the JCC. So maybe they are against development, as is what the hon. Members who spoke on the other side they are wont to say.

It has been bandied about—and I hope that Trinidad and Tobago takes note. Mr. Speaker, I have concatenated this in my head. The timing of this. So, just before budget, you take out all procurement—and that is exactly what they are doing. Let us call a spade a spade. They are taking out all the procurement. And you do that just before you go into a local government election, after “de ground just dry”. I see no good coming out of this. I see manipulation. I see something sinister, and that is my view based on the track record of this Government. They simply cannot be trusted at their word.

What evidence has been produced before you, Mr. Speaker, to show that any small or medium-term businesses would benefit from this? When I say there is no trust, I go back to the EFCL debacle, where they just destroyed that company. The company could not “catch back” itself. Between—800 million. Between 2011 and 2013—when the hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly got there, it was like a dark hole.

That is their track record. That is just the history of their track record.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So when I hear about “political will”, which is now their new mantra to cover, well, we are going to do what we want. We will infringe your rights and we will tell you we are not going to adhere to section 13, although we admit that we are infringing your rights because we say it is proportionate, and you try to throw us up in the Senate on one end to distract the population, whilst debating this most important Bill in the Lower House, Mr. Speaker. My trust just diminishes.

But it does not stop there. The hon. Member for Oropouche East quoted these sources, but he did not tell the people that two business groups questioned the OPR amendments. And this was only because—and I am sure the fact that there were only two up to now is because the Bill only came out in the last 48 hours. As it marinates, there will be more. And this article—because I do not want to offend any of the Standing Orders—is from Andrea Perez-Sobers. It is today.

“Business groups...”

—and it goes—they are warning—let me read the entire article.

“Business groups have backed efforts to overhaul Trinidad and Tobago's public procurement system, but are warning that greater speed and flexibility cannot come at the expense of transparency, competition, and accountability.”

It says that:

“The proposed changes would significantly alter the powers of the Office of Procurement Regulations...after a complaint is made or an investigation begins.

Two business representatives told Guardian Media yesterday that the proposed changes must be considered against the Government's push to accelerate major projects..."

But this is the concern:

"But it warned that flexibility must come with safeguards."

One of these groups is, Mr. Speaker, the CRBC, and the next group, Mr. Speaker, is—and let me get it, the print is small—the San Juan Business Association. And what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is this: They echo the concerns of this Bench. And these concerns are there because we are here to stand in the gap when we see that something is not right. And this Bill, this amendment, is simply not right.

And when you look at their recent history, I want the hon. Member—one of them to tell me, who is D&D Auto that had access to provide water truck services within two months of this Government coming into office without any open public tender—

Hon. Member: Papa.

Mr. K. Scotland SC:—and they are now a major water trucking service provider in the tune of millions of taxpayers' money? If it is that this is being done whilst the legislation is in place, "crapaud smoke we pipe" when they remove this legislation and then everybody come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: "Crapaud smoking we pipe."

Another submission made—and that is why I tell you, Mr. Speaker, they really think that they can feed us excrements, with just excrements, and say you are getting Häagen-Dazs. A speaker said that he went back to the hon. Member for Arouca/Lopinot in 2023, when he made the comments that the amendments that

we are proposing is because we do not want Government to be slowed down, we want to accelerate and we want to be more efficient. Do you know what those amendments were in 2023? The first one was a \$1 million procurement threshold, it raised it to a million, it amended section 58A. The second one corrected a drafting error. The 2020 amendment regarding section 7(7) was amended and section 7(5) and (6) was put in for parliamentary oversight. There was a modification of parliamentary oversight that changed the parliamentary requirement for specific exemptions under 7(6)(e) from an affirmative resolution to a negative resolution of Parliament, still keeping everything in the Parliament.

There is a validation of exemption orders that retroactively validated two specific exemption orders that were previously promulgated as Legal Notice 164 of 2023 and Legal Notice 206 of 2023. And the ministerial powers over exemption modified how orders and regulations are initiated under section 7, allowing the Minister of Finance, upon initiative with the agreement of the Office of Procurement or on the OPR recommendation, to determine additional specific service exemption by orders. What it was doing, it was strengthening the oversight of the OPR.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So, when the words of the hon. Member are taken out of context to say, well, they come—we did not come here, Sir, to disembowel the Act. When in 2023, Mr. Speaker, we came here, it was to strengthen the Act.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The Act—that amendment, Mr. Speaker, did not have a clause 3, where the definition of public-private partnership is changed to expand it and give a definition that removes the requirement that a private partner takes a

risk in any such arrangement. That amendment in 2023 did not have a clause 4 that removes the requirement that the Minister of Finance must get agreement of the OPR.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: It did not. That amendment did not have a clause 5 that renders the OPR impotent and useless, and makes a mockery of the OPR and the Act itself. That amendment did not have a clause that defeats the overriding objective of the Act, as introduced in 2015.

As we say the overriding objective, I want to remind the population of Trinidad and Tobago, and I speak to them about this Bill, what was the overriding objective of the Act? The overriding objective, the *raison d'être* of the Act, it was an Act to provide for public procurement and for the retention and disposal of public property in accordance with the principles of good governance, namely accountability, transparency, integrity and value for money, the establishment of the Office of Procurement Regulation.

What this Bill does with its clauses, it totally emasculates the Act. It makes no sense having the Act remain as it is now, because it is now toothless.

6.25 p.m.

What rules will apply now, Mr. Speaker? Who can intervene when something goes wrong with a procurement process? Who? What safeguard remains when millions and hundreds of millions, and in one case \$3 billion, are being committed without any oversight? This is a shift in the procurement architecture, and I wonder why.

Many speakers have gone before and shown the shift, the change of tongue from when they were in Opposition to now. I will not go there, but I want the population to understand that the general gist of all their submissions then, was

that, once the PNM touched the Bill, we were either weakening the Bill, Mr. Speaker, we were either watering it down, Mr. Speaker, we were either attacking procurement, Mr. Speaker, and it was done in both Houses in unison. They sang one chorus, and the chorus was: “PNM interfering with the Bill. Make it stronger. When we come in, we will do it.” And they did the exact opposite. That is what they are doing today: the exact opposite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Promises made and promises just going up in smoke before your very eyes. Right before your very eyes, Trinidad and Tobago. They have calculated that they can do this to us because we tolerate it. Our penchant for tolerance seems to have grown when they are in power, because we could not get away with that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: All kinds of advice we would have been getting from all and sundry to this one, that one, and then every Monday morning, some Baboolal—what is his name?—Balgobin in court.

I know they will, but they think, they think, you see, that it escaped. They think that the ad hominem legislation escaped us. It did not, you know. It did not. We were just balanced. It did not escape us. Do not feel that it escaped us. And time “ain’t” gone yet, because you would know, Mr. Speaker, that Durity says, that in constitutional matters, once you can give an explanation, there is no statute barred. That is what the Privy Council said in Durity. So do not chuck us too much. Do not push us too much. We are trying to be responsible as an Opposition.

But, Mr. Speaker, it really pains me that I have to come here to enter debate and talk about people's family. We have the information. We have it, you know. I have it. I will not do it. I will not do it. I will keep it, and what I will do, Mr. Speaker, is I will bide, I will take the pause between stimuli. We say on this side that Trinidad and Tobago has to be very careful with this Bill on various sectors.

Let me deal with a sector that is very close to me, national security. Mr. Speaker, national security has the words that, the effect of it, is that once it is national security, it is exempted. National security is a broad concept. It is not limited on the face of the Bill to procurement by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It is not limited to firearms. It is not limited to intelligence equipment. It is not limited to military equipment. The Bill simply states "national security" among the exempted categories. What is that? How broad and ambiguous can you get? What is really intended by this?

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, I have half an hour.

Mr. Speaker: No, no. Your time is—

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Yes, please. Yes, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I really did not intend to spend—

The reduced powers, Mr. Speaker, of the Office of the OPR, what does that really do? That is the most consequential part of this Bill, clause 5. It was touched on by the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. But what this Bill does is that, apart from emasculating the OPR, it just makes it otiose. The OPR now, with this amendment, cannot suspend or restrain procurement proceedings. It cannot restrain the performance of a procurement contract. It cannot prohibit an

entity from making a decision. It cannot direct a revaluation. It cannot direct a recommencement. The unkindest cut of all, and I am seeing that a lot in this House, its recommendations are now not binding. So what is the point? How does that help transparency in Trinidad and Tobago going forward?

As I was looking at my contribution today, I came upon a release from one David Cassidy from Proman, and I am wondering if that pulling out or that pulling back—because is it not what Oropouche East said? “Nobody is knocking the door in energy,” you know. In fact, they are locking the door in energy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: They are locking the door in energy. In their echo Chamber, “Oh, the doors are open. We have to be there.” What Proman is saying is: Hey, we are being cautious here. We are pulling a brake on what is happening. I am wondering if all of this, is part of the tapestry of governance that has led to international agencies such—Proman has been here for over 20 years—30 years. It is the first time this has ever happened in their history.

Nutrien, Methanex, come on—so, and that will only be exacerbated, Mr. Speaker, when the dangers of a regulator without effective remedies come into law, because that is exactly what this Bill does. You have a regulator who cannot regulate. The removal of the procurement regulations, it is just too blatant, and the free-for-all that that creates, Mr. Speaker, leads me to the concern that I have, and it is a legitimate concern. I hope it does not materialize—of massive fraud and corruption in Trinidad and Tobago gone wild.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: How could you have an OPR that makes a recommendation that you now expressly say is non-binding? So then, why make the

recommendation? Why give them the power? When we tie all of that in, Mr. Speaker, with the special zones Bill that is being debated up in the Senate, we are really just free-falling in Trinidad and Tobago, because you are infringing our constitutional rights on one part of the House, and you are setting up a system that may raid the Treasury without any safeguards on another part—and the Treasury is not empty. Do not tell fibs. You came and you met a very, a very robust Treasury, and that is a fact. Moody's will tell you that. The IMF will tell you that. All the bodies will tell you that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: That is one thing that your sloganisms and your fascist-craft phrases will not be able to outright. You met a healthy Treasury, a healthy Treasury.

So, we say, a matter of public confidence arises here, and there is nothing now to stop a contract that is shaky and shady; nothing in the procurement legislation. What you tell us, you understand, “challenge proceedings,” and not only is it shortened, but if you have a legitimate claim, you are threatened by prescribed costs if you lose, not to mention stigmatisation.

Mr. Speaker, I began my thought process by understanding that procurement is about people's money. I say to Trinidad and Tobago, it is time that you wake up and understand what is going on in your country. Understand it, because others are understanding it, and they are doing what they have to do under the guise of political will. But we have to now take stock of the future for our children and future generations, because this Bill does not merely change a few technical provisions; it changes the balance between procurement flexibility and procurement oversight.

It expands the circumstances in which procurement can be removed from the ordinary statutory framework. It gives the hon. Minister a broader power to create further exemptions. It removes the OPR's present gatekeeping role over that additional exemption mechanism. It replaces a detailed, simplified procurement regulatory framework with a direct statutory exemption and reporting. It restricts what the OPR can do after a Part IV investigation. It makes the recommendations by the OPR non-binding, and then it shortens the standstill period.

What else are you going to do with the Act? Well, they said, "I will give you one more. I will introduce legal costs for suppliers who lose." These are not minor amendments, Mr. Speaker. These are not minor amendments. If the procurement rules are being removed, what safeguards, hon. Minister, in your winding up, are you going to put in place? Because if the answer is that there are fewer rules, fewer remedies, less independent intervention, and greater executive discretion, then Parliament has a duty to examine these consequences with utmost seriousness.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go beyond 40 minutes. In my next two minutes—I know I have seven—I really want to practise discipline. It seems that this Government cannot govern under normal rules. So, for crime, you have to give us 400 days of State of Emergency, then try for another 180 days of ZoSOs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Now, when it comes to finance and procurement, you cannot operate within the rules. You have to take everything and just go your way, mash it up, and go your way. I do not know if it is capacity—I doubt it—if it is indolence. But I think that Trinidad and Tobago ought to demand better from those whom we have elected.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Elections have consequences, and this is one of the consequences of April the 28th, 2025. We are in a sad state, Mr. Speaker. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Jearlean John): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. You know, usually I do not know anything about cricket, unfortunately. But I do know when you come so low down in the batting order, there is not much to say. But in this instance, I still have a lot to say. So, Mr. Speaker, generally, when I stand to speak with your kind leave, I do not respond to what the other side, what they have to say, because it really adds up to nonsense. But today, I just think I have to do a couple rebuttals which will make the Leader of Government Business's heart sing today, right? Because the time is so short.

Mr. Speaker, I want to first thank the Member for Malabar/Mausica. You know, the seasoned Members of this House on the Opposition side, they have abandoned the House today. So these are the younger ones, and you know they are very junior. So sometimes they need a little lesson that an almost seasoned man like the Member for Port of Spain North/St. John's West will not assist you with. So today, let me just tell this Member for—kind of selfish.

Mr. Young SC: I will assist him.

Hon. J. John: No, you are not assisting him. I do not know why. You have all the motive. You have an agenda. The Member for Malabar/Mausica, Sir, you are

in an institution that runs a business on rumour-mongering, not on performance and on old talk. So I want to tell you about this thing you are talking about called Eden Gardens. That transaction came properly to the Housing Development Corporation, to the board, to the Ministry, to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, and was approved there properly. The PNM, of course, in Opposition, did not have anything to do, so they reported it to the Integrity Commission. They did, right. One Al-Rawi did that rubbish, you know. I hope when I report him this time—“Yuh know, do so doh like eh so”. [*Inaudible*]

They would have sent a letter on July 1st—I do not know if that is the first letter they sent—on July 1st, 2013, to me as Managing Director, and they asked for the request for information and/or documents pursuant to section 35 of the Integrity in Public Life Act, Chap. 22:01. The Act, the Integrity Commission, is conducting an investigation into this matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: I must say, thank God for technology, because you know, sometimes you do not expect people to talk a lot of rubbish, but I can just go on my phone and find these things and just ask for it to be printed. Now, you know, amongst other things, they said at paragraph 6 in their document, they said:

Please supply a copy of the following documents:

- The Cabinet Note and Cabinet Minutes with respect to the acquisition of the said parcel of land;
- All notes, reports, and minutes of the Corporation’s Board of Directors concerning this transaction; and
- All other documents associated with this matter.

They gave you time to present this information. After over a year, the Integrity Commission—I see their reference 4/01/133—to the Managing Director, myself, of the Housing Development Corporation on October 21st, that is 2014:

Dear Madam,

Re: Determination of investigation by the Integrity Commission of matter concerning the acquisition of lands at Eden Gardens, Calcutta Road No. 2, by the Housing Development Corporation.

Reference is made to your letter dated November 5th, 2013, and the Integrity Commission's letter dated November 8th, 2013, relative to the caption.

I wish to advise that the Integrity Commission has conducted a thorough investigation into this matter, and no conclusive evidence was unearthed to warrant any further action. As a consequence, the Commission has decided to close this matter pending any further development.

Yours faithfully.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Martin Farrell, [*Inaudible*] Registrar. Now, the Commissioner is there. The Chairman of that Board was Kenneth Gordon. Ken Gordon, no friend, right? The Deputy Chairman, was one, Justice Sebastian Ventour. I do not think he was a friend either. You understand? So please, you know, just relax yourself, “eh” honey. Check yourself before you wreck yourself.

Now, with respect to this financial statement that—I do not like to throw out all these kinds of nonsense, you know. Talking about, “they cannot find this and they cannot find that.” I am not only an accountant by training. I also have an MBA in Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, when I went into HDC, it did not have a two-by-four inside HDC. I was a proper professional. I did not build my name and my reputation on politics. I worked in various institutions, and out there, when you go out in the road, my name is solid as a rock. All right? I am a proper professional.

6.45 p.m.

So this was the report given to one Marlene McDonald, deceased, when she came into the HDC. Again, had I known, I would have come with the documents, the original, you know. I have the original documents. “Ah doh make joke with dat. Ah doh make joke.” We are accountants, that is why “we doh make joke”. The Housing Development Corporation is required, under the Housing Act, No. 24 of 2005, subsection 19(1), to have annual audits prepared by the Auditor General or an auditor. So I will skip that. While auditing the financial period, 2000-2004—this is in 2010 we are talking about “eh”. This is an audit in 2000-2004. Now, the management letter issued by the auditors for the period 2000-2004 concluded that:

The authority’s accounting records were not adequate for the purposes of the audit, and therefore there were no satisfactory audit procedures that they could perform.

They could not even do the audit. They abandoned the audit. It had nothing there to audit.

The authority’s accounting records were inadequate for the purposes of the audit, and therefore there were no satisfactory audit procedures that we could perform to obtain reasonable assurance that balances were complete, exist, accurate, appropriately valued, owned, and presented.

This led to what they call a disclaimer of opinion in the financial statement. You know what a disclaimer is? You know what Barry Padarath does say, “in local parlance”, but “in accounting parlance”. [*Laughter*]

A disclaimer of opinion, when an auditor is unable to complete an accurate audit report for reasons such as an absence of appropriate financial records, the auditor issues a disclaimer of opinion stating that the opinion of the firm’s financial status could not be determined.

They just abandoned the thing, you understand. But I am a proper professional. I do not go out there, and go tell it on the mountain. What I did, I brought in a team. Who was the Minister? Moonilal, “de one dat dey does discredit.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: A proper professional, you know. “He didn’t make ah bacchanal.”
Mr. Speaker, 2000-2004, we have to go back:

The management of HDC, in direct response to this information, made a decision to recreate.

So you had to bring in people and recreate the files. That means you are crawling under desks. You are all over because those guys, they had their project managers who used to literally sleep on these things. They had nothing. So you had to try and recreate the accounts. Go out there. You have to go to contractors to get their files to recreate the accounts because HDC had nothing, because I do not know who was running it. You understand?

The Corporation’s objective at the time is not only to bring to date its financial statements up to date, but also to ensure that these statements represent a true and fair view of its transactions over the years.

These are proper professionals, you know, because with accounts, if you put in garbage, you get garbage out; garbage in, garbage out, and you just keep carrying the rubbish straight up. And that is what one wanted to say, “Okay, if one will get a disclaimer of account, ’24, ’25, ’26, ’27, let us take it all there and then kind of move forward with clean accounts”, and that is what I was doing. Not on behalf of the then Opposition, but on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they could get a true picture of what was happening at HDC; not with bacchanal and scandal, very quietly. I never said anything. I just continued to work and pass it through the Board.

So the purpose of the report at the time, it was to provide an update on the status of the financial statement audit of the HDC for the period 1st October, 2005, to 30th September, 2014. As I said, one commenced, Mr. Speaker, the audit—and please excuse me for reading:

The audit of the financial statements for the fiscal years 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, commenced on the 5th of January, 2007.

So they started before I got there, but they did not complete it.

Audits for the fiscal period 2000-2003 were completed.

Right. Okay. This was done before I got there. It was completed on the 10th of August, 2009. So that was before I got there.

The external auditors, KPMG, issued a disclaimer of opinion.

They say, “It eh good”, for the fiscal years 2000-2003.

The audit for fiscal 2004 commenced 9th April, 2008.

So that was there, and again, they got a disclaimer.

So then the Managing Director, by letter 2010, sought the approval of the Auditor General's office to outsource the audit service for the audit of the financial statements for fiscal years 2000 to 2006.

Right? That is now me. Very decently, you asked the Auditor General to go out and kind of get these things, because:

Since correspondence found on the subject matter proved to be inadequate with respect to approval from the Auditor General's office, and so on, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, the audit team of the HDC at the time were faced with significant constraints in the preparation of the financial statements for the period 2000 to 2004, and following are some of the major constraints:

The absence of proper accounting records for the years under review. Namely files could not be found or files were non-existent.

They were just spending money.

There was no proper filing system in place. There was no reconciliation of bank statements for previous years.

This is basic accounting, you know. Somebody in their first week of bookkeeping will know these things.

No supporting documentation for major accounting items, such as receivables, payables, payroll, mortgage loan accounts, deposit on houses and inventory.

“So if you eh have dat in 2004, how yuh go find de houses in 2000, and whatever. This clown was inside ah HDC?” Because you are bringing forward the thing. You are trying to clean up the accounts, and then once you have clean accounts, you are out there. You have people checking. They have to go and check the

houses out, because they had no records to support the \$9 billion they spent; \$9 billion, and no records to support that.

So on 10th August, 2009, a disclaimer of accounts.

So I said that.

They had insufficient information related to balances, project costs. We observed that there was a breakdown—

This is the Auditor General's statement:

—in the accounting of projects during the period. Cost of construction was entered in the general ledger according to what project they relate to, often categorized by the name of the location. When the project was completed, the cost is not transferred from construction.

So they are not transferring the asset, neither the costs, and you are carrying that forward. So after the government changed, and so on, I mean, you had a whole lot of confusion inside of there. Let me see:

Deposit on sale of houses: There was insufficient information available to support deposits paid by mortgages for the sale of a house. These deposits are payable at the—

And just a mess. So if you are carrying forward nonsense, it will follow you throughout. But basically, what happened, when I left the HDC, when they threw me out in 2015, I heard they disbanded the group as if they belonged to me. You know, and these were the people—

Mr. Hosein: All of them, yeah.

Hon. J. John: All of them; independent people just focusing on all of this, trying to get these accounts up to date. You are talking about over 26,000 files they had

to go through, plus contractor files. You know, and, again, areas with issues identified.

There is no schedule detailing the quantity of housing units relating to the inventory balance on the financial statements.

The objective of that: To generate a schedule that details the development and units relating to the balance on the financial statement.

Actions being taken by whom? By me.

The corporation embarked on an exercise to review all supporting documentation.

So you had to go to by dem contractors and say, “How much house you built?”, “What was the contract?”, “How much you built?”, What is the variation between the gap, between what your contract say and what you built?” All of these things you had to do to come to some kind of determination of where you were.

So when these folks come here and talk nonsense, it rarely make you feel that you should be as nasty and vicious as they are and stop being any kind of professional, honestly, because decency does not pay, as far as the PNM is concerned. So, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see that today, those on the other side have suddenly discovered that public moneys must be accounted for and protected. Mr. Speaker, the UNC Government brought this legislation. The way they are talking, you will think they brought something to the Parliament, you know. They sat down there after—what? It was not HDC. It was NHA converted into HDC by Act No. 24 of 2005. Even the tender rules, by the way, under the Act, they were supposed to have written tender rules for the HDC. They did not do that. You know who laid those tender rules, one Roodal Moonilal, “who dey does talk rubbish of.”

The tender rules were laid in 2010. Right? So they were there having a good time without any tender rules. Yes, they were operating without tender rules. So “dem talking” about sole select, and they are talking about gutting the OPR—

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: Exactly. But it is true. As a matter of fact, in my documents, when I was going through, I saw where they went to one, John Jeremie—I “doh know” if you all know him—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John:—to ask about the legitimacy and the legality of sole selection. That is how far—I have it. I have the record, look at this list. You know, I could have bought in—I needed to bring in a whole filing cabinet here, you understand.

So these folks, really and truly, ought not to speak, but I forgive you, you all are young. You all felt the PNM started when you all came in here. I am hearing the nonsense you are talking, that is not true. It started long before that, you understand. So they sat there in 2000, 2000 and this, that, and the other, just having a grand old time, and basically, it was the great hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—who took this OPR law to the Parliament. They sat on it, and all they did was mamaguy you, and amended it without doing anything, but you have to test drive the thing.

What we have done is that we are working the thing now. We are working the Act and we are seeing this thing, it is not working in the way in the interest of the ordinary Trinidadian and Tobagonian, and we are saying, “No, that cannot work.” But they are inside of here talking about the OPR as if it is G-O-D, you

know, their “fleece as white as snow.” Yes. [*Laughter*] But, Mr. Speaker, very early in my tenure, I heard about a member of the OPR Board, who was sitting on the Board, who was also moonlighting as the Chief Procurement Officer of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: What?

Hon. J. John: Now I am hearing he was in Heritage too, eh, by the way. I do not know, you better check that. One, Mr. Lee Chee. Mr. Herdis Lee Chee, was a member of the Procurement Board of Trinidad and Tobago. This is the OPR who they here are talking about as if it is G-O-D. He was a member of the Procurement Board of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Lee Chee served for the period 12th January, 2018, to 11th January, 2026. But he was also hired as the Chief Procurement Officer of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago under employment contract dated the 30th of August.

You know, that could not be under the UNC, we “doh” put up with that foolishness. Because, I mean, sometimes, even if something is legal, which this is not, sometimes it is a matter of principle. He is regulating himself, and this is what they are here talking about the OPR as if it is G-O-D. They are without sin. You understand?

So they are saying he was under contract with the Port Authority from the 30th of August, 2023, for a period of two years, commencing on the 4th of September, 2023, and ending on the 3rd of September, 2025. Now, his job description is here. For the avoidance of doubt in terms of what this goodly gentleman was at the Port Authority and why would I bring this into this House today.

Job title: Chief Procurement Officer.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

He is supervised by the General Manager. The job summary:

The Chief Procurement Officer leads and directs the procurement function in keeping with the vision and strategic priorities of the Port Authority. He/she must analyze, categorize, and account for goods and services procured according to risk and spend in a manner as prescribed by the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act.

So he supervises himself, you know. [*Laughter*]

The CPO is accountable to the General Manager for the management of the procurement function and to the Office of Procurement Regulation for compliance of the management of the procurement function with the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just as this gentleman's term was about to expire, he sent a letter to the Minister of Finance. I did not ask the Minister of Finance about this because I know "he eh answer", because this man's name is no longer gazetted. So I know he is gone.

He wrote to this Minister now, Minister of Finance, a real Minister of Finance—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—on the 18th of August, 2025:

Dear Minister Tancoo,

Approval to trade with government.

Dr. Moonilal: What? Trade?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: "Whe dey does get these people from?"

Hon. J. John: “Dem is PNM people.” Their fleece is white as snow. They are here
wasting time today.

The matter at caption refers. As you are aware, the Procurement Regulation Office is governed by a Board.

Of course:

I, Herdis Lee Chee, have been appointed to serve as a member—

So he actually knows:

—with qualification and experience on—whatever, whatever—pursuant to—

He called the section:

It is to be noted—

So he is saying this with a sound mind:

It is to be noted, simultaneously employed by the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, as the Chief Procurement Officer.

So he talks about section 12 of the Act, provides that the President may remove a member from office upon being satisfied. So I hope the President is hearing this, you know, because in case he is there, you know, he needs to be removed. Right?

The member has traded with government without prior approval of the Minister.

So he hear this one from Fyzabad, he from the country so he could fool him.

[*Laughter*]

Furthermore, section 12(2) provides that:

“For the purposes of this section, a member trades with the Government if, while holding office, he becomes a party to, or is a partner in a firm or a director...”—et cetera, et cetera.

So he quoted. So he said:

It is in these circumstances that approval is sought for the hon. Minister to continue to trade with the Government, whilst this meaning is espoused above by the Act.

Oh, the approval is sought, sorry, from the hon. Minister. I do not think the Minister answered. But it gets “curiouser” and “curiouser”.

Mr. Speaker, on August 20, 2025, a letter—well, this letterhead is purported to be the OPR’s letterhead, and it is addressed to Marcia Charles-Elbourne, Chief Executive Officer of the Port Authority:

Dear Mrs. Elbourne—

I will just do—but I just want you to get the gist of it:

Regarding Mr. Herdis Lee Chee, member of the Board of the Office of Procurement Regulator, the Procurement Board. As you are aware, Mr. Lee Chee is a member of the Procurement Board and is therefore deemed a person in public life, and subject to integrity—so and so.

So 29(1), for the purpose of the Act, a conflict of interest is deemed to arise if a person in public life, or any person exercising a public function, were to make or participate in the making of a decision in the execution of his office, and at the same time knows, or ought reasonably to have known, that in the making of the decision, there is an opportunity to either directly or indirectly further his private interests—and so on and so on.

They went on to say:

Moreover, section 17 of the—

They quoted the Act:

“A member of the Board or a committee who has the direct or indirect interest...”—and so on.

And then all of the wonderful things. So the author said:

The general principle is that a Director or an officer of a company who is party to a contract has a fiduciary duty and legal obligation to divulge same, and recuse himself from the decision-making process.

So what this author is saying is, you could have a conflict as long as you recuse yourself. Just tell people, you know, tell them that you are doing wrong and that you will be absolved. You understand? That makes it better. You understand?

That and Buckley's. So:

The general principle is that a Director or an officer of a company who is a party to a contract has a fiduciary duty and legal obligation to divulge same and recuse himself from the decision-making process. It shall therefore be incumbent upon Mr. Lee Chee, and, by extension, the OPR, and/or the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, as the case may be, to manage any conflict that may arise, and to determine the necessary action on a case-by-case basis.

So every time he sits down at the OPR, he says, “I have a conflict.” Then he goes to the Port Authority, he says, “I have a conflict.” You understand? He is a busy man. You understand?

In this vein, consideration must be given to the nature and scope of the conflict of interest, i.e., whether real, apparent, or potential.

They said:

The OPR is cognizant—

With your leave, please, Mr. Speaker, I just want to read this into the *Hansard*:

The OPR is cognizant that Mr. Lee Chee's role at the Port Authority, and considerably by a letter dated August 18, 2025, Mr. Lee Chee took further steps in accordance with—their business there—the Act to inform Minister—

So, you see, they are bringing in the thing:

—of a simultaneous employment with the Port Authority.

They have not said whether you answered, you know, they told you.

On a final note, as a procuring entity it is prudent to also underscore the provision of section 59(6) of the procurement business, which states, 59(6):

“A member of staff of a procuring entity or a person with direct influence on the decisions of a procuring entity shall declare any interest that he may have in any tender and shall, so far as possible, recuse himself from the proceedings.”

Accordingly, we emphasize the importance of a robust internal control mechanism—

So they are telling the Port Authority, “suit up yourself, watch your business, mind your business”:

—and/or safeguard through internal policy, and/or otherwise to ensure full compliance with the aforementioned legal provision. We trust that you will be guided accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

And it is signed, but a name is typed:

Beverly Khan,

Chairman, Procurement Regulator.

Alright? So we should not be only exempting—

Mr. Hosein: “So dem recusing too?”

Hon. J. John: Well, we should be exempting the procurement—if this letter is really under the hands of the current Procurement Regulator, I think this person has questions to answer. This is what they are defending. You see, but you do not know what you do not know, that is the point. You understand, right?

That is what is going on in that OPR. So not only this lady is, well, the professional, the wonderful Regulator, knows that this guy is—well, I mean, must be breaking the law. There is obvious conflict, and she is saying, “Have your safeguard, watch yourself. Know what alyuh doing over there”, and so on, and that is what they want us to continue to have the lives of our citizens in.

Dr. Moonilal: “He playing like he is de referee?”

7.05 p.m.

And the captain knows, with the full knowledge of the captain.

So, Mr. Speaker, which brings me to some of what they have been talking about. Now, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West used his baseline as 2010, you know, they “does” alter the facts and so on. But really and truly, that could not be. These folks would have had something they—what you call it—the public-private partnerships at the HDC at the time from 2000/2004 and so. They called it the joint venture. They did not call it PPP; they called it the joint venture. And basically, this joint venture, the premise on which it started was, you bring land, you bring financing, you bring human resources, and you bring project management skills. That is what they had in their board minutes when I saw it at the time. And they then rolled out hundreds of—well, multiple projects which

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

would have produced hundreds of houses.

I remember when I did this particular document—and if you would allow me to hold it up. The first name on this document, and it was not deliberate, you know, this is a document dating back to 2015, you know. *[Laughter]* But as I said, you just find these things on your computer, right. So, you had what was HDC project variation.

Hon. Member: Variation?

Hon. J. John: Variation. What they would do, is—when I showed up at the compound, when we reached the compound, you what happened? The whole construction sector had collapsed.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. John: So, these fellas there are asking to say something; I want him to talk about that. And when you got into HDC, you could not pay somebody one cent; you could not pay \$1. You know why you could not pay \$1? Well they did not have the dollar, eh, right, because the bank account was empty but it is okay. It is HDC, you know, you could have scraped up something even if you were— But you know what happened? All of these contracts, you could not pay anything because they would have expired the contract sum and then they would have now paid, on a variation that was not approved. That was what was going on there. We are talking about procurement, right. They had paid on variations that had not been approved.

Now, the first name I saw on this list I had here ,and I said it was not deliberate, is one Vidara Enterprises Ltd.

Mr. Hosein: What?

Hon. J. John: Vidara.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

Hon. J. John: You would not know that. “You now reach.”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: They too young. “Dem was in short pants you know. They doh know that. ”

Hon. J. John: They “doh” know. You now reach. That was the young man who died in a chair with the open [*Inaudible*] One Franklin Khan, him and his wife, you understand, the deceased. Because that is how they conduct their business, you know. Tthey talk that lot of nonsense, but it is not so in principle. I have not known one UNC person working in any institution with any relative, inside of there so blatant.

Mr. Manning: Please.

Hon. J. John: No, I do not. Listen, I do not, okay. I am just telling you. I am saying if I know you have a relative that came into, I will tell you no, we cannot do that, you understand. But if you know, say so. That is the point. It is a democracy, you can say so. You go and tell it on the mountains and I will show this. These are facts, these are stubborn things. This is not conjecture and the “wooo” and “wuh” and the rumours you all spread all over the place with no facts, no facts.

Hon. Member: We have paper.

Hon. J. John: We have paper trails.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: That is what we have, all right. And when he spoke, what did they do? I spent the first two years of my tenure at HDC going to the board—two and a half years going to the board. First, you go to say this was the contract sum, this is the unapproved variation, so you go first to ratify the thing.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member—

Hon. J. John: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Fifteen minutes.

Hon. J. John: What—but no man.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: You are into your 15 minutes.

Hon. J. John: Right, I have it.

Mr. Hosein: That is a PNM clock.

Hon. J. John: Yeah, a PNM clock. So, they are saying—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Yeah, yeah, please, thank you. Thank you. So, they are saying now we have to go ratify their unapproved variation. You know how much that was?

Mr. Hosein: How much?

Hon. J. John: That was \$1.9 billion.

Hon. Member: Wow. Variation?

Hon. J. John: Variation. Because what was happening, they will just say go there and do that, go and do that. Whatever, you know, go and do that and then they would just expand the scope.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: Yeah, \$1.9 billion. I am coming to that, right, in an unapproved variation. So when you got that out of the way, the ratification, now you have to say what is the scope to completion and get that approved and only then you could start to pay again on the contracts. Right.

So which brings me to, when they talk about this OPR and whatever this

lovely law is, what was happening then, now, they like this PPP thing, you know. Now, what happened then is that somewhere around 2008 or thereabout, the then hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Manning, in this same House on Friday, November 14, 2008, he said:

“Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members—

Because all of these things that were supposed to be joint ventures, none were joint ventures. None was a joint venture.

Mr. Manning: What date?

Hon. J. John: Friday, 14, 2008. Yeah this is the *Hansard*.

Hon. Member: How old you was? Two?

Hon. J. John: “Doh waste my time. Listen.” So, all that they bought as joint venture, none was joint venture. Only one came that at least they had the land. Everybody came and they just did them and they were paying normal, right. “They didn’t bring land, they eh bring financing, they mus be hire a few project managers, but nothing else.” So that was just a scheme to get in the thing. The one that bought the land was a project called Cleaver Heights.

Hon. Member: Cleaver.

Hon. J. John: Cleaver Heights, they bought the land, but they were doing the same thing, meaning they were not—unlike Landmark when the contractor took the risk and borrowed his money—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—borrowed his money, they not are not borrowing any money. The Government was paying into HDC just as normal. So, Cleaver Heights they were doing it. So here is the hon. Prime Minister, and really and truly, it might have benefited these young honourable folks if they had worked with this Prime

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

Minister. Now, it did not help this fella here, but it might help you.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John: Right. So here is what it says:

“Mr. Speaker, hon. Members would recall that during the budget debate...I drew the attention of this honourable House to the Cleaver Heights Development Project...”

Give “meh my time eh.”

“...a housing project with the Housing Development Corporation (HDC). Essentially, the facts are that NH International approached HDC...”

And he laid—out the hon. Prime Minister in House, laid out the nature of the project, he talked about the project and so on. And he said—he talked about the price of the project. He said:

“You would also recall that I had pointed to the hon. Members that this matter came to my attention only this very morning, and try as we might, we could find no explanation.”

This is a Prime Minister, you know. This is a PNM Prime Minister saying that about

PNM projects, eh. Right. He said:

“Try as we might, we could find no explanation for the discrepancy of \$10 million. In those circumstances, I thought that the Member for Diego Martin West...”—

Not this one, not you my dear, not you, not you—

“...who was the Minister of Housing at the time, might be in a position to”—assist— and therefore, I asked him, ‘Where de money gone.’”

Hon. Members: “Where de money gone?”

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Where, the money went? He said, give us an explanation. Right and of course, the Member on to say whatever. And then Mr. Manning said:

“Mr. Speaker, I draw the attention of the hon. Members to a letter dated...”

And he spoke about this. He said:

“The following listing of Joint Venture Contracts”

So, he spoke about joint venture contracts and so on and so on. My time is so short. So anyway, he went on to say at the end of it he said:

“The project is a source of great concern to the Prime Minister. As of now, there has been no proper explanation for the discrepancy of \$10 million; in fact, the \$10 million figure has gone to \$20 million”—

Hon. Members: What”

Hon. J. John:

“—and the project is only 75 per cent complete. Therefore, God alone knows where it will all end; plus we have this issue now with the force main...”

And he went on and he said:

“I do not wish to get involved in the toing and froing taking place on this matter, but as a result of all these concerns, the Prime Minister has today directed the Attorney General to refer this project to the Commission of Enquiry into the Construction...”

That is what he said.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: He commissioned an investigation into his own Government and the [*Inaudible*]. So “doh” not come here today and talk down to us, no, no, no.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

Listen, this is what happened and this is where you had that Commission of Enquiry, right, where Mr. Uff had to come from London to tell HDC, you need to get tender rules, right. Of the 91 recommendations, 13 were for HDC and I think about nine for UDeCOTT. The Ministry of Housing, and the Housing Development Corporation under the UNC completed every one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Every single one of those. Because they were there, they were not doing anything, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Completed every single one. So, Mr. Speaker, that is where this whole OPR, the idea of having a more robust legislation, well that is where it emerged and then it stayed there, doing nothing. Well Mr. Manning lost the election, I do not know if he would have done anything. But in 2014 or thereabout is when I think the first—

Mr. Young SC: January 2014.

Hon. J. John: There you have it, thank you so much. But listen to me, the Uff Commission of Enquiry was established in Trinidad and Tobago to investigate public sector procurement practices. Not the UNC, right. Large-scale construction projects and specific concerns surrounding the Urban Development—UDeCOTT—and the Housing Development Corporation. So when you all are there talking like Pontius Pilate, know from whence we came, all right. “Doh” come and just come and talk nonsense. These things in *Hansard*. You go and see your party. Your party did not start yesterday. They started many years ago and we are in hole today because of—

Mr. Hosein: Seventy years of corruption.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Seventy; we are in this hole because of the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Right. So, he talked about the construction boom. We are talking about why they had the Uff Commission; rapid large-scale spending and a massive boom in local construction raised public concern about how contracts were awarded, that was not the UNC. Allegations of irregularities, intense public pressure, and queries called for a transparent probe into the operations, award of contracts, and leadership. Broader mandate, the Government responded by appointing the Commission led by British construction expert Prof. John Uff to examine public procurement transparency and project performance across the board.

So, hon. Speaker, these things did not happen, we did not get here by guess. But, you know, that was not enough, you know. When the hon. former, former, showed up again, he said in some address to the nation in December 2015. Well, that time he was newly minted, you know, that time he used to still address the nation, he stopped after one year. Good. [*Inaudible*] He said we intend to :

“...ramp up housing construction as a major driver of the economy”—but—
“there would be a comprehensive overhaul of the funding arrangements of the... programme”—there will be—“new initiatives...”—which will—
“...encourage private capital”

What is it he was talking about? Public-private partnerships, right. And that is “allyuh guru, you know allyuh sage” and he if say so and if he say so it is true, right. Which:

“...will encourage private capital, to accelerate construction on private or state land, for a pre-arranged price units”

—which upon completion the State, through the HDC, will receive and direct these units et cetera, et cetera.

Today, they are doing as if “PPP” is a dirty word. When it is they were doing this thing with one NH Construction that was all right, you understand, because here what they did, they gave the land and they put in on a special purpose vehicle, right. By Cabinet Minute No. 2208, they told UDeCOTT, “Go and negotiate”. The price was not to exceed \$249,468,000. But you know, with interest this project is almost \$500 million. It is now \$471,307,920; that is kind of ballooning interest. Basically, if you missed a payment with this company, they threaten you, they send you a pre-action protocol letter and tell you that they are going to send “bailiff to chain up de place you know”. That is what they have done with their public-private partnership. It is not our fault that contractors have faith in this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: It is not our fault. It is your fault that they have no faith in you. So, nobody would put their money at risk. So, whether it is this Allamby, LandmarkTT, whatever, or what happened down at HDC, can you imagine contractors willing, businessmen willing to put \$3.4 billion at risk?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: That is their risk. That is not the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the kind of nonsense you all are talking about “oh there is corruption.” “Where the money pass?” They had no money. They had to build it with their own money. They had to sell it and then, you had whatever the arrangement is that

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

they get some portion of the thing. They have been doing from time—you know, or trying to do it, but it never worked.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I have a minute again. So, we know the country needs accountability and delivery, a system that protects public money, a system that explains our decisions, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago have had many decades of excuses and so and so. So I urge all Members to think about every citizen, particularly that small man who will benefit; he has been shut out.

We have had, I have been looking at some kind of collapsed culvert performance and “cyah” do anything about it. We come up with some to get some pipes from Heritage; you know what they ask them? “Where the procurement for the truck? The truck that go bring the free pipe. Dey wa de procurement.” I almost died on Monday, you know. This time people in Las Lomas had to go 30 minutes around and fed up, four months now, they cannot get anything. “Overpass could collapse on people.” Why? “Because yuh procuring and six months and six months and six months.” It is an unending cycle of procurement that does not bring any result.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We say today support Bill in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance.

**The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning,
Development and Economic**

Affairs (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo): Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: You should. Mr. Speaker, it is now 7.21 p.m.; we have been at this since 10.30 a.m. I think that this has been a very interesting and revealing debate. Mr. Speaker, it has definitely been exciting. I want to, at the outset, thank the contributions and acknowledge the contributions, the sterling, brilliant contributions from the Members on this side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: The hon. Minister of Energy; the hon. Minister of Land and Legal Affairs, the hon. Minister of Housing, the Minister of Public Utilities, and the Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, it is usual in these debates to respond to things that were said by the Members opposite. I think I can summarize that, Mr. Speaker. There is a saying by Shakespeare:

“Suspicion always haunts the”—dirty mind—“guilty mind”

Mr. Speaker, having listened to Members opposite pontificate as if they were Pontious Pilate, somebody used that phrase before, Pontious Pilate, lecturing people on this side about the risks that are possible based on the legislation that we have, it is clear that they have been assessing and judging this Government by their own standards. That is very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because their standards are the lowest of the low. That is why they could not carry this country forward. As a matter of fact, what they did during their time in office, is carry the country backwards and backwards and backwards, Mr. Speaker.

Every institution in this country has suffered as a result of those Members

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

opposite. So, to have them come here and pontificate, Mr. Speaker, about what is right and how we should proceed, Mr. Speaker, is nothing short of hypocrisy on their side. Mr. Speaker, I am reminded, based on a quotation my colleague just raised about another quotation. Mr. Speaker, listening to those Members opposite, I see hate.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Hon. D. Tancoo: I see bitterness, I see acrimony—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: I see animosity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, and I see a party completely out of control.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Leaderless and lost, Mr. Speaker. Leaderless and lost. But that is not the worst part; fortunately, the country has a great Government on this side.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Fortunately. Fortunately, the country has stable leadership on this side, we know who our leader is. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is not that. The problem is we have an Opposition who clearly does not want to see this country get better. They spent 10 years of their lives bringing this country down and they hope to spend the next few years, the next decade of their lives in Opposition undermining the progress of this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, I say not a tale of that. To quote my friend here, and I want to reference it to the *Hansard* because I love that phrase, Mr. Speaker I want to tell each and every one of them on that side, “check yourself before yuh

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

wreck yuhself.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

7.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they do not want to see this country grow. They do not want us to create jobs for people. They do not want us to create an environment where investment will come to Trinidad and to flourish. Mr. Speaker, they do not want citizens to get housing. They do not want citizens to have adequate water supply, especially in times of emergency. They do not want this country to develop, Mr. Speaker. They do not want a better Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Hate, spite, and animosity—Mr. Speaker, this Government inherited PNM’s wreckage on at least two fronts. A population starved of services for a decade and a procurement system that had to be reformed. The PNM would have you believe that you must choose between delivering for people and doing things properly because that was the choice that they wanted, Mr. Speaker. We will do both. We will deliver effectively and efficiently, and we will deliver doing it in the right way, Mr. Speaker. You see, I am not bothered by the rabble that we heard on the opposite side. I heard the Member for Arouca/Lopinot suggest that we on this side were not convinced, and we were not fully engaged. We somehow were distant and disappointed. Mr. Speaker, I am piloting this legislation here today because I believe that what we are doing is the right thing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: I believe that this legislation would spark the construction sector, which is the greatest sector for the quick multiplier in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: This will generate jobs, Mr. Speaker. We need jobs; I started with that. How can you not support that? How can you? What do you have against putting income in people's hands? What do you have against that? And Mr. Speaker, two Members opposite mentioned the SOE, the Special Operations Bill, Mr. Speaker. It is being debated on the opposite side, Mr. Speaker. That same hate and animosity, Mr. Speaker, that they do not want—that same issue with the Special Operations that they do not want in their areas, Mr. Speaker, that is the same malintent that they have for their own membership, and for their own constituents, Mr. Speaker.

Today, they came here not to speak from their constituents' point of view because every constituent wants improvement in Trinidad and Tobago. I believe all right-thinking citizens want to see this country grow and develop. What that means is, if you are to marry what I just said—if all right-thinking citizens want to see this country improve and get better—and I have just said that they do not want to, Mr. Speaker, then clearly they are not right-thinking citizens. The Members on the opposite side are the most unpatriotic bunch of citizens that this country has—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo:—and it is time to call them all for what they are, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, 48(6), please, point of order. Is the Member allowed to call the entire Opposition unpatriotic?

Mr. Speaker: Minister, rephrase that somewhat.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I own this. I own this. It is my view that the Members opposite—those Members sitting there—are the most unpatriotic citizens in this country. I

own it. Do you have anything else you want to say?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: I am not casting aspersions, but if it falls in your garden, partner, water it—water it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot more I want to say—a lot more. There are some of those Members on that side who jumped up and proclaimed the importance and the effectiveness and efficiency of the procurement regulations that exist now. Mr. Speaker, one of the Members opposite quoted the OPR annual report to Parliament for fiscal year 2023/2024, but left out—that was the Member for—where is that?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Nah, nah, nah, I want to make sure I ascribe the blame where it is supposed to be. Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Yet you did not touch on it.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*—doing your job for you.

Hon. D. Tancoo: The Member spoke about some comments that we had made on this side, completely missing the entire point. He tried to portray the Office of the Procurement Regulator as working effectively under the PNM. Mr. Speaker, for 2023/2024, let me tell you what the Office of the Procurement Regulator found—because the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke about going to open tendering, open tendering, open tendering, as if they were doing that. But let me tell you all what they were doing, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell the national population. I have here a copy of part of the report—because I think the Member for Oropouche East highlighted a—it is a very voluminous document, so I only

have a couple of pages here. And I want to quote from page 138 of this report. The table is captioned:

Total procurement methods utilized for all awards—all awards mean contract awards, purchase orders, and micro procurement awards.

And this is what it says:

Procurement method. Open bidding/tendering, \$1.2 billion—that is 7.5 per cent of the projects awarded.

That is 7.5 per cent.

Selective bidding/tendering, \$3.4 billion.

That is 21.4 per cent.

Single source, 7.4 per cent. Sole source, 3.5 per cent. Direct contracting, \$329.7 million. Other, nil, \$159 million.

Mr. Speaker, of all of the contracts awarded in this one year—of all of them—92.5 per cent were done under the PNM without open tendering. But that is not all. This same report highlights that TT \$5 billion in this one fiscal year—\$5 billion—was awarded under the PNM without proper procurement measures being put in place, Mr. Speaker. So when they come here and they pontificate as if this was the solution and we are violating something somehow, Mr. Speaker, the facts are that only they knew how to beat the system because they were awarding contracts in total ignorance—in ignoring the procurement regulator to come here now and pretend that they were somehow defending procurement regulations. Mr. Speaker, that is hypocritical, but that is not characteristic of those Members on the opposite side.

Mr. Speaker, the Members also spoke about there being no safeguards. Well, that is completely untrue. And if they were paying attention to comments

that were made on this side, clearly there is—including there was some concern being raised about the fact that we are now giving the accounting officers in Ministries more money to spend without having to recourse to the requirements of the procurement regulator. They were trying to create the perception that somehow the likelihood is that those officers will abuse the process. I find this very disingenuous, but I hope the members of the public service are paying attention to the aspersions being cast by those Members opposite. I hope permanent secretaries are paying attention.

Because, just for reference, Mr. Speaker—just for reference—in addition to all of that—in addition to all the existing opportunities for safeguarding the procedures for ensuring that there is value for money, there are substantial procedures in the existing legislation, Mr. Speaker. Not just the procurement regulations, and not just the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, but there is also the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker. But I will recall too that—in fact, I will hold this for another day.

I will just mention that maybe that is why they spent so much money, \$1.6 million trying—was it million? Yeah, \$1.68 million pursuing a legal matter against the Auditor General; somebody who was just trying to do her job, Mr. Speaker. So they sabotage the OPR, and they sabotage the Auditor General. Mr. Speaker, do you know why? I can only come to one conclusion, you know. They wanted a free hand in doing business. That is what they wanted. They wanted a free hand in doing business. But Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up, I want to emphasize that there is now a different sheriff in town.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. D. Tancoo: The hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar is not the former, or the

Public Procurement and Disposal
of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026
Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

former, former, or the former, former, former.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. D. Tancoo: This is a different sheriff, Mr. Speaker, and she has mandated that this Government be run effectively, efficiently, transparently, and with full access to accountability, Mr. Speaker. And that is what we will do on this side. Mr. Speaker, the legislation creates jobs, creates opportunities for investment, creates housing, creates services, stimulates micro, small and medium-sized businesses, and will ensure spin-off industries—Mr. Speaker. This is a major transformation that will come to the citizens of this country. I urge Members opposite to do the right thing and support the legislation. Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of amendments which have been circulated, which will endorse and support the original proposed amendments, Mr. Speaker. And I look forward to the support of Members opposite. I know that I have the support of the Members on this side, because on this side we do the right thing, whether they like it or not. Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Question proposed: That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, there is an amendment which was circulated. It is

self-explanatory. The word “arrangement” is put in after “means any” and the word “designing” is putting after “purpose of” in respect of public-private partnership and the definition there. I ask that the clause be amended as circulated.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7.

Question proposed: That clause 7 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Again, there is an amendment primarily to take into account the position of our colleagues in Tobago. So (3) and (5) speak to Tobago. The Commissioner of Police is putting at (4). The rest of the clause is—well, it follows from that. The other amendments follow from that. I ask that the clause be amended as circulated.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 8 to 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the House.

House resumed.

7.45 p.m.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2026, was considered in a committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agrees with the Committee’s report.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

Mr. Gonzales: Division.

The House divided:

Ayes 25

Noes 10

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Lee, Hon. D.

Hosein, Hon. S.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Alexander, Hon. R.

Maharaj, Hon. D.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Benjamin, Hon. M.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Ms. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. R.

Gosein, Dr. N.

Thomas, D.

Sampson, J.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

de Nobriga S.

Manning, B.

Marcelle, K.

Des Vignes, H.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

PROCEDURAL MOTION

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (*Hon. Barry Padarath*): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 15(5), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the completion of the business before it. But, Mr. Speaker, I also beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday 30th September at 10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The House will continue to sit until the conclusion of the business before it.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the question on the adjournment, I wish to invite Members—As we all know, we celebrate a historic milestone tomorrow, and it is our 50th anniversary of Republic Day. I wish to invite Members to make contributions.

GREETINGS

(Republic Day)

Mr. Speaker: I first call on Madam Deputy Speaker, Member for Princes Town.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Aiyana Ali (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fellow citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Ali: [*Laughter*] Fellow citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, it is a privilege to rise here in this historic Chamber to extend Republic Day greetings to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Tomorrow, we commemorate an extraordinary milestone, fifty years as a Republic. Fifty years ago on September 24, 1976, our nation took a definitive step in reshaping our own destiny. We severed the final administrative ties to the British Crown, replacing a monarch with a Republican Constitution written by and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. On that historical day, we declared that supreme authority rests not across the ocean but right here, here in the hearts, the hands and the minds of our own citizens.

UNREVISED

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Ali: Tomorrow, we mark our golden Jubilee as a Republic. We stand at a profound milestone. Half a century as a sovereign republic is more than a line in a history book. It is a testament to our resilience, ingenuity and spirit of the twin island nation we call home. When we ushered in the republicanism of 1976, we stepped into uncharted waters. Over the past five decades, our journey has been marked by remarkable achievements that far exceed our geographic size. We gave the world the steelpan, the only major acoustic musical instrument invented in the 20th Century, Along with Calypso, Soca and Chutney, establishing our culture as a global powerhouse.

We nurtured a vibrant democracy supported by an independent Judiciary, free press and a tradition of civic participation. Our motto, “Together we aspire, together we achieve”, has not merely been a slogan. It has been the thread holding our multicultural quilts together. We have shown the world that people of different races, faiths, and origins can share two small islands and build a peaceful society.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Ali: While we celebrate our past, true patriotism demands that we look squarely at our present challenges. Republicanism is not a static status. It is an ongoing responsibility that requires daily renewal. Fifty years have gone, generations have changed. Our society has changed, but the fundamental responsibility remains to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that responsibility continues. Since returning to Government, the Prime Minister and this administration have pursued priorities including national security, economic development, and the delivery of public services while undertaking the responsibility of governing a diverse nation.

Greetings (Republic Day)
Dr. A. Ali (cont'd)

2026.09.23

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Ali: As Prime Minister, she not only serves those who supported her or her Government, but every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, every community, every family, every person who calls this Republic of Trinidad and Tobago home. That principle of service to all our people is at the very heart of what it means to be a Republic.

As we look towards the next 50 years, our focus must turn to some vital imperatives. As the global energy landscape evolves, we must accelerate diversification into technology, renewable energy, creative industries and agriculture to build a resilient economy for future generations. A nation cannot thrive if its citizens do not feel safe. Securing our streets, supporting our youth, and revitalizing our justice system must remain top national priorities. We must continue modernizing public infrastructure, reducing bureaucracy, and ensuring transparency at every level of government.

A Republic does not belong to politicians, institutions or laws. It belongs to you, the people. To our youth, you are not just the future of Trinidad and Tobago. You are its present. Your creativity, tech-savviness and drive will decide where this nation stands in its centenary. To our elders, thank you for laying the groundwork and holding the fort through challenges, through decades. Let us carry forward the courage of 1976. Let us honour the red, white and black by striving for excellence in our schools, workplaces and communities.

Happy 50th Republic Day to every citizen at home and in the diaspora. May God continue to bless our nation with peace, progress and prosperity. Long live the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hans De Vignes (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I thank you. On behalf of the very patriotic Leader of the Opposition, and very patriotic Members of the Opposition, I rise to extend warm Republic Day Greetings to every citizen of our beautiful nation of Trinidad and Tobago. This is no ordinary Republic Day. This year our nation commemorates 50 years as a Republic, 50 years since the coming into force of our republican constitution in 1976, and the establishment of the Office of the President as our Head of State. Republicanism represented an important stage in the constitutional development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Yes, we achieved Independence in 1962, but in 1976, we took the further step in replacing the British monarch as Head of State with a President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Mr. Speaker, more than ever, this distinction is important. To be a Republic is to recognize that the sovereignty of our nation ultimately rests with us as a people, not an external source. Those entrusted with public office must exercise authority on behalf of the people and within limits established by our Constitution. Our President is our Head of State and Commander in Chief.

The presidency also has important constitutional responsibilities in relation to Parliament, including the summoning, prorogation, and dissolution of Parliament and assenting to Bills passed by both Houses. This year, therefore, we take time to commemorate 50 years of the presidency of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Remember with respect the service of all our Presidents, over those five decades: His Excellency Sir Ellis Clarke, our first President; His Excellency Noor Hassanali; His Excellency Arthur A.N.R. Robinson; His Excellency George Maxwell Richards; His Excellency Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona SC; Her Excellency Paula May Weekes O.R.T.T.; and our current Head of State, Her

Excellency Christine Carla Kangaloo O.R.T.T., President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Each has occupied the highest office of our Republic at a different moment in our national journey. Together, their service forms part of this history of an institution that has now endured about half a century.

Mr. Speaker, those of us who are privileged to sit in this Chamber must never lose sight of what that means. Parliament does not belong to the Government. It also does not belong to the Opposition. It belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is our responsibility to serve them. As we commemorate 50 years, this occasion should not only invite us to look back. It should also allow us to challenge and consider what kind of a Republic do we want Trinidad and Tobago to be for the next 50 years. A Republic where our institutions remain strong, where the Constitution is respected.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. De Vignes: Where those entrusted with public office understand that leadership is service. Where democracy remains vibrant. Where the rights and freedoms of every citizen are protected. Where we respect our history while creating opportunities for our youth. Where our cultural practitioners are valued and given what they are owed. And where every citizen, regardless of circumstance, can believe that they have a place in the future of Trinidad and Tobago. May God bless every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. We wish you a safe, peaceful and happy 50th Republic Day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I too should like to join in extending greetings to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on this important and historical milestone of our 50th anniversary of our own particular and peculiar brand of republicanism. It

is both an honour and a profound pleasure to commemorate this important milestone in the presence of esteemed women and men in this August Chamber.

Fifty years ago, our Republic was founded on principles that remain fundamental to the core notion of what we are as a country and as a people. The rule of law, peaceful and respectful democratic governance, equality, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, and most importantly, respect for the dignity of every citizen. This golden Jubilee is more than an anniversary. It is a time to reflect on our journey. It is a time to honour those who built our nation. It is a time to recognize the challenges we have overcome, whilst at the same time, considering the responsibilities that come with freedoms, and the obligations to the institutions entrusted to us, which we hold in sacred trust for the future generations of this country. We must also recognize and pay homage to what the people of Trinidad and Tobago have built. We have built a nation whose voice and image are heard and seen far beyond these shores and around the world.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: We became a member of the United Nations in 1962 and helped establish CARICOM in 1973. We built an economy that became an important part of the industrial development of the Caribbean, powered in a significant measure by our natural resources. But by far, our greatest contribution to the development of the Caribbean as a zone is the immense human resources and capital which we have contributed, which we continue to produce in prodigious numbers in this country.

But our achievements cannot only be measured by an educated workforce, barrels, tonnes, dollars or exports. Our power achievements can also be heard from the creativity of our people in the steelpan, our national instrument, a lasting contribution to world music. Our culture has travelled with us. We have sworn

two different genres of music which have now become world famous: Calypso—well, three, I might add—Calypso, Soca and Chutney are all world-famous genres of music. And many of our traditions have carried the creativity of Trinidad and Tobago across the world. Our writers, our artists, our nobel laureates, our musicians, our athletes, and our scholars have shown that a small nation can make a significant contribution to the world. These achievements tell us something important: the story of Trinidad and Tobago is not simply a story of what we inherited.

8.05 p.m.

It is a story of what we have collectively created. It is a story of institutions established. It is a story of institutions developed, cultures preserved, communities strengthened, and generations of citizens who have contributed to the advancement and the glory of this small but great country.

Yet, a Republic cannot live on its achievements alone. It requires citizens who participate, remain informed, question responsibly, respect the rule of law, and recognize that rights carry responsibilities and obligations. Our diversity has always been one of our defining characteristics and has allowed us to carry different cultures, faiths, traditions, and experiences in a respectful and, most importantly, peaceful manner.

As we look across the world, we must ensure that our task is to ensure that our differences never become barriers to the commonality of our purpose. Fifty years of republicanism reminds us that nation-building is a never-ending task. Each generation inherits institutions from those before it. Each generation has a responsibility to strengthen them, improve them, and pass them on. The achievement of the Republic is therefore not simply that Trinidad and Tobago changed its Head of State in 1976. It is that over five decades, generations of

citizens have continued to build a State that defines itself, governs itself, and contributes not only to the Caribbean, but to the world at large. That work must continue.

As we celebrate 50 years as a Republic, let us today renew our commitment to the principles upon which it was founded. Let us strengthen our democratic institutions. Let us encourage civic participation. Let us protect the freedoms that allow all citizens to question, debate, and contribute. Let us preserve the cultural and natural heritage that makes Trinidad and Tobago unique. And, let us continue to develop our human capital. May we continue to build together a Republic worthy of those who came before us and of those yet to come.

On behalf of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and on behalf of my family and myself, I wish all of you a happy Republic Day. May our manifestations of God, in whatever way we perceive our God to be, continue to bless the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, its people, and its institutions. As I end, I crave your indulgence to invoke the words of Sir Rabindranath Tagore:

“Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, just a point of clarification. I know we have had a long day and my colleague opposite—I just want to draw his attention and the Members of the House that in accordance with Standing Order 33(5), that the fourth Friday of each month shall be Private Members’ Day and Government Business shall have precedence on every day except Private Members’ Day. So, I realize my colleague is proposing to have a Sitting on next Wednesday. I am just seeking clarification whether or not we are going to have Private Members’ Day on

that day. If we did not get an opportunity to have it before.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the House.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you kindly. Hon. Speaker, the intention is to speak with my colleague across the Floor to ensure that the Opposition gets their Private Members' Day to which they are entitled to. However, on Friday of this week, we will not be sitting.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: So I propose—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Can I get those in favour as to the adjournment of the House to Wednesday, 30th September, 2026?

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.10 p.m.