

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 30, 2026.

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS



[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Dr. Lackram Bodoë, Member for Oropouche West; Mr. Stuart Young SC, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and Mr. Brian Manning, Member for San Fernando East, who have requested leave of absence from today's Sitting of the House. Additionally, the hon. Devesh Maharaj, Member for Aranguez/St. Joseph, has requested leave from Sittings of the House for the period September 30 to October 02. The leave which the Members seek is hereby granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Notification of Her Excellency, the President in respect of the nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin, Deputy Commissioner of Police for appointment to act in the Office of Commissioner of Police. [*The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander)*]
2. Notification of Her Excellency, the President in respect of the nomination of Mr. Anand Ramesar, Assistant Commissioner of Police for appointment to act in the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*Hon. R. Alexander*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for the year ended September 30, 2024. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo)*]

UNREVISED

Paper 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

4. Consolidated Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL) for the year ended December 31, 2017. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
5. Consolidated Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL) for the year ended December 31, 2018. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
6. Consolidated Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL) for the year ended December 31, 2019. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]

Papers 4 to 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the House.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you, most kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Government wishes to advise that we are in a position to answer questions 1, 10 and 11 on the Order Paper. With respect to Written Questions, there were two, one has already been provided to the Parliament and before the end of the Sitting, the other will be provided from the Ministry of Homeland Security.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

TTPS Mobile Units (Details of)

2. **Mr. Marvin Gonzales** (*Arouca/Lopinot*) asked the hon. Minister of Homeland Security:

Can the Minister state the following:

- a) which State agency was used by the TTPS for the procurement of mobile units for the TTPS;
- b) did the Cabinet grant approval for that State agency to be used;
- c) what procurement process was used for the purchase of the police mobile units;

- d) what is the total contract cost for the purchase of the units;
- e) name of the contractor that supplied the Police mobile units?
- f) did the state agency follow procurement requirements for the publication of the contract; and
- g) award and standstill period prior to the award and execution of the contract?

Young Athletes Withdrawal from Pan American Games

(Details of)

8. Mr. Hans Des Vignes (*Diego Martin West*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

- a) In light of recent reports that a group of dedicated young national athletes including Kylee Young, Shameka Hoyte, Kafele Desormeaux, Christian Nelson, and Zion Lucas were forced to withdraw from the Pan American Games in Mexico due to the non-approval of critical funding, could the Minister advise: the specific reasons why the funding applications for these athletes were denied or not processed in time to meet the respective competition deadlines;
- b) what immediate steps are being taken to reform the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme or the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago (SPORTT) grants process to ensure that athletes who have met all international qualifying standards are not denied representation due to internal funding delays; and
- c) whether the Ministry will provide a formal apology and a commitment of future developmental support to these athletes to compensate for the significant psychological and professional setback caused by this oversight?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

TTPS Acquisition of Electric Vehicles

(Details of)

1. **Mr. Marvin Gonzales** (*Arouca/Lopinot*) asked the hon. Homeland Security: In relation to the recent acquisition of fifty-one (51) electric vehicles by the TTPS, can the Minister indicate:

- a) the name of the company that was contracted by the TTPS for the purchase of the vehicles; and
- b) the procurement process used by the TTPS, whether sole select, selective or open tender process?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the question and at this time, I am constrained in answering this question as it relates to section 27(1)(g) of the Standing Orders.

Mr. Speaker: For the purposes of clarification, the question is split into two, I take it, hon. Minister, that the invocation of the 27(1)(g), public interest immunity, applies to both?

Hon. R. Alexander: That is right, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: I am not so sure the Standing Orders provide for clarification. The Standing Orders provide for a supplementary question.

Mr. Gonzales: Supplementary.

Mr. Speaker: I think we have been down this road already, there can be no supplemental to an invocation of the public interest immunity exception. I do not think that I need to explain the breadth, extent, width and purport, and reasoning behind the 27(1)(g). And so that we demystify what that is, it is the public interest exception which appears littered throughout these Standing Orders. So in the circumstances, there can be no supplemental in so far as that answer is concerned.

Mr. Gonzales: Can I seek your guidance?

Mr. Speaker: You can seek my guidance. But as I said the Standing Orders do not provide for clarification, it provides for question. But you are free to make an enquiry once you do so within reasonable boundaries.

Mr. Gonzales: Of course, Mr. Speaker, you know, I always attempt and always try to do things within reasonable boundaries, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: I do not think you really want me to answer that.

Mr. Gonzales: No, no. Of course, not. Mr. Speaker, this matter has been on the Order Paper, this question, and the Government has requested time to be able to respond to the question. It is quite shocking that after being given time, the Government is now invoking—

Mr. Speaker: What was the clarification—

Mr. Gonzales: After being given time—

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. The clarification and the only clarification you could seek from me with regard to the invocation of the public interest exception, I said and I have been at pains to point out before, is the nature and extent of it, okay. If you choose to make a speech as to the appropriateness of the invocation of the public interest exception, I think you are in the wrong forum to do so and I say so quite respectfully, okay.

There are other avenues for you to do so. It is not for me to articulate those avenues, but you are a lawyer of many years' experience, you know that there are other avenues for you to do so, okay? Including statutory avenues, which provide and I am saying this for the benefit of members of the public viewing, I am not saying this for the benefit of legislators, the avenue open to you is a statutory avenue in which, where that public interest immunity exception is invoked, a judge has a wider discretion than these Standing Orders allow me to. So I want to say it again, for the benefit of the members of the public looking, I am not invested with the jurisdiction to question the invocation of that, so there is no clarification on that, so do not make a speech with it. Let us move to question No. 10, clerk? Question No. 10, Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Police Shooting Death of Shivenath Jogie

(Details of)

10 Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot*) asked the hon. Homeland Security: Relative to the police shooting death of Shivenath Jogie at Old Train Line, Corinth, can the Minister indicate whether the police officer involved in the shooting was equipped with:

- a) body cameras;
- b) tasers;
- c) pepper spray; and/or
- d) batons?

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, I once again thank the Member for Lopinot/Arouca—

Hon. Members: Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. R. Alexander: Same thing.

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. R. Alexander: —alright—for the question. According to the information provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the responding officers were dispatched in response to a wounding incident following information conveyed by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Command Centre. The officers were not equipped with body cams, tasers, pepper spray, or batons. Upon arrival at the premises, the officers came under attack and responded in accordance with the use of force policy. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot, supplemental.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, supplemental question to the Minister of Homeland Security. Minister, having regard to your answer, can you indicate to the national population whether police officers engaged in operations do have resources such as body cams, tasers, pepper spray and batons to engage in these types of operational activities?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, my response would be, the operational units work with what they have.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: And also, I hope that the Member for Arouca/Lopinot would know that there are times when you respond to certain reports, it is an immediate response. Depending on what you are doing, you cannot stay and prepare all these things, but you are trying to save lives, so you are out in a minute, and as a result of that, that is what happened on that particular day when the report came from the police Command Centre. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Question No. 11, Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

**Police Shooting of Home Invasion Suspects
(Details of)**

11 Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot*) asked the hon. Homeland Security: With respect to the police shootings of home invasion suspects in Central Trinidad, can the Minister state whether Police Officers involved in the shooting were equipped with:

- a) body cameras;
- b) tasers;
- c) pepper spray; and/or
- d) batons?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question, I have responded by saying that the officers did, in fact, have, according to information from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in relation to the incident which occurred on the 2nd of May 2026—“is dat one”?

Mr. Gonzales: Question No. 11.

Hon. R. Alexander: “Youdoes ask meh so much question, ah does get lost.” Yeah. All right. Yes, Mr. Speaker, two police officers, according to the information from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, two police officers were dispatched and from the Criminal Investigation Department, of the CID Task Force and they were equipped with body cams. One police officer attached to the Central Division Task Force was equipped with a taser; no police officers were equipped

with pepper spray; all police officers were equipped with batons. Mr. Speaker, that is the information from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, supplemental question to the Minister of Homeland Security. Minister, in response or just to follow up on, your response, can you clarify whether all of the officers, as indicated in the question, were wearing body cameras, had tasers, pepper spray and/or batons when that exercise was conducted that resulted in the shooting death of the suspect?

Mr. Speaker: I think that has been asked and answered. Second, if you have one. Yes, go ahead, second supplemental.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, can you indicate whether this death is the subject of investigation by the Police Complaints Authority or any internal unit in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service?

Mr. Speaker: Minister, have a seat. That question does not arise from the primary question.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

10.45 a.m.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am advised that the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Development intends to make a statement. And I have been advised that the hon. Minister wishes to do so later in the proceedings, and I have given leave to do so.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Sometimes you just need to resist.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Sometimes you just need to resist that temptation, Arouca/Lopinot. Take a deep breath, and to mirror the words of Sir John Bercow, “Take up yoga”. it is helpful.

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (ALCOHOL, CANNABIS,
DANGEROUS DRUGS, GAMBLING AND TOBACCO) BILL 2026.**

Bill to amend the Dangerous Drugs Act, Chap. 11:25, the Registration of Clubs Act, Chap. 21:01, the Tobacco Control Act, Chap. 30:04, the Children Act, Chap. 46:01, the Liquor Licences Act, Chap. 84:10, the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act, No. 8 of 2021 and the Cannabis Control Act, No. 10 of 2022; and to provide for related matters) [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken later in the proceedings. [*Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Homeland Security.

RELATED MOTIONS

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1, standing in my name. Mr. Speaker, in moving this Motion, I seek to have the leave of this House, in accordance with Standing Order 51, to debate, along with matters of Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper, which are interrelated.

Mr. Speaker: Is this the wish of the House?

Assent indicated.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted for Motions 1 and 2 on the Order Paper to be debated interrelatedly.

COMMISSIONER OF POLICE (AG.)
(NOMINATION OF MR. JUNIOR BENJAMIN)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister for Homeland Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I will then move the following Motion:

Whereas section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (“the Constitution”) provides that the Police Service Commission shall have the power to appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(3) of the Constitution provides that the Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the office of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

And Whereas the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mr. Junior Benjamin, Deputy Commissioner of Police, as the person nominated to act in the office of Commissioner of Police;

And Whereas the President has on the 23rd day of September, 2026 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

And Whereas it is expedient to approve the Notification:

Be It Resolved that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Junior Benjamin to act in the office of Commissioner of Police be approved.

Also, Mr. Speaker—whereas Mr. Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 2:

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE (AG.)
(NOMINATION OF MR. ANAND RAMESAR)

Whereas section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (“the Constitution”) provides that the Police Service Commission shall have the power to appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And Whereas section 123(3) of the Constitution provides that the Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the office of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And Whereas section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

And Whereas the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mr. Anand Ramesar, Assistant Commissioner of Police, as the person nominated to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And Whereas the President has on the 23rd day of September, 2025 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

And Whereas it is expedient to approve the Notification:

Be It Resolved that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Anand Ramesar to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Junior Benjamin holds the Office of Deputy

Deputy Commissioner of Police (AG.)
(Nomination of Mr. Anand Ramesar)
Hon. R. Alexander (cont'd)

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Commissioner of Police. Mr. Junior Benjamin is a current police officer, and he is no stranger to this House, or to the post, as he has acted on more than—I think this is the third occasion that he has acted as Commissioner of Police. His years of experience with the organization has provided continuous leadership in the absence of the Commissioner of Police.

The Police Service Commission has nominated Mr. Benjamin to act during the Commissioner's absence. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Benjamin comes with 37 years of service. A well-rounded police officer, who has adapted and has led this organization time and time again in the absence of the Police Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Junior Benjamin brings a wealth of experience, and knowledge, and qualifications, as he holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Management, and a certification as a polygraph examiner. Also, Mr. Speaker, he has a Bachelor of Law degree, he has a Diploma in Management, and also a Master in Business Administration, and a Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice. So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Benjamin is not only qualified to lead, but he has always led in the absence of the Commissioner of Police.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Commissioner of Police to act, Mr. Anand Ramesar.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I crave your indulgence there? I understand that this might be a somewhat procedurally vague area, but I am advised that the proper procedure for us to adopt here is that, yes, and then you will read at the end. Let me just clarify it for a moment.

[Mr. Speaker confers with the Clerk]

Mr. Speaker: I think I must accept some of the culpability here because what happened earlier is that only one Motion should have been read, but we read both

Deputy Commissioner of Police (AG.)
(Nomination of Mr. Anand Ramesar)
Hon. R. Alexander (cont'd)

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of them. So, in order to mitigate that, Minister, you can go on with your presentation on Mr. Ramesar, but we will put one resolution and then at the end we will correct whatever—the procedure at the end of it. So, go ahead.

Hon. R. Alexander: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move the Motion for the approval of the Notification of Her Excellency, the President, with respect to the nomination of Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. Anand Ramesar, to act as Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Anand Ramesar is no stranger also to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, a career police officer with 34 years of service. Mr. Ramesar is well-qualified, well-rounded, and has worked in different areas in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. He is also fully qualified to hold this post, Mr. Speaker. He has a Masters in Criminology and Criminal Justice, a Bachelor of Law degree, a BA in Human Resource Management, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ramesar also has several trainings within the police service and outside of the police service as it relates to policing. Mr. Ramesar is therefore ready and qualified to hold the Deputy Commissioner of Police post temporarily until the return of Mr. Junior Benjamin.

Mr. Speaker, at this stage, Mr. Speaker, I think I have exhausted my contribution to these two officers. Again, I recommend these officers to hold the next post in their name. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I beg to move, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca /Lopinot. May I remind Members that leave has been granted for Motions Nos. 1 and 2 to be debated together.

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(Nomination of Mr. Anand Ramesar)
Hon. R. Alexander (cont'd)

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are here to debate two Notifications from the President, as indicated by my colleague from Tunapuna, the Minister of Homeland Security, and the genesis of which is the impending travel by the Commissioner of Police, as indicated here in the Notification, to attend an International Association of Chiefs of Police Annual Conference and Exposition in Orlando, Florida, USA, from 22 October to 28 October, 2026. If I recall, sometime last year we were in a very similar debate or proceedings. We debated similar nominations to allow for the Commissioner of Police to participate and attend this International Association of Chiefs of Police Annual Conference in the United States of America.

So we are quite familiar by now with this arrangement, and once the Commissioner is out of the jurisdiction, as is mandated by the Constitution, to allow for someone, or the appropriate or the qualified senior police officer, to act in the Office of Commissioner of Police. The Police Service Commission will discharge its constitutional responsibilities and make the recommendations to Her Excellency the President, and the President would refer the Notification to the Parliament for approval or disapproval depending on what is before us.

So in this case, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Benjamin, from my recollection, would have acted as Commissioner of Police during the absence of the substantive Commissioner of Police in the past, and he is quite familiar to us because we would have engaged in these types of parliamentary activities to approve his nomination to act as Commissioner of Police. When I looked at his résumé, which I intend to go in for a little bit, it is not different, I think, rather, it is the same

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résumé or curriculum vitae that would have been submitted to the Parliament.

Mr. Anand Ramesar, on the other hand, is new to Parliament because my information is that he was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Police, and one would assume that he is the most senior Assistant Commissioner of Police on the Order of the Merit List, as is required by the Constitution and the Order for the Police Service Commission to have in place an Order of Merit List for the positions of Deputy Police Commissioner and Police Commissioner, whenever there is a vacancy, in order to allow for the Commission to make its recommendation and Her Excellency to make her recommendations to the President. As indicated by my colleague on the other side, there is agreement for us to debate both Notifications interrelatedly, and that is why we are engaging in this particular exercise.

So, Mr. Speaker, please allow me to start with the recommendation or the Notification in relation to Mr. Anand Ramesar. But when I look at the Notification or the Legal Notice dealing with this particular matter, Legal Notice 277, made or published in accordance with the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago—the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Selection Process) (No. 2) (Amdt.) Order, 2021—I note, Mr. Speaker, that the Order requires the Service Commission to submit to Parliament a dossier concerning the recommendations. But what is that dossier? I mean, Members of Parliament only have access to the information provided to us.

I recall when we were in Government, the Opposition would say, “Well, look, listen, all we have is the CV and the Notification. There is nothing much we can do. We cannot engage in any background checks.” One would assume, you know, that the Police Service Commission would have discharged those serious

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responsibilities. Because, Mr. Speaker, we just came out of a State of Emergency. We are engaging a legislative process to continue to give the police extraordinary powers to treat with crime and national security issues.

Therefore, when, as parliamentarians, we are being asked to approve or not approve recommendations of candidates to act in the position of Police Commissioner and Deputy Police Commissioner, we have to do so in a way that will protect those offices and discharge our responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago ensuring that those persons who act in these very serious and sensitive positions, are persons who are duly qualified and that they are worthy to gain the trust not only of law enforcement officials within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, but in the ecosystem of law enforcement.

Because as a Deputy Commissioner of Police and Commissioner of Police, you have to treat with your colleagues in the prisons service, in the defence force, in the intelligence agency, not only locally but regionally and internationally. So, it is not a rubber-stamping exercise. That is the point I am making. It is a very serious responsibility, and even though we are engaged in these processes from time to time, it must be taken with a degree of seriousness, given the fact that we are approving or not approving persons to act in these very serious offices, Mr. Speaker.

The Opposition, today, whilst we are engaging in this exercise, our responsibility is to engage the Government in conversations, ensure that the information being put to us, that was sent to us by Her Excellency the President and, by extension, the Police Service Commission and the Government, that those two candidates whom we believe will be acting in the position of Deputy Commissioner of Police and Police Commissioner are worthy of the trust that

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comes with those serious offices, Mr. Speaker.

So, let me start, and I heard the Minister of Homeland Security, in his presentation in moving this Motion, indicate and commend to this House the suitability of both candidates. Mr. Anand Ramesar's suitability, according to the Minister, to act in the position of Deputy Commissioner of Police, he being a substantive Assistant Commissioner of Police, and Mr. Junior Benjamin he has also recommended his appointment to act as Commissioner of Police.

I am happy that we are doing that, because you could recall, not too long ago, we were engaged in a national dialogue where there was a vacancy in the position of Commissioner of Police, and after the Opposition raised some issues regarding his whereabouts, we have been given conflicting information. And even up to this day, we do not know what really is the truth. When questions were asked, we are being told that we ought not to ask those questions because of national security considerations. Something we reject completely out of hand.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Completely out of hand. But we will get to the bottom of that. Because when you are acting and when you are discharging serious constitutional responsibilities, you ought to do so in a transparent and responsible manner. Those who wish to aspire to high office must be prepared to carry that serious burden of responsibility to the national community.

So, Mr. Anand Ramesar, Mr. Speaker, when I look at his CV, we were told he has 34 years of progressive service with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, currently serving as an Assistant Commissioner of Police, and his qualifications are as follows: a Master's in criminology or an MSc in criminology and criminal justice, a Bachelor of Laws degree, a BA in human resource

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management, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration.

When I look at his key achievements, because that is very important, as detailed in the documents provided to us in this Parliament, his key achievements: disciplinary processes. He designed the disciplinary process used in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, followed by overseeing the implementation of structures necessary for effective functionality. Collective agreements: he successfully prepared and negotiated two collective agreements for the periods 2008 to 2010, and 2011 to 2013. Third—he listed it as an achievement. Third on the merit list, having been assessed for the Commissioner of Police in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and he was an honour roll student, very admirable and honourable student at the Hugh Wooding Law School during the period 2003 to 2005. Those were listed as his key achievements.

Mr. Speaker, I thought the Minister of Homeland Security, in moving this Motion, would have gone into the other achievements of Mr. Ramesar as an Assistant Commissioner of Police to act as the Deputy Commissioner of Police, so that we in this Parliament and, by extension, the country, would have a fulsome understanding of his achievements and, by so doing, his suitability to act in the Office of Deputy Police Commissioner during the period of time that the DCP Junior Benjamin will be acting in the position of Commissioner of Police, Mr. Speaker.

But what I noted in the Minister's contribution, Mr. Speaker, is that he did not mention that the candidate that he is proposing to act as a Deputy Commissioner of Police, is a candidate that, according to reports reaching the Opposition, was convicted or found guilty on serious internal disciplinary offences. It was not stated. The Minister did not say. I was hoping that he did, because

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these things are very serious, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister recommended to this Parliament and, by extension, the country the appointment of Mr. Anand Ramesar to act as a Deputy Commissioner of Police. But as an Opposition, doing the work that we ought to do on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we have to ask the question. I am asking the Minister, in response to my contribution, whether he is aware of this very serious matter that purportedly is against the record of this candidate, and whether, if he was not aware and is now being made aware, whether he continues to hold the position that this candidate is suitable to function in the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

And I refer to a Daily *Express* report dated October 22, 2012, and its headline:

“Ramesar: Guilty verdict made me stronger”

Please allow me to quote, Mr. Speaker, on this matter.

“President of the Police Social Welfare Association, Sergeant Anand Ramesar...”—

—as he was then—

“...said yesterday that the guilty verdict and sentencing handed down against him by a disciplinary tribunal had made him stronger and the issue of stepping down did not arise. ‘These are the things that make a president stronger. That is what—’”

I am quoting what he is saying—

“‘That is what it has done for me,’ said Ramesar.

Ramesar was sentenced on Monday on three disciplinary charges by the Police Service Complaints Tribunal which also ordered that 36 days’ pay

be deducted from Ramesar's salary.

He was penalised for engaging in a professional undertaking without permission from the Commissioner of Police, falsehood, and discreditable conduct.”

Mr. Speaker, let me repeat.

“He was penalised for engaging in a professional undertaking without permission from the Commissioner of Police, falsehood, and discreditable conduct.

The tribunal, chaired by Supt Clarence Boodram and including acting Senior Supt Cecil Santana and Supt Stephen Pustam, handed down the sentence.

The offences arose from an incident on October 3, 2011, at the Scarborough Magistrates' Court in Tobago, where Ramesar provided legal representation to a police officer charged with misconduct in public office, for allegedly renting his service firearm.

‘It is not the first time a president of an association has had disciplinary action taken against them and the outcome was not favourable. But nonetheless...’—

—according to him—

“...I have the support of my members who have been calling constantly. I have their support,’ he said.

Ramesar said the case had made him more sensitive to the needs of the association.”

11.15 a.m.

In a similar report, Mr. Speaker, a *Newsday* report of similar date:

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“CoP candidate Anand Ramesar”—I am quoting—“unfazed by the tribunal conviction”

—as reported in the Trinidad and Tobago *Newsday*.

“Candidate for the post of Police Commissioner, Supt Anand Ramesar says his past internal charges ought not to hinder his chances of leading the police service.

Responding to questions pertaining to his internal charges of 2012, Ramesar said, the three charges cost him 36 days’ pay, as each charge carried a 12-day pay cut.”

And I quote:

““That was cowboy justice from when I was president of the police association...””

I am quoting him:

“Ramesar said adding that he wanted to appeal the decision but that would have stunted his promotion from then sergeant to inspector, so he accepted the punishment.

The charge of falsehood was part of requested information given to High Tide Project, a non-profit Caribbean police-reform organisation incorporated in...”—Trinidad and Tobago—“...directed by former state prosecutor Lee Merry.”

So, Mr. Speaker, now that this matter is in the public record, with admission from the candidate who is now being recommended by the Government through the Minister of Homeland Security, and it is now inviting us as parliamentarians to approve this candidate as one that is suitable to act in the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr. Speaker, given where we are in this country, and

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given the fact that the public requires to have firm confidence and trust in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, I want to ask the Minister whether this is the same candidate he is offering and recommending that we approve to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. Because I hate to believe that the Minister was aware of this very critical information and did not put it on the *Hansard* of Parliament so that we could be aware of these very serious matters, so that we can take an appropriate decision—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I would hate to believe that the Minister was aware of this critical piece of information and did not put it on the public record, so that we can make a decision to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, the Opposition is saying, where this recommendation is concerned, we cannot support it in order to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: We cannot. We have a responsibility as parliamentarians and we have to ensure that those that we put in public office, in accordance with the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, are suitable and well-qualified in order that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can have confidence in serious organizations, in this case, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, I move to the nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin. I am hearing the Member for St. Augustine just muttering. What is making her so uncomfortable? I did not call Zambo's name here.

Hon. Members: “Ohhh!”

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Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gonzales: I move on. I withdraw that statement, Mr. Speaker. Let me not be distracted. I will not be distracted, so I withdraw the statement.

Mr. Speaker, I move to the nomination of Junior Benjamin, and again, I want to—I looked at the CV of Mr. Benjamin that was provided to us, and I have to look at it, even though I am familiar with it, but I have to see, on behalf of the Opposition and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, whether there is anything inside of there that should concern us as an Opposition.

His executive profile: A career officer of 37 years. Career progression through increasingly senior ranks within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, culminating in appointments as Acting Commissioner of Police; Deputy Commissioner of Police, Operations; and Deputy Commissioner, Administration and Operational Support. Demonstrated experience by providing executive leadership across complex operational and administrative environments, including oversight of 10 policing districts and tactical support, human resources, finance, Police Academy, information technology, firearms and other critical institutional functions, Mr. Speaker.

I then point my colleagues on both sides to his selected executive experience or achievements, and I make that comparison with the nomination before. So, when you look at Mr. Benjamin's selected executive achievements, one would say he achieved quite a lot during the period of time that he was a career, and continues to be a career police officer of 37 years.

He served as Acting Commissioner of Police during a period of significant national and operational and security demands, providing strategic direction and executive oversight of the police service. He led completion of the Trinidad and Tobago's

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strategic plan, 2025 to 2027. And, Mr. Speaker, this is the part that interests me. Mr. Benjamin indicated in his CV that when he served as Commissioner of Police during the period of time that the PNM was in office, he achieved and contributed to a reported 31 per cent reduction in murders during the period of executive leadership.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: So, Mr. Speaker, there are those who believe, because you see, that is why people—

Sen. Jeremie SC: That is the man for the job.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Probably, I agree. Probably that is the man for the job. I mean, it is a 31 per cent reduction.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Can we move on?

Mr. M. Gonzales: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would not be distracted by the Attorney General, Mr. Speaker, and the rest of them going down on that side, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You sure?

Mr. M. Gonzales: I will not be distracted by them.

Mr. Speaker: You sure about that?

Mr. M. Gonzales: Of course, I will be sure, but I will reserve my right to respond to them as they speak, Mr. Speaker. That is my role and my responsibility here.

Mr. Speaker: Your role is to speak to me, not to speak to anybody else in the Chamber.

Mr. Gonzales: No, I have to speak to them through you, Mr. Speaker. You know that. That is the rule. I cannot speak to them directly because I might be in breach

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of the Standing Orders. But, Mr. Speaker, I will not be distracted by the Attorney General and those on his right.

But Mr. Benjamin, Mr. Speaker—as I have said, and I have gone through the CV—Mr. Benjamin indicated that he contributed to a reported 31 per cent reduction in murders during the period of acting executive leadership of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. In other words, Mr. Speaker, during the time that the PNM was in officer. I am very proud of him for putting this fact on his CV because if you listen to those opposite, they would have the country believe, and they would have the Parliament believe that crime reduction only took place between a period of time. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker.

He indicated that as Assistant Chairman of the Promotion Advisory Board in 2023, he contributed to the assessment and interview of 2,232 constables within a five-month period, resulting in more than 900 officers being promoted to corporal. And another part, he played a key role in the establishment and the development of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, polygraph unit, and served as one of the first two police polygraph examiners within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Mr. Speaker, a very impressive record, if I were to describe it like that, because I know the importance of someone acting in the position of Commissioner of Police, as we have been asked to do here and approve, and understanding the value of police officers engaging in polygraph examinations. Because as a young man being part of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Mr. Speaker, I worked in certain units where in order to remain so and remain working in those units, you have to subject yourself to regular polygraph testing. And I am proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that every polygraph test that I undertook, I passed all of them.

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Unfortunately—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—there are many of those who—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—cannot boast of it. They run from polygraph, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: They run from polygraph. I am speaking—Mr. Speaker, I am not talking to them. I am not speaking to them. I am not speaking to my colleague from Couva South, I am not speaking to the Attorney General, I am not speaking to the Member for Tunapuna, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: It is a—

Mr. M. Gonzales:—the Minister of Homeland Security.

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

Mr. Speaker: It is a little too early to launch a glorified tirade, right? Let us just stick to the Bill. It is a little too early—the notification. It is a little too early for that.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: I am not fixated with you. I have time with you? Fixated with you? Please. Give me a break. Fixated with you? Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for your guidance on it.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: What is going on there?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps you should tell me.

Mr. M. Gonzales: “What going on with dem?”

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Mr. Speaker: What is going on with you.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: It is too early for that glorified tirade. “Come nah, man.” Let us move on.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that the person being recommended to act as Commissioner of Police understands the value of polygraph testing.

He led—and listen to this, Mr. Speaker. In this document here—and I want my colleagues on both sides to listen, especially those on this side, carefully to what transpired earlier on today. He served as the named procurement officer—not 27(1)(g)—he served as the named procurement officer, supporting public procurement governance, tender development, regulatory liaison and policy improvement. Mr. Speaker, this is a suitable candidate to sit in the office of Commissioner of Police, and perhaps, if he does so, within that short period of time, there will be no need for some colleagues to come and invoke 27(1)(g).

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Selected achievements, Mr. Speaker, very impressive: He managed the general election, the ICC T20 World Cup, the strategic plan across 10 policing divisions, and contributed a reported 31 per cent reduction—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—[*Laughter*—in murders during the period of executive leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on, but let me just say that when the

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Opposition examined the profile of Mr. Junior Benjamin, we have no concern and we believe he is a suitable candidate to act in the office of Commissioner of Police during the absence of the substantive Commissioner of Police.

Let me reiterate that, having regard to what I have now put in the public domain with respect to the other candidate's recommendation to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police, I want the Government to tell the national population, having regard to these facts regarding the candidate to act as Deputy Commissioner of Police, having regard to those facts whether the Government holds firm to the recommendation, that Mr. Anand Ramesar is a suitable candidate to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, I am bothered by what I just heard.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. It seems like the Member for Arouca/Lopinot came here with some kind of Scooby-Doo tactics—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander:—and was looking for clues because he had none at all.

Mr. Speaker, let me say this. First of all, apparently, the ex-police officer, I believe he was, does not even understand the role and function of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. R. Alexander: And let me deal with this one at a time, or should I put them together in a knot? As it relates to Mr. Anand Ramesar, the Police Service Commission would have interviewed persons qualified to act in the other rank because Mr. Anand Ramesar—apparently he did not know this—is in fact an Assistant Commissioner of Police and not a Senior Superintendent, Acting ACP. Alright, so I think you should fix that because, like he did not know. You see, the problem is, Mr. Speaker, I do not know if I should have given them the list so they could have taken it to point X to have it manipulated in order to choose who they want to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, a point of order, please. 48(6) thank you.

Dr. Moonilal: You were excused from the Sitting.

Ms. Ameen: “Where you come from?”

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Alright, let us settle down a bit.

Hon. R. Alexander: You are not here.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Shall we—let us calm down a bit. Shall we—Minister, I do not think there is any need for that, right. So, let us move on. At this stage of this debate, there is no need for that. I think you just need to state the facts with Mr. Ramesar.

Hon. R. Alexander: So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ramesar was interviewed again by the Police Service Commission and placed on a merit list. If persons do not understand what is a merit list, I suggest they ask the people’s question.

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Mr. Padarath: Nobody on this side has—*[Inaudible]*.

Hon. R. Alexander: So, since there are no questions on that side, I will ask them if they are aware of what a merit list is? And then a polygraph test. The Member for Arouca/Lopinot mentioned a polygraph test. I do not know if he will take one today.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. Would you subject yourself to one today if I was to polygraph you and ask you if you want to be the Leader of the Opposition?

Hon. Members: Ohhhh!

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker: Minister, Minister.

Hon. Members: *[Continuous desk thumping and laughter]*

Dr. Moonilal: Well said.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, as I said earlier, it is a little too early in the day for that.

Hon. R. Alexander: Yes, I apologize. It is just a question that I am asking *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but this is not the forum to ask that question.

Hon. R. Alexander: Okay, Mr. Speaker, I humbly apologize.

Ms. Ameen: “Wit’ ah polygraph , yuh ask anything”.

Hon. R. Alexander: But Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that when you do not have knowledge of the institution he used to be in because he did not last very long. Things have rolled forward, and he did not know. So now that he has addressed that, Mr. Speaker, these two officers, they are ready to serve, and I look forward to the next coming days to work alongside these officers in this state that we are in presently, where the crime figures are truly going down.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, again, Mr. Benjamin and Mr. Ramesar are both career police officers. I have worked alongside them, so I am talking about facts and not fiction. They are ready, they have always been ready, and if you understand the Police Service and how situations exist, then you will understand why persons are still promoted even when there is a very minor infringement. Mr. Speaker, having said that, I think we are here too long debating this matter.

Mr. Des Vignes: I think we are here too long in general.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Well, you should not have come.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: And as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are going to do some procedural improvisation here because both Motions have been read. We are not going to be slaves to an old procedure where we will have to reread the second Motion. I am going to put both questions now. So, we are going to do some procedural improvisation.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but one at a time, and we are taking the vote one at a time. So, what I propose to do is put the question with regard to Mr. Benjamin first and then I will follow the question with Mr. Ramesar. I do not intend to have the Minister get up and go through the charade of rereading the Motion with Mr. Ramesar, right. And in any event, it is my call to make, so I make the call.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Junior Benjamin to act in the office of Commissioner of Police be approved.

Mr. Speaker: Then with regard to the second Motion, Motion No. 2.

Question put.

Mr. Gonzales: Division.

The House divided: Ayes 23 Noes 8

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.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, Hon. W.

Benjamin, Hon. M.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

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Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. R.

Gosein, Dr. N.

Thomas, D.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Beckles, Ms. P.

Scotland SC, K.

de Nobriga S.

Manning, B.

Marcelle, K.

Des Vignes, H.

Romain, D.

Resolved:

That the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Anand Ramesar to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

Question agreed to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the next business on the Order Paper is a Motion and a Bill, which I am advised are being taken together by agreement. The staff of the Parliament requires 15 minutes to iron out a few procedural matters. So, we would suspend for—shall we say we would return here at 12.00 p.m., 20 minutes. So, this means we will just get enough time. So, we will suspend until 12. We

will resume at 12.00 p.m. Thank you.

11.41 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

12.00 noon: *Sitting resumed.*

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are two housekeeping matters I wish to deal with. One, I had earlier been advised that the hon. Member for San Fernando East was going to be absent today. Can I correct the public record and indicate that the hon. Member is indeed present in the House, and that was communicated to me in error? Just so that we correct the public record, the Member for San Fernando East is present today.

In so far as the progression of the future business of the House, we had been told that both the Motion and the Bill would have been dealt with together. I understand that we are reverting to the original procedure, so we will deal with them separately. Just to let Members know, at the end of the debate on the Motion, I intend to take the lunch break and return to do the Bill thereafter. Hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

GAMBLING (GAMING AND BETTING) (REMOTE GAMBLING) ORDER, 2026

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 the following motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by section 76(1) of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Act, 2021 (Act No. 8 of 2021) (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”) that a person commits an offence if he does anything in Trinidad and Tobago

or uses remote gambling equipment situated in Trinidad and Tobago for the purpose of inviting or enabling a person in a prohibited territory to participate in remote gambling,

And whereas it is provided by section 76(2) of the Act that the Minister may by Order, subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament, amend section 76 of the Act for the purposes of permitting remote gambling,

and whereas the Minister of Finance has, on the 15th day of September, 2026, made the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order, 2026, *and whereas* it is expedient that the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order, 2026 now be affirmed.

Be it resolved that the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order, 2026 be approved.

Mr. Speaker, before this honourable House is a resolution to approve the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order 2026, made by myself, under the guidance of the Government, on September 15, 2026. For the record, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read into the *Hansard* what the Order basically cites. The first clause is a citation. The second is the Interpretation Act reference. That is what the Act means. And the third, I think, is the most important. The third clause reads:

“Notwithstanding sections 76(1) and (4) of the Act”—that would be the Gambling (Gaming and Betting Control) Act 2021—“a person who is the holder of a valid remote gambling licence issued by the Commission under Section 30(2)(1) of the Act may engage in remote gambling, subject to the provisions of the Act and any Regulations made thereunder and the terms and conditions of his licence.”

Mr. Speaker, basically then, the Order before the House seeks to provide the legal framework to permit a person resident in Trinidad and Tobago to engage in remote gambling. For the record, Mr. Speaker, I would want to suggest a clarification for the Members opposite and for the listening audience as to exactly what remote gambling means. According to the interpretation section of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting Control) Act 2021:

“‘remote gambling’ means gambling in which persons participate by the use of remote communication;”

Higher up in the same interpretation section:

“‘remote communication’...”—is also defined as meaning—
“...communication using the internet, telephone, television, radio or any other kind of electronic or other technology for facilitating communication;”

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it abundantly clear at the outset that nothing in this Order, and nothing in our intention, is intended to take away the responsibilities and the rules or dilute the functions of the Commission, that is, the gambling and gaming commission. It has power to licence under Section 32(1) of the Act.

Before I get into the benefits that we redound to our country because of this legislation, I want to explain to the listening audience what the current legal position is with regard to online gambling generally, Mr. Speaker. And this will be specifically with regard to remote gambling as I have just described. Mr. Speaker, section 76 of the Act currently prohibits, under sanction of a criminal offence, a person from doing:

“...anything in Trinidad and Tobago or...”—using—“...remote gambling equipment situated in Trinidad and Tobago for the purpose of inviting or...”—engaging—“...a person in...”—any country outside of Trinidad and

Tobago—“to participate in remote gambling.”

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, the existing Act prohibits anyone operating in Trinidad and Tobago from offering remote gambling to any person in any other country of the world. The current fines, as they exist in the 2021 Act, Mr. Speaker, are significant. The penalties range from a fine of \$5 million and imprisonment for seven years, or a fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years. Mr. Speaker, why are these penalties so high? We are provided with an answer by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who is not in the House today—the former Minister of Finance, when he piloted this very same Gambling (Gaming and Betting Control) Act in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would like to quote the *Hansard* of June 18th, 2021, in the other place, when the then Member for Diego Martin North/East, the former, former Minister of Finance, said:

“Clause 76 creates an offence relative to a person in Trinidad and Tobago inviting somebody outside of Trinidad and Tobago to participate in remote gambling. This...”—the then Minister had said—“...is a matter that is very complex and we have determined that we are not going to allow this at this time.”

He also said:

“...if in the future the policy changes and sufficient controls can be put in...”—place—“...to allow Internet gambling, then we will revisit it but at this time, we do not think we have the level of sophistication and capacity at this time to monitor Internet gambling generated in Trinidad and Tobago.”

For reference, that is the Senate *Hansard* dated June 18th, 2021.

Ironically, Mr. Speaker, in the same *Hansard*, the very same Member cited a

caution that the gambling sector was a \$16 billion industry in Trinidad and Tobago that was characterized by the potential for money laundering, terrorist financing, leakage of foreign exchange, and a significant number of other irregularities. Mr. Speaker, while the Members on that side, when they were in Government, recognized that they were developing the legislation, even in the debate there was recognition that remote gambling was an issue that needed attention. They accepted that the legislation was complex. They accepted that the industry was complex. They accepted too, that the PNM administration at the time lacked the sophistication and capacity to manage Internet gambling. They recognized too that it was a multi-billion-dollar enterprise capable of having serious ties with criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, recognizing that the industry exists, recognizing that there is a substantial revenue potential and a substantial risk of illegal activity, and recognizing too that the rest of the world has engaged in remote gambling at significant levels, Mr. Speaker, any right-thinking administration would have immediately established a framework to bring itself up to speed with the technology and the technicalities of the industry so that they could better monitor and regulate the industry and therefore avoid the criminal activity which could have been generated. But also as important, Mr. Speaker, any right-thinking Government would also have taken every possible action to prevent the tax leakage and the tax evasion that they accepted was likely to happen. But what did this unpatriotic PNM administration do, Mr. Speaker? Not one thing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Not one thing, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, from the passage of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting Control) Bill in 2021—on June 23rd, 2021, it

was passed—to the assent of the Bill in July 2021, to the partial proclamation of the Act on August 11th, 2021, to general elections on April 28th, 2025, nothing was done by the previous administration to address the remote gambling provisions, although it was acknowledged that constant policy review was required. The Member for Diego Martin North/East did not know what to do, and therefore he did nothing. And while he did nothing, Mr. Speaker, this country lost millions and perhaps billions of dollars in potential revenue and in potential foreign exchange generation.

Mr. Speaker, if it is one lesson that countries across the world have learnt in terms of regulating gambling and addressing anti-money laundering and counter—

Hon. Member: Counter-terrorism.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Counter-terrorism financing—thank you—concerns, if it is one lesson that has been learnt, is that the more you prohibit conduct instead of regulating and licensing, the more you will be driving illicit activity to flourish in an underground economy that does not redound to the benefit of citizens who are law-abiding, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let us look at the size of the problem. This is an article by Global Compliance International, dated May 17th, 2026. It is captioned:

“The Trillion Dollar Problem: Unregulated Online Gambling Reaches 5.9 Trillion in Global Wagering Value”

Mr. Speaker, if I may be permitted, I would like to quote from the article, Mr. Speaker. According to this article:

“New analysis from Gaming Compliance International reveals that unregulated online gambling has reached \$5.9 trillion in global wagering value in 2025, confirming what is widely referred to as the ‘trillion dollar

problem’—in reality, a multi-trillion-dollar global economy. At this level, unregulated online gambling now ranks as the world’s third-largest economy, behind only the United States and China, while also representing the largest form of cybercrime globally.

The “GCI’s global analysis, summarized in a new report, GCI Online Gaming 2025: Global, shows that the average online gaming marketplace is structurally unbalanced:

78 per cent is unregulated...”—and
“22 per cent is regulated”

Mr. Speaker, that means that 78 per cent of US \$5.9 trillion that exists on online gambling, 78 per cent of that is unregulated. This reflects the global cross-gaming revenue market-share split, demonstrating that the majority of customer-generated revenue is flowing outside licensed tax and control environments. This is not a marginal issue, Mr. Speaker. The unregulated sector dominates the marketplace. Mr. Speaker, it is a vicious cycle. It is a vicious cycle, as you are constantly having to spend time, energy, money, and resources prohibiting an activity with little or no results, instead of licensing it, regulating it, monitoring it, and making that industry work for the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And that is the simple rationale for why we are here, bringing this Order—this resolution—to Parliament today. Sitting still—as they have done for the last six years—is not an option. We must act. Mr. Speaker, this Government is about creating opportunities and stimulating industry, and we envisage that a lot of good can come out of this once it is done correctly. And we are committed, Mr. Speaker, to doing it correctly.

Mr. Speaker, before I address the issues of enforcement, licensing and digital

payments, I want to draw an analogy with one, the Virtual Assets and Virtual Assets Service Providers Act, which we passed in this House last year. And the subject of the resolution before us: To further illustrate the pitfalls of legislating for prohibition rather than regulation, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as you will recall, the Virtual Assets and Virtual Assets Service Providers Bill was laid in Parliament last year, and initially totally prohibited virtual asset activities. This policy, when put in the public domain, attracted significant attention, and the Government of the day—this administration—listened.

We engaged the regulators, we engaged the practitioners, and with input from the sector and the regulator, we eventually amended the Bill and passed the Bill to permit what is called “sandboxing”, which is a limited operation in the industry under the supervision of the regulator. Mr. Speaker, if you take stock of numerous social media posts today, you will find that because this Government permitted sandboxing to occur, rather than stifling it under a carnage prohibition, this Government is now helping an industry to germinate in Trinidad and Tobago, to generate jobs, to generate foreign exchange, and to generate revenues for Trinidad and Tobago, and we are very excited about the next stages of that enterprise.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that the regulator of the virtual assets industry, which is the Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission, is driving every aspect of the sandboxing. It is fully compliant with the AML/CFT requirements and is being properly policed. Mr. Speaker, that has been the experience that we have had with regard to virtual assets. Virtual assets, which had been prohibited by the Members opposite, and which we have now taken under our wings and put into a sandboxing procedure, so that we will learn and the industry

could develop and grow, rather than simply blocking it off, Mr. Speaker. We are following the same formula today with this gambling Motion, Mr. Speaker. We are following the very same procedure that has been proven successful with virtual assets, as we are dealing with remote gambling today. We are licensing, not prohibiting. We are seeking to empower and allow the regulator to do its job. Mr. Speaker, the Government and the regulator are actively learning about this industry as we speak, and under carefully monitored and managed conditions, we expect that great things will come to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago from this Motion and legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, that is how a responsible government operates. We do not acknowledge that there is a problem and do nothing about it. We do not acknowledge that there is a risk for greater hurt and harm and do nothing about it. We do not simply recognize that there is potential for revenue, foreign exchange generation, and simply not regulate, Mr. Speaker, and allow the loss of millions, if not billions, of TT dollars and US dollars to occur, Mr. Speaker. Yet that is exactly what the PNM administration did for several years, Mr. Speaker. For five years under their tenure, after having passed the legislation, after having recognized the need to regulate, they simply prohibited and did nothing to learn about the industry. Left to the PNM, Mr. Speaker, we would stay in the same place, doing the same thing, expecting different results.

Mr. Speaker, that is the very definition of madness. That is the very definition of what passed for governance during the 10 years of decadence under the former administration, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the exception of section 76 of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Act, Mr. Speaker, that was proclaimed

subject to Legal Notice No. 78 of 2026, much of the Act currently remains unproclaimed, and we simply do not have sufficient data to support the intended operations under the Act. Given these circumstances, however, let me share what data is in fact available. This is what exists under the current regime, Mr. Speaker. We have currently 1,150 registered gaming-related accounts, comprising 926 gaming amusement tax accounts and 224 club gaming tax accounts with the Board of Inland Revenue.

Mr. Speaker, payments received in 2025 amounted to approximately \$72.66 million TT, comprising \$15 million in gaming amusement tax and \$57.6 million in club gaming tax. Mr. Speaker, payments for 2026 so far have amounted to approximately \$71.3 million TT, comprising \$21 million in gaming amusement tax and \$50 million in club gaming tax. Mr. Speaker, what these payments, these numbers represent is an indication, a clear indication that regulated gaming already, Mr. Speaker, provides a measurable revenue stream to the State, and this reinforces the need, Mr. Speaker, of bringing additional gambling activity within the formal system.

Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence to prove that the prohibition as implemented by the former administration has worked. There is no information to prove this because no structure was put in place to ensure that there is regulation of even the prohibition that was put in place. Mr. Speaker, other compliance activities have already been undertaken by the BIR to ensure that, in addition to those regulated industries that I have just mentioned, the regulated entities, we also make sure that compliance takes place. Mr. Speaker, BIR, having now been staffed effectively enough, I believe, to engage in more aggressive compliance mechanisms, compliance outreach, Mr. Speaker, has advised that several

coordinated exercises have taken place between the Board of Internal Revenue and the TTPS and Customs and Excise, Mr. Speaker, and so far we are looking at 247 payments between October 2025 and February 26, 247 payments across 240 gaming amusement tax accounts totaling \$15.58 million, Mr. Speaker, that have now been brought into the books that were not previously pursued and prosecuted, Mr. Speaker.

We expect, Mr. Speaker, that this new step that we are proposing to take, that is to license remote gambling from Trinidad and Tobago, will allow existing and new operators to pay their fair share to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago via the Board of Inland Revenue. The alternative, Mr. Speaker, if we do not do this, what happens? If we do not do this, Mr. Speaker, we will be encouraging persons and businesses to conduct remote gambling on the ground and therefore become associated with the world problem that exists, Mr. Speaker, and that is exactly what the PNM did by not putting this remote gambling under some law, some sort of regulation as existed under the Gambling and Gaming Act, Mr. Speaker. The potential revenue for Trinidad and Tobago is substantial, Mr. Speaker; it is phenomenal, Mr. Speaker, and we have every confidence that this measure will provide success and a substantial revenue source and a substantial source of employment for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Government's approach to licensing and digital payment issues is that these matters will continue to be regulated by the relevant regulators in Trinidad and Tobago, in this case the Gambling, Gaming and Betting Control Commission and the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. The public is well aware that the Central Bank has already begun licensing e-money issuers and has begun public consultations on a payment systems and services bill licensing, where

these systems will be regulated by the Central Bank. We expect that these initiatives will complement this industry and properly address any and all AML and CFT concerns

Mr. Speaker, in this regard, Government intervention is required here only for ensuring that the appropriate legal framework is put in place. The regulators are already in place, Mr. Speaker. It is also anticipated that further sections of the Gambling, Gaming and Betting Control Act will require proclamation followed by the preparation of enabling regulations. While this may be, in fact, the case, Mr. Speaker, and it will be a work in progress, this resolution does, however, indicate to the industry that we, that is, this Government, are prepared, unlike those before us, to facilitate remote gambling from Trinidad and Tobago. This policy position, Mr. Speaker, is important and necessary to encourage germination in the industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, the main reason for this resolution here today is to acknowledge that prohibitions, as have been done by the former administration, have only resulted in fuelling illicit activity with various negative knock-on effects. That is not a position we want to see develop in relation to gambling. Mr. Speaker, if only for that reason, we should get the support of members on the opposite side. However, there are also tremendous job opportunities and revenue potential and foreign exchange generation potential that can be unlocked through this industry. And that too, Mr. Speaker, is another reason why we expect that the Members opposite would support this motion. Mr. Speaker, I think I have made the case. I think I have supported the resolution before us. And Mr. Speaker, with those words, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Keith Scotland SC (*Port of Spain South*): Mr. Speaker, sometimes when I listen to the Members on the opposite side, every Bill they bring, they have to mention PNM. Why did you not tell the country that this is a PNM Bill?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And in 2020 when we introduced the Gambling Gaming and Betting Control Bill that you refused to support it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Come on. We have some grey matter here, you know. What happened then is that we needed a three-fifths majority. We counted on your support, and what did you do? Every one of you all abstained.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Every one of you all abstained. Now you are coming in the Parliament to say that a Bill passed by the PNM with clauses that are unproclaimed, that it was done due to sluff? That was done—the non-proclamation of that was due to sober consideration and deep thought processes and not because you need money because the Government is broke and you need every cent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So, what are you doing now? What are you doing now? What are you doing now? You are now trying to gain, to beef up revenue because the war is over. We are not too sure about persona non grata. So, what you are doing now is that you are looking to tap into every source that you can try to get revenue from and come. But whilst you are doing that, you are not being upfront, but you are blaming the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: That is not cool. That is just not cool. So, what are we about here? Let me remind the population, as you all try to rewrite history once more, that it was the PNM Government in 2021, Act No. 8 of 2021 who introduced this Bill and that is the substratum of the Motion that you have read into this Parliament. What happened, people of Trinidad and Tobago? And from now until I leave here, I am talking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I understand you all, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

12.30 p.m.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Let me talk to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What section 76(1) says is:

“A person commits an offence if he does anything in Trinidad and Tobago or uses remote gambling equipment situated in Trinidad and Tobago for the purposes of inviting or enabling a person in a prohibited territory to participate in remote gambling.”

And sub subsection 4 sets out the penalties, which are relatively onerous, and we understand what the penalties are. So, as I understand it, what you are doing now is you are introducing this, to clothe this section with the garb of legality. So I understand what you are doing, you are making this legal. There is a reason why the PNM was cautious in the implementation of this section. Because we understood the pitfalls that may lie with online gambling and society.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I understand you all exactly. If it comes to money, we are not regulating alcohol because you are regulated in one hand and say, “Well, under

14 or under 21 you cannot do this, under 25 you cannot do this, you cannot have this, you cannot have that”. But on the other hand, you are saying, “Open up online gambling”. What happens to the young people who might be affected by online gambling?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Are they exempted? Is there an age limit for that? Because we are coming to debate a Bill shortly which will say if you are of a certain age, you cannot drink alcohol, you cannot smoke, you cannot do this, you cannot do that. But yet, online gambling is open to everybody.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Show me the money. It is all in the money. And we understand. But let me tell you why the PNM was cautious, was cautious about implementing, about proclaiming this section. We understood the Caribbean society, and particularly Trinidad society and the disadvantages of gambling, particularly as it relates to vulnerable and young persons. And the first thing that we understood was economic vulnerability and leakage because we rely heavily on tourism-driven gaming and casinos and resorts. We understand that. And a significant portion of the revenues generated often flows out of the local economy to foreign-owned parent companies and multinationals. We understood that. We also understood that we have to create a structure that will catch that and not let it leak from our country. We were putting things in place, firstly.

Second, we understood that the proliferation of online gambling may have a deleterious effect on mental health issues, particularly with this new generation here. What is it called? Generation what? Generation X? This new generation here, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: Gen Z.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Generation Z?

Hon. Member: No, Gen Z.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Gen Z, Lord. This generation here is different, you know. Mr. Speaker, when they talk, they talk differently. So, I was leaving my house this morning, I said, “Daughter, I on fleek?” She said, “On fleek? That is four years ago, Grandpa. It is yuh slay.” I am like, “Yuh slay?” So that now—if you are okay, it means that “you slay”. They are talking differently. May Godchildren say, “six and sevens”. I am like, “Sixes and sevens”? I am not understanding. Mr. Speaker, the new generation, they are not like us. I am talking to somebody; the man says, “Say less”. I said, “You trying to tell me hush”?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Say less really is hush, you know. I could have told my parent under any circumstance—

Mr. Sturge: 48(1).

Hon. Members: Oh, gosh.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Who is that?

Hon. Member: Sturge.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Oh. Mr. Speaker, the point that I am making is that this generation needs a little more care in terms of how we do business, how we take away their rights, how we try to regulate their rights and how we open them up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: How we open them up. And in Trinidad and Tobago, the People’s National Movement, being a responsible government, hon. Member for Fyzabad, we think that Trinidad and Tobago, this Motion may very well create an

adverse effect on communities, schools, and young people because it will normalize online gambling and it increases the exposure of the population to that without the safeguards. You have not told us one safeguard that you have put in place. What about the socio-impact on households when people start this online gambling, and there are no stopgap measures? What happens to online gambling? As I understand it now, it will be available 24/7; 24/7, you are on your smartphone. What happens to addiction? What happens to the regulatory framework that does the social intervention that you needed to put in place before you chase the money? We will—because in principle, this is our child. We take paternity.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: We take paternity. This Bill is our child. But what we will not do is that we will not be hard and fast with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will be—as a responsible government, we will take our time and ensure that things are in place. You have not done that because, in your salvo, you have not told us one regulatory framework, one social mechanism that you will put in place that would assuage the harsh effects that online gambling may create in Trinidad and Tobago. Let me focus now specifically on issues that I would like addressed.

The disadvantages we see, and the structural issues that surround the gambling industry, are shaped by the legislation. And the enforcement history in Trinidad and Tobago is by no means stellar. There are four key points specific to Trinidad and Tobago incorporating this type of legislation. And I would want to ask you, hon. Minister, to consider the historical regulatory gaps and legislative backlogs because, for decades, you know, as you are aware, the gaming industry has operated under an outdated framework. It is still there. I am not laying blame.

I am addressing an issue, and before you implement this, I would respectfully suggest that you look at that issue.

The proliferation and exposure of the vulnerable, I have dealt with that, and I would like you, respectfully, hon. Minister, would like your good office to take a look at that whilst you pursue a revenue-earning initiative. Because that is what this is, yeah? A revenue-earning initiative. Let us call a spade a spade for once. And sometimes when you come, you must be a little open with us, and we could talk.

Mr. Tancoo: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. K. Scotland SC: We understand that. We understand that. But in doing so, put some safeguards in place so that people who may be disadvantaged, people who may get addicted, people who may actually lose more than they gain with this online gambling, will have some sort of fallback. Now, Mr. Speaker, we understand the need for raising revenue.

Hon. Members: What?

Mr. K. Scotland SC: We do not agree that this was due to any sloth of the PNM. And we say to you, you are in charge now. Stop referring to the PNM with every two words that come out of your mouth. Forget us.

Mr. Tancoo: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. K. Scotland SC: We know what we have to do in order to be there, so “you do you, and we will do we, all right”? But every time you come with a Bill, before you say, “Thank you, PNM, for giving me an opportunity to be able to raise some revenue now that we are bankrupt”, you say, “No, PNM to blame”. So, what we would want to say, and we understand the compliance, we understand the backlog and the proclamation challenges that occurred, we understand, Mr. Speaker, the

statutory compliance pressures that strict AML CFT CPF mandates. We understand that. But what we do not understand is the lack of social measures or any fallback that will be put alongside or juxtaposed with this Order that will help to alleviate potential pitfalls. Mr. Speaker, having said that, having understood that this is a People's National Movement Act, I have nothing further to add.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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, my deceased father used to say, "If you have nothing to say, say nothing".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: It is advice I would like to proffer to my colleagues opposite because clearly, they came here unprepared.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: And I think it is clear that the hon. Chief Whip, Member for Arouca/Lopinot, did my friend from Port of Spain South a grave dishonour. A grave, grave injustice because clearly, clearly, he had no idea what he was talking about. Worse than that. Worse than that, Mr. Speaker, he was not paying attention. He was not paying attention to the point that his entire contribution is irrelevant.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, what I think bothers them most, what bothers them most, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that we will make sure that the country remembers

that the crisis that the country faced from 2015 to 2025, it must be bolted to the chest of those Members opposite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: So, when a Member jumps up on that side and says, “The country is broke, the country is bankrupt”. He knows what he left. He knows what they left. And, Mr. Speaker, the irony of the fact is—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo:—the irony of the fact is that they have been singing that song since last year. They told this country that this country could not be governed. We were bankrupt. People were not going to get anything. Everything was going to collapse like Chicken Licken running left, right and centre, saying the sky is falling.

I want to remind people, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind people of what that very said Member was encouraging and suggesting that Trinidadians do. That very said Member in partnership with his colleague from Diego Martin North/East, the former, former Minister of Finance, who was gleefully raising the price of fuel, Mr. Speaker, to the average citizens, not once, not twice but multiple times—and then this very said Member, who now cares about people, was recommending that people go back to riding bikes. Riding bicycles.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: You would recall, Mr. Speaker, it is in the public domain, that I challenged the hon. Member then, to ride a bike and come to Parliament with it and park it outside.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: All the talk is talk, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, Mr. Speaker.

Sen. Jeremie SC: The Chief Whip is— *[Inaudible]*.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Yeah, yeah, correct, correct. That is what they wanted. The Chief Whip, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, was telling people, “No macaroni pie”. “Doh go to cinema.” They want people to suffer.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. D. Tancoo: They want this country—Mr. Speaker, I said it on the last occasion, and I repeat it today, Mr. Speaker, it is my personal view that this is the most unpatriotic bunch of Members opposite that this country has ever had.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, 48(6). 48(6), once again the Member is imputing improper motives, saying us on this side, we are unpatriotic, and we reject that claim fully.

Mr. Speaker: I think it is being used with a degree of artistic licence.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

2.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (ALCOHOL, CANNABIS,
DANGEROUS DRUGS, GAMBLING AND TOBACCO) BILL, 2026**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Dangerous Drugs Act, Chap. 11:25, the Registration of Clubs Act, Chap. 21:01, the Tobacco Control Act, Chap. 30:04, the Children Act, Chap. 46:01, the Liquor Licences Act, Chap. 84:10, the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act, No. 8 of 2021, and the

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Cannabis Control Act, No. 10 of 2022; and to provide for related matters be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin with some introductory remarks on the importance of the legislative reform that we are about to make this afternoon. The responsibility of government is to confront the harms that we know, to recognize foreseeable risks, to listen carefully to evidence, and where harm can reasonably be prevented, to act before the consequences become more difficult to reverse. It is a duty fixed on the Parliament at section 53 of the Constitution to enact laws for the peace, order and good government of the country. We, on this side, take that responsibility very seriously.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Today, we ask and answer a simple question: At what point should the law place certain choices within or without the reach of our young persons? And when the evidence tells us that age matters, that early exposure to alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, and gambling can increase the likelihood of dependence, harmful patterns of use, injury, or other lasting consequences, our duty, as legislators, is to act. That we propose to do. Data obtained from the United Nations Population Fund for 2025 estimates the population of Trinidad and Tobago at 1.5 million. Based on those projections, 19 per cent of our population, amounting to an estimated 285,000 individuals, fall within the critical age group of 10 to 24.

This demographic is facing an unprecedented convergence of public health challenges, ranging from the escalating incidence of chronic non-communicable diseases and mental health crises. They impact, often, our most vulnerable

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communities. We cannot, on this side, sit idly by while nearly one-fifth of our nation's human capital is compromised.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to state that the policy intent of this administration is not confined to the protection of minors, adolescents, or youth, as traditionally defined. We are equally attentive to a critical developmental stage recognized in contemporary academic thought as emerging adulthood, spanning the ages of 18 to 25. This period, though legally within the age of majority in this and in many jurisdictions, is characterized by continuing biological and psychological development, which materially influences judgment, decision-making, and long-term well-being.

Literature identifies five defining features of this stage, namely exploration, instability, self-focus, the sense of being in between, and a heightened perception of, sometimes, unrealistic and undeveloped possibilities. It is during this phase that young adults are particularly susceptible to behaviours and influences, which may cause mental, physical, and economic harm. The fact is that alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and gambling are not ordinary commodities or ordinary activities. They are subject to regulation precisely because they carry risks that extend beyond the immediate.

The question, therefore, is not whether an 18-year-old is an adult. The question is whether reaching adulthood, the age of majority, by definition, confers an automatic, identical, legal entitlement to every substance and every activity that society regulates? Our law already recognizes that it does not. I will treat first with alcohol. First the evidence; the evidence on alcohol is substantial. The World Health Organization's Global status report on alcohol and health and treatment of

substance use disorders published in June of 2024 states, and quote:

“In 2019, the prevalence of alcohol consumption among 15–19-year-olds was unacceptably high worldwide (22%), with very little gender difference and a tendency of increase from initially low levels in some regions...

The global burden of disease and injuries caused by alcohol consumption can be quantified for 31 health conditions on the basis of the available scientific evidence for the role of alcohol use in their development, occurrence and outcomes.”

They went on:

“Worldwide, 2.6 million deaths...”—are—“...attributable to alcohol consumption in 2019, representing 4.7% of all deaths in that year...

Globally, an estimated 400 million people, or 7% of the world’s population aged 15 years and older, live with alcohol use disorders, and an estimated 209 million (3.7% of the adult world population) live with alcohol dependence, with substantial differences in the numbers of people affected in different WHO regions.”

The WHO documents that 724,000 alcohol-related deaths resulted from injuries, including those arising from road crashes, self-harm, and interpersonal violence. That description is stark; it states, unsurprisingly, that alcohol is, and I quote:

“...a psychoactive and toxic substance that can cause dependence.”

It further reports that:

“...the highest proportion...of alcohol-attributable deaths...”—13 per cent occurred—“...among people”—between the ages of—“...20 and 39

years...”—of age.

And that the consequences are not confined to the persons consuming the alcohol.

They estimate that approximately 298,000 people died directly as a consequence of road crashes, of which 156,000 were caused by someone else’s drinking. Closer to home, the Pan American Health Organization’s Health in the Americas, Trinidad and Tobago country profile of 2024 records that non-communicable diseases accounted for 82.7 per cent of deaths in Trinidad in 2019. That statistic does not mean that alcohol or any single substance explains our national NCD burden. But both the WHO and PAHO say that there is a link between alcohol use and the NCDs.

It does, however, remind us of the importance of addressing preventable and modifiable risk before harmful patterns can become established. The 2024 PAHO STEPS Survey, which measures the prevalence of risk factors associated with NCDs in the population, sampled 4, 052 adults, ages between 18 and 69. The results revealed concerning trends in lifestyle habits and health outcomes, which might significantly impact public health. Notably, there was a sharp rise in alcohol consumption over their last reporting period. It increased from 40.6 per cent, in a similar survey conducted in 2011, to 51.5 per cent in 2024.

In terms of tobacco use, 21.3 per cent of the population, they say, smoked tobacco. Mr. Speaker, perhaps most alarming was the finding that in the age group 18 to 44, a category which many described in the literature to be prime adulthood, 28.4 per cent had three or more risk factors for developing NCDs. The experience of other jurisdictions provides useful evidence of how governments have approached the responsibility of treating with age limits, that is to say, the age of

majority, and defining specific limits with respect to substances and activities.

2.30 p.m.

In the United States, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's May 2024 Report—they published a report: “Why a Minimum Legal Drinking Age of 21 Works”. It states plainly that establishing a higher legal age reduces the incidents—especially among young people—from alcohol-related crime. Sorry, I have been speaking of crime incessantly these days. So that is alcohol-related harm. The CDC reports that after the national minimum age of 21 was established in the United States for alcohol—they raised their limit; the age of majority is 18, but for alcohol it is 21—they saw a 16 per cent reduction in motor vehicle crashes. The report went on to say that:

“About 4,000 people under the age of 21 die in the”—US—“every year from excessive drinking”—still—“either directly or indirectly.”

Now, the Law Reform Commission has done some research. and in tiny Lithuania, they say that the Civil Code provides for an age of majority of 18, but they too have raised the minimum legal age for purchasing alcohol from 18 to 20 as part of a wider package of alcohol-control measures. The World Health Organization describes that package as including increased excise taxes, restrictions on retail hours, and a near-total advertising ban.

Sri Lanka provides another example. They have placed the legal purchase age for alcohol and nicotine at 21, notwithstanding the fact that the Age of Majority Act defines the age of majority as 18. In August of 2026, the World Health Organization reported that Sri Lanka's National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol Act of 2006 had set the minimum legal purchase age at 21, and that that

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was among the highest in the world. But they have done so as part of a broader framework aimed at addressing alcohol control, non-communicable diseases, road safety, and the protection of children and adolescents. Now, I pause here to say that that 21-year limit, which is invoked in Sri Lanka and the US is perhaps what we seek to move the House on this afternoon.

The data on tobacco and gambling; that data is equally compelling. The same principle can be seen in tobacco control. The underlying evidence is incontrovertible. According to the American Cancer Society:

“Anyone who starts using tobacco can become addicted to nicotine...”—which is—“...the addictive substance...”—I am told—“...in tobacco products. But the younger you are when you begin using, the more likely you are to become addicted. This is because the brains of young people are still developing. It’s easier for them to become dependent...”

“Nearly 9 out of 10 adults who use tobacco started before age 18.”

This is the American Cancer Society.

“Almost all started by age 26

“8 in 10 who start using tobacco as youth or young adults will continue smoking in adulthood.”

Research published by the ACS, the American Cancer Society, found that people who were currently smoking were three times more likely to die from cancer to those who never smoked. They also found that smoking accounted for 75 per cent of deaths from cancer among those who started smoking when they were younger than age 10, and 59 per cent of deaths from cancer among those who started smoking when they were age 21. Broadly speaking, among people who

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were currently smoking, among 70 per cent of deaths from cancer, 60 per cent of deaths from heart disease, and more than 90 per cent of deaths from lower respiratory disease were attributable to smoking.

Now, all of this is important because, critically for us today, people who delayed smoking until adulthood had a greatly reduced risk of dying from cancer compared with those who began at younger ages, while making clear that beginning at 21 or older does not eliminate the risk.

Now, other countries have also raised the minimum legal age for tobacco. Singapore progressively raised their minimum legal age for tobacco from 18 to 19 in 2019, 20 in 2020, and to 21 in 2021. Its Ministry of Health explained that raising the minimum legal age is part of Singapore's ongoing efforts to reduce smoking prevalence. It aims, they say, at preventing youth from picking up smoking by limiting access to tobacco products. Then there is the United States.

The federal minimum legal sales age for all tobacco and nicotine products in the US is 21, and that was fixed in or about December of 2019, when the US President signed legislation amending the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of its 21 US Code Chap. 9, and that raised the federal minimum age from 18 to 21. The legislation is known as Tobacco 21. It became effective immediately, and since then, it has been illegal for a retailer to sell any tobacco product, including e-cigarettes, to anyone under 21. Recently:

“In August 2024, the FDA issued a final rule entitled: ‘Prohibition of Sale of Tobacco Products to Persons Younger than 21 Years of Age.’ As outlined in the final rule, beginning Sept. 30 2024, retailers must use a photo ID to

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verify the age of anyone under the age of 30 trying to purchase cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, and covered tobacco products...”

Also, Mr. Speaker, is a recent development in the United Kingdom. On the 29th of April this year, the UK enacted a Tobacco and Vapes Act of 2026, which essentially stated that it is illegal to sell a tobacco product, a herbal smoking product, or cigarette paper to any person across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland born on or after 1 January 2009. In effect, what they have done is to legislate for the creation of a smoke-free generation. It ensures that, in a very short period of time, the UK is going to be smoke-free.

Cannabis requires a similarly careful but distinct analysis. In writing about cannabis and brain health, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention stated that:

“Developing brains, such as those in babies, children, teenagers, are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of cannabis...because the brain is continuing to develop until around age 25.”

That is what that report stated.

Now, the Canadians offered a different model. There was a federal system, and they allowed states. The federal system set the minimum standard. States were allowed to impose standards which were greater than. In Quebec, the age that was struck upon was 21.

Now, we have in the Caribbean a CARICOM report that we must look at. In 2014, CARICOM established a regional commission on marijuana. It was to examine the social, economic, health, and legal implications of marijuana use, and possible approaches to law reform across the community. Its findings were

subsequently considered by Heads, and at the 39th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads in Montego Bay, in 2018, the Commission's report specifically addressed the social and developmental impact of marijuana use among adolescents and youth.

In their report “Waiting to Exhale - Safeguarding our future through Responsible Socio-Legal Policy on Marijuana”, they noted that:

“...the average age of initiation to cannabis...in the Caribbean...”—was approximately—“...13 years...”

The Commission stated that:

“The adolescent brain is in a stage of critical development...”—at that time.

It is particularly—“...susceptible to the effects of marijuana....”

When the matter was considered by the 39th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads, the following statement was reported. The conference said:

We note “...conclusive evidence exists”—indicating—“ the negative effect of marijuana on the adolescent brain”—infant birth, weight, and on—“driving. Consequently, cannabis/marijuana use”—before the age of 24 was—“not recommended...as it may affect memory, learning and attention and it may put youth at risk for early onset of psychosis.”

Mr. Speaker, the House would note that in the legislation that we have put this before the House today, we have roughly followed the CARICOM age model. That is, insofar as cannabis is concerned.

I turn finally to gambling. Gambling represents a different form of risk. It is not a substance but the consequences of harmful gambling can extend well beyond

persons placing bets. In its December 2024 gambling fact sheet, the World Health Organisation stated that gambling can lead to, and I quote:

“...financial stress...” “...relationship breakdown...” “...family violence...”

“...mental illness and suicide...” and warns that:

“...the legacy of gambling harm can endure throughout one’s life and transmit intergenerationally...”

We on this side accept that, and we accept the evidence which has been put forward to suggest that gambling is something that we ought also to consider regulating very heavily.

2.45 p.m.

We have looked again at the position in other jurisdictions. In Georgia, Georgian citizens who attain the age of majority at 18, are prohibited under 25 from entering gambling establishments, to gamble or to participate in gambling, including electronically organized gambling. Now, I should like to take us now to a clause-by-clause analysis of the Bill. The Bill is only nine clauses. There are some amendments coming. I am moving an amendment to include vaping.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am also moving an amendment to require the use of IDs, identifications, in respect of the purchase of tobacco, in respect of possession of cannabis, in respect of entry into gambling establishments, and in respect of the purchase of alcohol.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Mr. Speaker, Clauses 1 and 2 provide for the usual preliminary matters, the short title and the commencement provisions. Clause 3

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seeks to amend the Dangerous Drugs Act, to provide that a person over the age of 25, who is in possession of cannabis, in permissible quantities, or cultivates not more than four growing plants of the genus of cannabis, will not be determined to be in possession of a dangerous drug. That is over the age of 25. Of course, you determine that with the amendments by the use of an ID.

At the same time, penalties are to be increased for contravention of specified provisions of Part II of the Act, including smoking or using cannabis or cannabis resin in a public space, engaging in acts which constitute negligence or professional misconduct whilst under the influence of cannabis, and possession of cannabis or cannabis resin on school buses, premises where children are present for educational purposes, or any sporting or cultural activity. Provision is also made for the issuance of a fixed penalty notice by a police officer where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a person under the age of 25 has committed an offence under the specified sections.

Clause 4 of the Bill would amend the Registration of Clubs Act, to prohibit membership in clubs by persons under the age of 25, save where the club is primarily devoted to some athletic purpose, and to bar gambling by this cohort of persons on club premises. Additionally, the general penalty under the Act, where none is specified, is to be increased.

Clause 5 of the Bill would amend the Tobacco Control Act, to raise the minimum age for the sale and possession of tobacco products to 21, consistent with the global trends that I have identified, to require clear signage of that prohibition, and to permit the sale of individual units of smoked tobacco products only to persons over the age of 21. The penalties for contravention of various sections of

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the Act are to be increased. Where offences may be tried summarily, fixed penalty notices may be issued.

Clause 6 of the Bill would amend the Children Act, to strengthen the penalties applicable to those persons who expose children to dangerous drugs. It is a significant amendment which would criminalize the possession or use of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, or other dangerous drugs by children from the age of 10. It is further proposed that new provisions be inserted to extend criminal liability to persons between the ages of 18 to 21, in respect of the use or possession of alcohol or tobacco; and to persons between the ages of 18 to 25, in respect of the use or possession of cannabis or dangerous drugs. Where offences may be tried summarily, fixed penalty notices may be issued. A new section is to be inserted, which would enable the Minister to make regulations for giving effect to the purposes of the Act.

Clause 7 of the Bill would amend the Liquor Licences Act, to prohibit persons under the age of 25 from engaging in amusement game activities on licensed premises, or from being on that part of the premises where amusement games are conducted. It is further proposed, inter alia, that the penalties for the unlawful sale of intoxicating liquor, the sale of intoxicating liquor to persons under the age of 21, and the use of children in the purchase or delivery of alcohol be increased. It will also be an offence to permit children to be on premises where intoxicating liquor is sold or consumed. Provision is also made for the issuance of a fixed penalty notice by a police officer, again, where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a person under the age of 25 has committed an offence under specified circumstances.

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Clause 8 amends the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act of 2021, to prohibit gambling by a person under the age of 25, to increase penalties for failure to post and maintain required signage, and to criminalize, inviting, causing or permitting a person under the age of 25 to gamble or to enter gambling premises. It is proposed that persons who contravene specified provisions of the Act will be subject to a prescribed fixed penalty system.

Clause 9 of the Bill would amend the Cannabis Control Act, that is Act No. 10 of 2022, to increase the penalty for the unauthorized use of medicinal cannabis, to provide that a sacramental dispensary shall only dispense to a person over the age of 25, and to prohibit the dispensing of cannabis to a person under the age of 25 at a place of worship, a sacramental dispensary or an exempt event. It is proposed that persons who contravene specified provisions of the Act will be subject to a prescribed fixed penalty system.

In sum, Mr. Speaker, the clauses of the Bill before this House collectively advance a coherent policy aimed at safeguarding not just minors, but young adults, strengthening public health protections, and ensuring that penalties under the Act are commensurate with the gravity of the offences committed. Now, I should like to put on the *Hansard* that we have considered the constitutionality of the proposed Act. Of course, colleagues would have looked at the cases of *Suratt* and *Suraj*, I believe quite recently, in respect of the legislation that we passed a week ago.

We say that the measures which are contained in the Act are necessary, that they are proportionate, and that they satisfy legitimate aims in keeping with the standards which are proposed by the jurisprudence emanating from the highest court in *Suratt* and *Suraj*, and its progeny. Now, Mr. President, on this side—

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Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am sorry. Thank you, Diego Martin North/East. Mr. Speaker, on this side, we reiterate that we are mindful that freedom, and the freedoms that each of us enjoys, must always be balanced with responsibility, the enjoyment of alcohol, the smoking of tobacco, gambling, when exercised responsibly. These are legitimate choices, yet those choices must never jeopardize the well-being of our young people or compromise public safety.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: In this regard, we say, the measures proposed are firmly grounded in the overriding public interest, proportionate to the challenges we face as a society, and necessary to secure the welfare of our nation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: The Bill, therefore, is not merely a legislative adjustment, it is a declaration of principle that Trinidad and Tobago will act decisively to protect its young people, to strengthen its communities, and to uphold the values of responsibility and care that bind us together as a people. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hans Des Vignes (Diego Martin West): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying it on record, this entire House stands together, and we are united on the fact that alcohol abuse destroys lives, gambling can devastate individuals and their families,

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marijuana and drug dependency also destroys lives, and tobacco addiction can cause enormous harm. We are united on that. So, this debate is not about whether we should protect our young people, we know we should. The Attorney General says, “We take it very seriously”. “The Government takes it very seriously”, but if you took it very seriously, Attorney General, we would not have had this legislation circulated less than 48 hours ago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Also, we would have had consultations with those that this would affect.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: There is something very clear to me, Mr. Speaker, and I am not being ageist, but I am looking at the reality. On the other side, the person that is moving this Motion is the person that this least affects, because they are not in the age group, or even near to the age group that this is affecting.

This is not something that is going to affect him and his livelihood. There are no consultations that have been done with those between the ages of 18 to 24. The young people who this affects do not have a voice in this legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Until we, the Opposition, speak, now they shall have a voice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3.00 p.m.

Mr. H. Des Vignes:

The purpose of these amendments...”
—let us get into it:

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“...to raise the minimum age for the sale, purchase, possession or consumption of intoxicating liquor or tobacco to twenty-one; and the minimum age for the sale, purchase, possession or consumption of cannabis to twenty-five, respectively. Additionally, the minimum permissible age in respect of gambling will be raised to twenty-five.”

Now, that is particularly important because this Bill creates what is effectively a new ladder of adulthood in Trinidad and Tobago in a lot of ways. Let us be honest, at 18, a citizen can vote. There probably are the ones who have most of us in this Chamber. At 18, I can get married. At 18, I can join the defence force, I can join the police force, I can protect and defend my country, and even die for my country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Yet, what this seeks to do is tell me at 18, I cannot be trusted as to my decisions on taking a drink of alcohol. That is not consistent in terms of legislation. Quite frankly, it is actually absurd.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: This is all done with those on the other side showing the idea of their love and care for the children of Trinidad and Tobago, and their fear of gambling addiction. But it does not miss us on this side that those on the other side were the ones that added NLCB draws to Sunday.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Those are the ones that defended child marriage.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Those are the ones that even have Members in the Senate who were on videos with plant-like substances.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So, I also want to put on record that at the last minute, even further, the Minister of Finance came to the Parliament with a Motion less than two hours ago to implement, regularize, take care of online gambling. Let us understand that online gambling is actually the most addictive and most dangerous form of gambling, and that is what he came to the Parliament with today.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So, how can this Government come here and tell us that they care so much about the children, they care so much about gambling regulation and dealing with gambling and making the public not get addicted to gambling, they care about marijuana use, they care about cigarette use, and they care about alcohol usage in a big way? Why are the young people not engaged? Just look at it. At 18, all these things I can do for my country, but I cannot decide in terms of whether or not I have a drink? Basdeo Panday said it best, “You cannot be half pregnant.” Either I am an adult or not an adult.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So, another question I ask: Is this for genuine protection of our children, or is it to pander to some outside source that thinks Trinidad and Tobago’s society should be a certain way? We have our culture in Trinidad and Tobago, and we hold very strong to it.

Mr. Speaker, comparative experience also matters, particularly for a Caribbean country like ours that wants to attract visitors, events and, yes, investments. I would caution pretending that every Caribbean jurisdiction takes precisely the same approach. We do not. Legal ages vary.

However, when we look at the legal age for consumption of alcohol in Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Cuba, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, it is actually 16. It is 18 in Saint Lucia, Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, USVI, Saint Kitts and Nevis. When you look at gambling in all other islands, the age is 18, with the exception of Turks and Caicos and the USVI, where the limit is 21. What we are proposing here is 25 years for gambling and marijuana. If Trinidad and Tobago intends to move beyond the regulatory position adopted by several competing Caribbean destinations, what assessment has really been undertaken on that decision? The Attorney General presented no local evidence. Quite frankly, it is something that was blatant, and we noticed it. It clear. No local evidence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: My point about the other Caribbean destinations is tourism does not operate in a vacuum. People choose destinations to party, beaches, hotels, yes, but also because of the nightlife, the Carnival-like culture, the entertainment, the restaurants, the festivals, casinos, sporting events and the social experience of the destination. That does not mean that tourism interest overrides public health. It does not. It does not. But what it does mean is that Government changes the rules governing part of that experience, it affects the tourism product. The Government has to understand the consequences of this. Has Tourism Trinidad been consulted at all? Has the events sector been consulted? The Promoters Association? Has the hospitality industry been consulted at all? Has the Government asserted whether these measures affect those choosing Trinidad and Tobago as a destination, especially among our young visitors who come from other islands? Why would I

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go somewhere to vacation, Mr. Speaker, to relax, to release, to be free, where I have less freedoms than the place I am coming from?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So, again, the Government has not done the work, but we will put what we need to put forward once again. Public health and tourism are not competing responsibilities of the State, but much like other legislation that the Government brought, we know what they are going to do. “Dey going an’ come here and say, dis is wa it is, even though we submitting amendments. If allyuh doh like it, rock so”. That is what they are going to come with. But you know what? We are speaking on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, in preparation for today, I came across a term “salami tactics”. Let us talk about this just for a little bit. Mr. Speaker, I see you are quite intrigued by that term. Autocratic leaders often implement restrictive measures one small piece at a time, like slicing salami. No single change seems too drastic enough to trigger a mass uprising or anything big, but the accumulated effect destroys economic and democratic safeguards.

Let us look at what we are, and where we are now, from rolling states of emergency, to the Special Operations Bill, to raising fines in the dead of the night, to cutting youth programmes, heavy criticism of the Law Association, silencing and criticizing the Independent Senators. Any time anybody has a difference in opinion, they are, all of a sudden, evil.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: And, yes, I know the Government and Members on that

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Bench would say, “Oh, those on the Opposition dey promoting alcoholism.” No, it is not that. We are questioning what is in front of us. That is our job. We are not just opposing for opposing’s sake. We are asking the relevant questions and we are looking at the way it affects society.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So, again, these salami tactics on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the small tactics that happen over, and over, and over, slice by slice, digging into the population, we see it. This legislation here that is being brought, this Bill, listen, just because “de roof is damaged, we doh need to destroy de whole house”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So, much like the Attorney General did, I am going to look at the substance of the Bill just a little bit. Clauses 1 and 2, short title and commencement by proclamation—title, clause. Again, an omnibus approach, seven Acts, commencement by proclamation with no transition plan, which is quite reckless, if you ask me. Businesses, clubs, bars, gaming operators, we want to know what the time period is for them to change the signage. Is it immediate criminal liability as soon as this legislation is passed? Will you publish the regulations and the guidelines? What would it be?

Now, clause 3: In 2019, this country took a very important step forward to decriminalize small amounts of cannabis. Clause 3 of the Bill now says that protection only applies if you are over 25. So, a 24-year-old who had 30 grammes in his home, who yesterday was protected by decriminalization, can now be brought with an offence on a fixed penalty regime with substantial fines and

conviction. We knew what this meant at the point in time when the PNM this to the Parliament in 2019. We knew a lot of young men would not have to go through carrying this on their criminal record for their entire lives.

Another point with reference to clause 3 and the point about marijuana use: When we look at it, the ability in Trinidad and Tobago to practise your religion should always be held sacrosanct; always, especially for adults.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: What this clause does now is make it illegal for a Rastafarian between the ages of 18 to 24 to fully practise their religion freely. Thus, in this modern era, Mr. Speaker, at 24 years old, not being able to completely practise my religion freely, I say, “fire fuh dat”—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes:—added to which, the penalty for the young person is TT \$500,000 or rehabilitation.

Now, the rehabilitation or the fine, it immediately creates a separation in society where some people can afford to pay it and some people cannot. Also, with reference to the rehabilitation, it is non-specific. We are not talking about, who has to pay for it, how does one access it, where are the registered and approved areas for rehabilitation, who supplies the psychologists. We do not know any of those details at all. Particularly for Tobago—it is actually concrete for Tobago because the 2026 OAS diagnostic reports that there is no residential treatment facility in Tobago. So, how it affects Tobago is also a question that, again, you know, the Government did not take into consideration.

The immediate contest procedure also takes an awkward route. A person

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must first pay or elect a programme they have not begun. We want you all to give every recipient a clear route to contest without paying first or navigating a programme election. A system intended to rehabilitate young people must not inadvertently create one route for those who could pay and those who cannot. There are serious injustices in terms of that clause, clause 3.

Moving on to clause 4. Clause 4 amends the Registration of the Clubs Act Chap. 21:01. Again, it raises the age for club membership from 21, and 18 for students, to 25 years. Unless the club is primarily athletic, then under 25 can be a member, but you cannot gamble on the premises. It raises the general penalty from \$10,000 to \$50,000. Let us think about that, Mr. Speaker, five times the amount, a penalty is being raised here for the members' clubs. Think about it. A 24-year-old doctor, lawyer, accountant, architect, construction worker, you are telling them they cannot join a club? What are we really speaking about, Mr. Speaker? We are in a situation where we are telling the young people of Trinidad and Tobago that we do not trust them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Even from the perspective of myself, a practising Roman Catholic, I will say, I am not one who drinks a lot. I did not smoke anything in my entire life. I am not a smoker.

Mr. Alexander: "Waaaay".

Mr. H. Des Vignes: I am not a smoker. I am not a smoker. You know that, Tunapuna. Tunapuna, you know that.

Mr. Sturge: "We thought you high everyday".

Mr. H. Des Vignes: You thought I—

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Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Toco/Sangre Grande, unlike you, I am high on life, bro.

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

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So, what has happened to me, and to most young people, is we have exercised choice. We have exercised choice through our mentorship, through our training, through our development. If we want to fix most of these problems that this Bill is trying to remedy, I will take you back a little bit, Mr. Speaker.

There was a campaign some time ago, where the Ministry of Health and all of the relevant state agencies, through the National AIDS Coordinating Committee, they ran the “Got It? Get It” campaign. What that did, because of the conversations around it, we were able to reduce the spread of HIV in Trinidad and Tobago. Even growing up, we had this campaign that said, “Get High. Get Stupid. Get AIDS”. That is something that stuck with an entire generation. What we have here and what our problem is, and the solution to our problem is, is not just a Bill and moving the age. It is education and mentorship.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: If you really wanted to fix these problems, Mr. Speaker, let us be honest, we would be focusing on public education. We would be focusing on providing support for students in schools and support for their parents.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: If we wanted to fix these problems, greater focus on not removing programmes that push mentorship, like the MPower Programme, like the 40 Under 40 that went into schools, like the CCC that Bunji Garlin said changed

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his life, like MiLAT that took young men and put them in a disciplined environment—

Mr. H. Des Vignes:—and we would never be talking about the investment required for MiLAT. We would never, ever be talking about that. I see the Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services is going to implement a programme similar to MPower very soon. I commend her for that because that is part of the solution to fixing these problems that are in front of us.

So, moving to clause 5 now. You know, what is interesting, Mr. Speaker? Through the Attorney General's presentation, he himself said it, most of these habits start before 18. So, what does changing the age really do? Ask yourself that, Attorney General. Penalty for selling tobacco to underage raised from \$10,000 and six months to \$150,000 and three years. Again, a massive jump, 15 times. A person under 21 who contravenes section 12 commits an offence liable to \$50,000. Imagine that. Right now, I could smoke a cigarette as a 19/20 year-old—

Mr. Lee: “You doh smoke”.

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Not me, Caroni Central. “Yuh smarter than dat”.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: You can smoke a cigarette as a 19/20 year-old, and you are telling me, as soon as this comes into Act, that person is now liable to a fine of \$50,000? That does not add up, Mr. Speaker.

Sections 13 and 17A raise the legal age for sale of tobacco from 18 to 21. Signage must say, “21”. Again, for a lot of these small shops, this is going to affect the small shops in different communities because they are going to find it a little more difficult to get things done and really abide by these regulations. Section 13

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also applies a fixed penalty system, section 37A to 37E, under 21, and regulation 10, the fine for display breach raised from \$500 to \$100,000. Mr. Speaker, you are telling me \$100,000 because I do not have up a sign? That is draconian.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Again, in this particular clause, victim becomes offender. The current law punishes the seller. Now, you punish the 18 to 20 year-old smoker with \$50,000. This is public health by criminalization. Massive penalty hike, with no proportionality, \$500 to \$100 000, and the fixed penalty trap, 18 to 20. An 18-year-old legal adult, working, paying tax, now gets a criminal record for possessing a cigarette. Not even if they smoke it. They just have. They might be carrying it for somebody. They are now a criminal. They now are subject to a big fine. Mr. Speaker, \$50,000? It is quite ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. Again, I go back to saying, if it was really about fixing the problem, the focus would not be on moving the age. It would be on education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: If you want to see how grievous this piece of legislation in front of us is, look no further than clause 6. Criminalizing our children, instead of protecting them. Let me break it down for you, Mr. Speaker. Under the proposed amendment to section 38 of the Children Act, a child under the age of 10 who is found in the specified circumstances involving alcohol, tobacco, cannabis or dangerous drugs can commit an offence carrying a fine of \$50,000 on summary conviction. Mr. Speaker, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14-year-olds, where are they getting \$50,000 from?

Mr. Alexander: “What dey doing with it?”

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Mr. H. Des Vignes: Where? Where are they getting \$50,000 from? And—oh, I love the way you speak there, my colleague on the other side. What we always need to remember is a child in these scenarios is a victim. A child is a victim and not a criminal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: But I understand why the Member for Tunapuna gets antsy because he himself loves to criminalize the children of Trinidad and Tobago. I know that. I have heard him many times before, back when he was doing his programmes, always—

Mr. Sturge: 48(6).

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Diego Martin West, change course on that a little.

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Sorry for bringing that to the Parliament.

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, 48(6). That cannot be allowed to remain on the public record. So please ask the Member to withdraw and apologize.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Well, I thought that that is what he was going to do. “Loves to criminalize children”, you could say that in a different way, you know. You could convey the same idea in a totally different way except that kind of statement. So, withdraw it, please.

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker, no problem. A 10-year-old with a drug problem does not have \$50,000. Let us understand that, Mr. Speaker. That is

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my point. The child has a protection problem.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: We must ask ourselves, Mr. Speaker, does this violate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the legal principle of *doli incapax* and basic decency, for us as a society to criminalize a child, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 , \$50,000? That is the part that is extremely scary. What makes this even scarier is this: Parents are not required to be present at the time of issuance under section 38C(2). So, in other words, this child can be dealt this, with no parent present. Just think about that.

So, for clause 6, however, there is something that we can agree on because there are harsh penalties for exposing children to dangerous drugs. Section 35, exposing a child to dangerous drugs, \$30,000, plus 27 months, becomes \$3 million and 15 years. Section 35B if a child suffers harm, 15 years becomes \$5 million and 30 years. Section 36, giving a child dangerous drugs, \$180,000 becomes \$3 million; \$300,000 becomes \$5million. Section 37, using a child to sell, buy, deliver drugs, \$300,000 becomes \$3 million, and \$600,000 becomes \$5 million. We understand that, Attorney General, and I, as a young Member, respect that because those criminals that use young people in this way should be penalized harshly. But even these increases, sometimes the question is: Are they really deterrents in communities?

Let us go to clause 7. Clause 7 amends the Liquor Licences Act, Chap. 84:10. Premises with amusement games: The owner must not permit under 25 to be on part of the premises or engaged in the amusement games on the premises. Selling liquor without a licence or selling so it may be unlawfully consumed: The

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penalty has been increased. The licence-holder: Where under 25 is found gambling on retail liquor premises, the penalty is increased.

Now, let us bring that to our current reality. If a bar has an amusement game, a dart board, a game machine, the licence-holder must now ensure that no person under 25 enters that part of the facility of the premises? Clause 8, when we look forward, requires all gaming premises to post the signs other than a racetrack, and now, when we look at it, the 24-year-old who is there to celebrate a birthday, to just be there around his friends, now commits an offence himself just by being present—

Mr. Alexander: Choose somewhere else.

Mr. H. Des Vignes:—in that place? “Choose somewhere else.” That is not how it works.

Mr. Speaker, also, who will enforce this? Does the Government have inspectors for every bar in Diego Martin, every one in San Fernando, Tunapuna, Barataria, San Juan, Caroni Central? We do not. What you are basically doing is criminalizing the rum shops, you will criminalize small game shop operators and you will make every young adult a potential criminal for liming with their friends.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: But again, what the reality is, there has been no consultation or discussion with the young people that this actually affects.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: The AG brought some statistics and some information to the Parliament, but let me ground us in evidence and—2025, very recent evidence. The Pan American Health Organization reports that:

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“Alcohol...is a contributing factor in more than 300,000...deaths annually in the region of the Americas.”

Approximately 5.5 per cent of all deaths.

A WHO study examining mortality data across 30 countries also found:

“An average of 85,032 deaths...annually that were solely attributable to alcohol.

...64.9%”—of those deaths—“occurred...”—among people under—
“...60...”—years of age.

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have less than a minute again, unless you want your 15 minutes.

Mr. H. Des Vignes: I would love my extra time, please, Mr. Speaker,

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Nobody on this side, Mr. Speaker, is suggesting that alcohol-related harm is not a public health issue. We know it is. All right? But the question is whether the policy before us is properly designed to achieve the outcome the Government says it wants.

When we look at alcohol availability policies in 30 selected countries, the World Health Organization found that:

“The most common minimum legal purchase age was 18 years.”

The same review found that more than half of the countries restricted hours of sale, while alcohol sales were commonly prohibited at sensitive locations, including:

“...educational facilities,”—much like they do in UWI, St. Augustine, now—“health facilities, houses of worship and sports sites.”

The World Health Organization concluded that:

“...coordinated multisectoral approach is needed to address...alcohol availability.”—effectively.

This distinction matters because the World Health Organization supports minimum age restrictions as one component of alcohol control policy, but its evidence does not establish 21 as a universal international standard. Therefore, if this Government is asking this Parliament to move Trinidad and Tobago from 18 to 21, it should place before the Parliament the local evidence supporting this threshold.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Again, WHO’s 2025 evidence specifically stresses clear and enforceable measures tailored to each country’s—and this is it. This is where it hits, the rubber meets the road for Trinidad and Tobago. It takes into account the country’s social, cultural and economic context. That should be the standard applied here, evidence enforcement, and a comprehensive public health strategy, not simply an age change on paper.

When we are talking about gambling in this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, I myself, in my past life, did many voices for the NLCB. One of the things that I remember saying many times over and over is, “Players must be 18 years and over.” Are we changing the NLCB guidelines as well? That is something that the Attorney General did not highlight, and we are still clueless about. So, is the State going to adopt the methodology that it is enforcing on all the other gambling institutions and clubs? So, is state gambling one particular age, and gambling from clubs another age? We are very unclear, and we would like to know if you now

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have to be 25 years old to play Play Whe. That is what we need to know. Simple things. Will we now be a criminal if we are 25 and we play Play Whe?

Clause 9 amends the Cannabis Control Act. Again, there is a religious freedom issue here for the Rastafarian community of Trinidad and Tobago. I know my colleagues will go deeper into these and all of the other clauses.

The Attorney General mentioned amendments and that they are bringing an amendment with vaping. We would love to hear it. We would love to see it. It has not been circulated yet, but we on this side, we understand that vaping is one of the biggest threats to people in Trinidad and Tobago, where we see people below 18 actually vaping on the streets, and it is something that we do have to enforce. But again, because there was little to no preparation, we now have to wait and see and watch and figure out the amendments as they come.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say something in terms of the way smoking habits are usually formed in our society and I know the Attorney General is from Belmont, but I know he has not, you know, he is not around as some of us younger Members of Parliament may be. What usually happens and you see it in a lot of sporting grounds where young men they gather and one person brings a cigarette, one person brings weed, or a drink and all of a sudden, you know, through peer pressure and influence they gather in a group and they become smokers. What has happened around us and we are seeing a lot of in the communities that I have been lucky enough to traverse, is these fields are no longer maintained in the way they were before because a lot of these fields, funny enough, were maintained by—

Mr. Sturge: 48(1).

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Mr. Speaker: Alright. I suppose you are going to get to the point at some point in time, right? Let us give him half a minute or so to get to the point.

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, of course, I am going to get to the point. Because what I am talking about is the culture surrounding alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use.

Mr. Marcelle: “Yuh ha’ to break it down for him”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Right. So young men used to gather in these areas by these fields, they used to play football. The field was cut, we used to have a great time, but guess what? Now, these young men are gathering in the same place, unable to use the field and you know what they are doing? They are smoking together in the corner.

And let me tell you, the Attorney General, you all mentioned clubs here, the Attorney General and so many Members on that side are so out of touch. The young men who are on the corner smoking and playing “wapee—dem not going by no club.” They are not going by the clubs, that is not where the problem lies. The problem lies around us on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: You all are not there and let me go a little bit further with reference to this legislation, something that remains unclear. Four, the young people that are working in supermarkets that sell alcohol, for the young people that are working in casinos, the young people that work in event bars, the young people that are working in circumstances here, young people that between the ages of 18 to 21, 18 to 23, 24, that may be working these events and working these places,

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they are university students, they are hardworking young people with a bright future ahead of them you are now telling them they cannot work in these places, that is the question we have.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: We do not know from this legislation what is going on, because again there has been no consultation.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: No TTMA, no Trinidad and Tobago Promoters Association, no business chamber, no beverage association, not even the Rastafarian community, nobody. Not a youth, just are they talking to themselves on that side, that is all this is.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: But, nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, let me say something, Yung Bredda from Sea Lots has a song, he says:

“Take it easy, I will do the work.”

We know they did not do the work. So guess what is going to happen, we are going to bring amendments from the MP from Sea Lots and all of Port of Spain South, he will come and bring the amendments. So we will do the work that they cannot do, as always.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, what I urge this Parliament to do today is to value and respect the views of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: We can trust them with responsibility once we equip them

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with the right tools, the right information, the right education, and the right encouragement and opportunities. And listen, Mr. Speaker, I end by quoting the words of the Minister of Finance from 12.12 p.m. today. He said:

The more you prohibit, the more you drive the activities underground.

That is what the Minister of Finance said.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Phillip Watts): Mr. Speaker, I rise to lend my full support to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol, Cannabis Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and Tobacco) Bill, 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: And at the outset, Mr. Speaker, permit me to commend the hon. Attorney General and his team, as well as all those public officers, stakeholders and

institutions who worked hard and contributed to this important piece of legislation. Mr. Speaker, this Bill is about protecting the health, welfare, dignity and future of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: Above all, Mr. Speaker, it is about protecting our children, and our young people, at a stage of life when they are developing their identity, making critical choices and laying the foundation for the adults that they will become.

This Government, led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has made it clear that national development cannot be measured only in roads, buildings, technology or financial incubators. But, Mr. Speaker, before I go forward, I want to respond to some of the things that I heard on the other side from Diego Martin West. I heard about the person who is moving the Bill is not affected by the Bill, which is a joke to me, Mr. Speaker, this is wasting our time on this side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: I heard the speaker spoke about our culture and gambling, but, Mr. Speaker, drinking and gambling is not part of our culture in Trinidad and Tobago. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, I heard the speaker raise issues on the other side about us shutting down programmes for youths and I want to tell the speaker, I did not want to touch on CCC and MiLAT and those things, but I wonder if those on the other side saw the report from MiLAT, CCC and MYPART which their Government would have done and which I would have seen last year some time, June, their Government did a report and I will urge, I hope that my colleague from Sangre Grande would have seen that report and clearly, Mr. Speaker, when I saw that report I was very much surprised and then I understood why in January they would have hired the 114 persons to work to bring in the CCC cohort that they were supposed to bring in January of 2025 and they could not bring them in.

So they had these people working from January to March, 114 persons employed with no cohort. Is it that the UNC and this Minister or Sangre Grande shut down CCC? You all tell us. Because clearly they did not know what was happening, they did not know what to do, but they hired 114 persons with no

cohort enrolled in January 2025 and they went further and renewed the contracts in March just before they realised they were going to lose the general elections and they renewed these 114 persons' contracts at the cost of the taxpayers in this country and renewed it for a next three months, from April to June. And it is when I, as the sitting line Minister, realized that, I would have asked for them to put that on halt, right and we got a lot of pushback and here they are saying today and they keep telling the people in the public domain, that the UNC and this particular Government would have shut down CCC, lie from the pits of hell.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: Even in Opposition, they continue to misguide the population—in Opposition also, too, right.

MYPART, the last time they had MYPART operational was 2021, right.

Hon. Members: What?

Hon. P. Watts: 2021.

Hon. Members: “Nah”

Hon. P. Watts: But you know what, the UNC Government shut down MYPART.

Hon. Members: “Nah man”

Hon. Member: “Yuh sure”?

Hon. P. Watts: Yes, this is what was happening. Let me touch a little bit on WRAP TT, right. WRAP TT programme, what I realized while WRAP TT was, well, still is, under my Ministry WRAP TT, they could not control WRAP TT. WRAP TT was a runaway horse. When I started to delve deep into WRAP TT, what I realized, a lot of those centres, they were pumping money into the centres, the people at the centres were buying cell phones, refrigerators, laptops, stoves.

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Hon. Members: What!

Hon. P. Watts: But once you are spending State funds, you must have an inventory of what you have, because if that is State money being spent to purchase these things, you must have an inventory, these assets are owned by the State. You have nothing like that. So what we had to do is stop WRAP TT and try to do an investigation into WRAP TT.

Now, the WRAP TT programme is a good programme, you know, but again, of course, they could not manage it, they did not know what to do. They were too busy trying to award contracts to their friends, family and girlfriends and boyfriends.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: Right. So, Mr. Speaker, even the youth camps. I would have seen a video from Persto Praesto. They would have shut down Persto Praesto for renovation, this is what they said, and I would have seen in the video a student having one of the lecturers in a headlock, on a chair, and punches to his face. They are hiding that, but I have the video as the line Minister and that matter is before the court with some of the people there.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to put this thing in the public domain about the UNC shutting down youth programmes and the UNC “doh” care about youths and whatnot. Ask them about the youth camps. What happened with El Dorado Youth Camp? Again, what they did? They awarded a contract to a contractor. They paid out the contractor the full 100 per cent of the contract sum—

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, 48(1).

Hon. Members: He is responding.

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Hon. P. Watts: I am responding. I am responding.

Mr. Speaker: You can raise the Standing Order, but it was the Member for Diego Martin West who went into great detail.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: So you see, the rules of debate are such.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you for the ruling , Mr Speaker. Excellent—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Minister, go ahead.

Hon. P. Watts: Mr. Speaker, it seems as though they cannot take the pressure. “Take it een”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: No, what I have to say to them, Mr. Speaker:

“Take it easy, I will do the work.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: We on this side will do the work, alright? Take it easy, we will manage, we will carry along.

Hon. Member: “Inch by inch”.

Hon. P. Watts: Yeah. But do not come here to misguide the population and tell the population the “UNC dis,” the UNC “doh” care about youths, you know.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, Mr. Speaker, as I said, back in 2025, the 28th of April, 2025, Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we would have consulted with them before, we would have gone out on the campaign trail, all these issues would have been raised with the people, with the youths. All the persons sitting here on this side would have met with their constituents, I, in La Horquetta would have met with the youths. I had a series of youth meetings, and

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this is why

the youths voted for me, right and they voted out “the mayor”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: And all that we are doing here would have been highlighted in the policies in our manifesto and therefore we are just rolling out what we promised the people and we are keeping those promises.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: So, Mr. Speaker, true development must also be measured, as I said before, by the health of our families, the safety of our communities, the quality of opportunities available to our young people and the extent to which the State is prepared to protect those who are most vulnerable. This is the spirit and purpose, Mr. Speaker, of this particular Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation amends seven pieces of law: The Dangerous Drugs Act; the Registration of Clubs Act; the Tobacco Control Act, the Children Act; the Liquor Licences Act; the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act and the Cannabis Control Act.

3.45 p.m.

It raises the minimum age for the sale of, purchase, possession of, consumption of alcohol and tobacco to 21 years, and establishes 25 years as a relevant threshold for cannabis and gambling. It also strengthens penalties, requires clearer safeguards and signage, and creates fixed penalties and rehabilitative options for certain specified offences, Mr. Speaker. This is not random lawmaking. This is deliberate, preventative, and protective policy, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. P. Watts: Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak to this Bill through three lenses. First, the developing mind of a young person. Second, the health of our nation and the burden of non-communicable diseases. And third, the conviction that a young person who makes a mistake deserves a way back, not a life sentence. This is not random lawmaking; this is deliberate, preventative, and protective policy, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: We are a Government that protects our citizens. Mr. Speaker, this UNC Government recognizes that young people do not develop in a vacuum. Their decisions are influenced by their home environment, their schools, their communities, social media, peer pressure, the availability of recreational facilities, the quality of mentorship around them, and the opportunities that can be accessed.

They are also affected by what society normalizes, permits, or ignores, Mr. Speaker. When alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, dangerous drugs, and gambling become easily accessible to young people, the effects can be severe and long-lasting, Mr. Speaker. It can compromise physical health, mental wellness, educational attainment, family relationships, sporting performance, employability, and overall life prospects. That is why this Government is acting, and we are acting now, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: Mr. Speaker, we cannot afford to wait until a young person becomes addicted, drops out of school, becomes involved in crime, loses a scholarship, damages a promising sporting career, or enters a cycle of despair before we decide that intervention is necessary, Mr. Speaker. A responsible

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government intervenes early o'clock. A caring government establishes clear boundaries. A visionary government creates positive alternatives, Mr. Speaker, and that is precisely what this UNC Government, under the leadership of the astute hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts:—is doing through this legislation and through its broader focus on youth development, community development, sport education, and social protection, Mr. Speaker, because, as I said, youth development matters.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I approach this Bill from the perspective of the young person in the community who is trying to find a direction. The talented athlete seeking change, the student navigating pressure, the young entrepreneurs working to build a future, and the family that wants to keep its children safe, Mr. Speaker. The simple question before us is, what kind of environment are we creating for our young people? This is the question. Are we creating an environment where a young person has access to healthy recreation, sports, mentorship, skills training, and opportunity? Or are we creating an environment in which harmful substances, underage drinking and gambling, are allowed to become normal features of youth life?

Mr. Speaker, the answer must be crystal clear. We must choose protection over neglect, prevention over regret, and opportunity over exploitation. As Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I understand that sport is not merely recreation. Sport is a vehicle for discipline, character building, health, national unity, and social mobility. On the field of football, the cricket pitch, the basketball court, the swimming pool, the athletic track, and in every community, sporting

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space. Young people learn values that serve them throughout their lives, Mr. Speaker, discipline, commitment, respect and rules, teamwork, leadership, resilience, and the importance of hard work.

Sport gives a young person somewhere to belong. It gives them a reason to strive. It gives them positive role models. It can provide pathways to scholarship, employment, national representation, and international opportunities, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, sport cannot fulfil that role effectively where young people are being pulled toward harmful substances, addiction, impaired judgment, and gambling.

A young athlete cannot perform at his/her highest level while struggling with substance use, Mr. Speaker. A young person cannot train consistently, compete confidently, or pursue excellence while their health and judgment are being compromised, Mr. Speaker. A youth programme cannot achieve its objectives if harmful influences are allowed to take root without meaningful national response. This is why this Bill is not only a matter for law enforcement or public health. It is a youth development Bill. It is a family protection Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: It is a community safety Bill—and it is a national development Bill, Mr. Speaker. We are also protecting and developing minds, Mr. Speaker.

Let me begin with the science. Adolescence and early childhood are not a waiting room for adulthood. They are a period of intense brain development. Research summarized by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation indicates that: alcohol can affect the developing brain up to around the age of 25—we would have heard the AG speak about that before, right—with severe and lasting consequences for

“...attention, memory, and decision-making...”.

A systematic review prepared for the Health Council of the Netherlands Research has a similar conclusion, Mr. Speaker. There are indications that alcohol harms brain development in young people, and the younger a person starts, the higher the risk of alcohol use disorder later in life. The numbers are sobering, Mr. Speaker. Within 10 years of the first use, 27 per cent of persons who began drinking by the age of 14 become alcohol dependent, compared with 4 per cent of those who began by the age of 21. The story is the same with tobacco.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services reports that:

“Nearly all tobacco use begins in childhood and adolescence.”

And the United States Surgeon General’s report found that adolescents can show signs of nicotine dependency within weeks of beginning to smoke. And for cannabis, clinical research estimates the lifetime risk of dependence at about 9 per cent rising to nearly 17 per cent where use begins in teenage years.

Mr. Speaker, the message is consistent. The earlier the start, the harder to stop. This Bill buys our young people time, most importantly, time for their brains to mature, time to build the judgment, the resilience, and the support system that would lead to better choices. That is not interference; that is protection. And we must be clear when it comes to the age protection, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Bill proposes to increase the age of alcohol and tobacco to 21 years old, while establishing 25 as the age threshold for cannabis and gambling. It also provides that persons under 25 who gamble, enter, or are found on gambling premises other than a racetrack, commit an offence, while persons who knowingly invite, cause, or permit such conduct may also face consequences.

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These provisions are clear in their purpose. Young people must not be treated as consumers to be targeted, exploited, or drawn into potentially harmful activities. Under this Government, Mr. Speaker, we have a duty to protect their health. We have a duty to protect their decision-making capacity. We have a duty to protect their future.

Mr. Speaker, let me speak plainly about gambling. A young adult who is still building a career and finding financial footing is not equipped to absorb the losses that gambling can bring. The Bill, therefore, requires gambling premises to “post rules” stating that “...gambling by persons under...twenty-five is prohibited.” It makes it an offence knowingly to invite, cause, or permit a person under twenty-five to gamble or to either licence premises other than a racetrack. And it creates a new offence of conducting remote gambling without a valid licence, punishable by a fine of “five million dollars and imprisonment for seven years.”

The gambling house is no longer only a building on the street corner, Mr. Speaker. It is on the phone in a young person’s pocket, and the law must research that, Mr. Speaker. And this is why you would have heard the Attorney General said in his presentation where he will be bringing amendments, Mr. Speaker, to deal with these things.

Let me also be clear about what this Bill does not do. A person over 25 with his legally permissible amounts of cannabis or who cultivates no more than four plants will not be treated as being in possession of a dangerous drug. Authorized medicinal use on “...prescription or recommendation from a medical practitioner...” is preserved, Mr. Speaker. What the Bill does is draw cleaner lines.

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The penalties for unauthorized use of medical cannabis are increased, and sacramental dispensaries may dispense only to persons over 25 years of age, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this country must reject any notion that access to alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, or gambling is an entitlement for persons who have not yet reached the prescribed legal age. The law must set the standard, but our families, businesses, clubs, schools, and communities must reinforce that standard. This Bill makes clear that a person cannot simply turn a blind eye while young people are being supplied, admitted, encouraged, or permitted to participate in activities for which they are below the legal age, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is also a public health measure and nowhere is that clearer than in the burden of non-communicable diseases, Mr. Speaker. The Pan-American Health Organization reports that non-communicable diseases amounted for “82.7 %” of all deaths in Trinidad and Tobago in 2019. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer were the top three causes of death and disabilities. PAHO also ranked our country third highest in the Americas for diabetes mortality at “70” deaths per “100,000” population, Mr. Speaker. PAHO identified four principal drivers of this epidemic: tobacco use, physical inactivity, harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy diets. More than half of our population carries three or more of these risk factors, and about three-quarters of NCD deaths occur before the age of 70.

4.00 p.m.

I wish to be precise, Mr. Speaker, I am not claiming that raising a legal age will by itself prevent a single case of diabetes. What I am saying is that tobacco and the

harmful use of alcohol are established drivers of these diseases, that these habits are formed young, and that the United States Surgeon General's report has noted that an earlier start extends these years of exposure across a lifespan, Mr. Speaker.

Every year we delay a young person's first cigarette, or first drink, is a year of exposure removed, Mr. Speaker, and here, sport is not a bystander. Physical inactivity is one of those four drivers. Every young person we keep active in a sports club, on a football field or in a swimming pool is a young person who is protecting another from risk factors, Mr. Speaker.

That is why the amendment to the Registration of Clubs Act deliberately keeps gambling clubs open to persons under 25 who are barred only from gambling on the premises. There is also a matter of prudent stewardship. Non-communicable diseases and addiction-related illness place a heavy and great strain on our public health system.

I was having a chat with my colleague to the side of me here, Dr. Seecheran, about the volume of money that the Ministry of Health is spending on drugs for non-communicable diseases per year. What he was telling me is that they spend about \$1.5 billion dollars per year. Mr. Speaker, the volume of infrastructure work that the people of La Horquetta/Talparo need—some of that money could also go into youth programmes for the youths in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: So, prevention, Mr. Speaker, is an upstream investment. It is far wiser to invest early in keeping young people healthy than to pay later for the treatment of preventable diseases.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to emphasize an important feature of this Bill. It does

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not approach young people solely through the lens of punishment. The Bill allows, in specified instances, for fixed penalty notices and rehabilitative programmes as an alternative to the payment of a penalty. The proposed rehabilitation framework includes at least 30 hours of community work, Mr. Speaker. We did not talk about jail. We talked about 30 hours of community work. Counselling through a faith-based organization, maybe a church or something, or counselling with a qualified psychologist, Mr. Speaker.

So again, you are seeing where the Bill is not all that harsh.

Mr. Speaker: Can I ask you if you want your 15 minutes?

Hon. P. Watts: Yes, Mr Speaker, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: So, Mr. Speaker, this is the mature and balanced approach that this Government and this Attorney General is taking. Mr. Speaker, let me explain how it works because the details matter:

“...where a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a person...”—below the relevant— “...age...has committed...”—a specified— “...offence...”—the officer must— “...issue...a fixed penalty notice...”

That young person may pay the penalty or instead begin a rehabilitative programme within 28 days. If the penalty is paid or the programme is completed, the person is not liable to any sanction and cannot be convicted of that offence, Mr. Speaker. The young person also has the right to contest the notice, and the matter cannot be listed for hearing until two months after the deadline for payment or completion has passed.

The same model is applied consistently across six of the seven Acts amended by this Bill. And yes, Mr. Speaker, there must be accountability. Law without consequences is merely suggestions, but accountability should also provide an opportunity for reflection, education, correction and rehabilitation, Mr. Speaker. We should not only ask what offence was committed. We must also ask what intervention can prevent this young person from repeating the conduct, causing further harm or becoming trapped in a cycle of poor choices. This approach is especially important for our young people, Mr. Speaker.

A mistake must be addressed, but it need not become a life sentence of stigma or exclusion, Mr. Speaker. Through counselling, structured community work, mentorship and other rehabilitative measures, young people can be guided toward healthier choices and a stronger support system. Mr. Speaker, rehabilitation must be meaningful. It cannot be a mere administrative exercise. It must be properly structured and accessible—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts:—professional and results-driven. It must involve qualified psychologists, appropriate counselling providers, faith-based organizations where suitable, community partners and institutions that understand the realities facing young people and families. The Government's intention must be translated into programmes that genuinely help people to change their direction, not programmes like RAPP and what they had before, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this approach is not new to sport. Under the Anti-Doping in Sport Act, 2013, Mr Speaker, as amended by Parliament in June 2023, Trinidad and Tobago strengthened its legislative framework to support compliance with the

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World Anti-Doping Agency requirements. The Trinidad and Tobago Anti-Doping Organization is charged with advancing anti-doping education and awareness, including educating athletes, parents and the public about the health consequences of doping, while supporting appropriate rehabilitative interventions for athletes who have used prohibited substances. The same Act makes an athlete responsible for ensuring that no prohibited substance enters his or her body.

This Bill complements that framework, Mr. Speaker, by strengthening the message our young people receive long before they reach the elite level. So, I look forward to working with the Anti-Doping Organization and the Ministry of Health so that the rehabilitative programmes under this Bill are designed in a coordinated way.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to protect our children from exploitation and the amendments to the Children Act are among the most consequential aspects of this Bill. The Bill broadens the legal framework in relation to children who are found in possession of, using or involved in the dispatch or trafficking of alcohol, tobacco products, cannabis, cannabis resin and dangerous drugs, Mr. Speaker. It also increases penalties for adults who expose children to dangerous drugs, give dangerous drugs to children or use children to sell, buy, or deliver dangerous drugs. Mr. Speaker, the penalties reflect the gravity of these acts.

The Bill raises the maximum fines for exposing a child to a dangerous drug, giving a child a dangerous drug or using a child to sell, buy or deliver dangerous drugs to as much as \$5million, Mr. Speaker. For exploiting a child to a dangerous drug, the maximum term of imprisonment is raised to 30 years. And for the child who is found with these substances, the Bill provides a pathway through a fixed

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penalty and rehabilitation process so that the child meets counselling and correction while the adult who put the child at risk meets the full weight of the law.

Mr. Speaker, there must be no uncertainty in this Parliament or outside of it about where we stand. Children must never be exploited. Children must never be used as couriers. Children must never be recruited into criminal activities. Children must never be exposed to dangerous drugs by the very adults who should be protecting them. Those who seek to manipulate a child's innocence, vulnerability, financial hardship, or lack of guidance for criminal gain must face the full weight of the law, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: We must understand that a child is not a commodity. A child is not a messenger for criminal enterprises. A child is not a means by which an adult can evade responsibility. A child is a citizen with rights, potential, talent, and a future that this country has a duty to defend, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, those on the other side should join this Government without hesitation in sending that message. This is not an issue of which partisan division should be allowed to overshadow the national interest. The protection of children must be above political convenience, above political rhetoric and above temptation to oppose for the sake of just opposing, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Watts: I therefore invite Members opposite to examine this Bill responsibly, contribute constructively and support measures that strengthen the protection of Trinidad and Tobago's children and young people, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill also addresses the obligation of persons who sell, distribute

and facilitate access to alcohol, tobacco products, cannabis and gambling activities, Mr. Speaker. It strengthens provisions under the Tobacco Control Act, the Liquor Licensing Act and the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act, including higher penalties in specified circumstances, requirements for appropriate signage and prohibition against selling for allowing access to persons below the prescribed age.

This is important because the protection of youth cannot be left to parents alone, Mr. Speaker. It cannot be left to teachers alone. It cannot be left to police officers alone. It cannot be left to youth workers and coaches alone. Each shopkeeper, bar owner, club owner, gaming operator, licence holder and business owner who deals with these products or activities must act responsibly, Mr. Speaker.

Profit cannot take priority over the safety of our young people. Compliance must be active, not passive. It requires proper age verification, visible signage, staffing, training, supervision and the willingness to refuse a sale or deny entry where the law requires it, Mr. Speaker.

The consequences of non-compliance are real. The Bill doubles the penalty for gaming premises that fail to post and maintain the required signage from \$50,000 to \$100,000. Mr. Speaker, how much more time do I have again?

Mr. Speaker: Six and a half minutes.

Hon. P. Watts: Six and a half minutes.

Mr. Speaker, legislation is necessary, but it must be part of a wider national strategy. We cannot simply tell young people what not to do. We must also give them meaningful things to do. That is why the work of the Ministry of Sport and

Youth Affairs is so critical. When young people have access to football, cricket, basketball, netball, athletics, and swimming, these programmes are youth-centred, Mr. Speaker. When communities have safe and properly maintained recreational spaces, young people have alternatives to idleness, isolation and risky behaviour, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would have delved down into recreational spaces and the condition of the recreational spaces that we would have found, but I do not have time for that, so I will not waste my five or six minutes on that, Mr. Speaker. When a young person meets a coach, teacher, youth worker, a mentor or community leader who believes in them, that relationship can change the course of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, the Anti-Doping in Sport Act, 2013 recognizes parents, guardians, coaches, trainers and officials as athlete support personnel and requires them to use their influence to foster anti-doping attitudes among athletes, Mr. Speaker.

4.15 p.m.

The Ministry will continue to support initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles, positive youth engagement, leadership development, skills acquisition and social inclusion, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work with sporting organizations, schools, local government bodies and non-governmental organizations, faith-based institutions, community leaders and the private sector to expand opportunities for our young people because, Mr. Speaker, prevention is not only a police matter, as I said. Prevention is also football programmes. Prevention

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is swimming classes. Prevention is in after-school activities. Prevention is in youth camps that they would have shut down. Prevention is in mentors who listen.

Mr. Speaker, this is a whole-of-society, and we are taking a whole-of-government approach in this fight to protect our young people. Government has a responsibility. Families have a responsibility. Schools have a responsibility. Businesses have a responsibility. Sporting bodies, community groups, religious institutions and civil society organizations also have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

We need access to mental health services, substance use support, counselling and referral pathways. We need enforcement that is fair, consistent and professional, Mr. Speaker, and we must speak with our young people, not merely speak to them. Young people must be respected as partners in shaping a safer, healthier country that we all want.

Mr. Speaker, a strong society does not wait for a young person to fall in crisis before it responds. A strong society acts early. A strong society creates boundaries. A strong society provides opportunity. A strong society holds persons accountable. A strong society makes rehabilitation and recovery possible.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill affirms that the future of our young people is too important to leave to chance. It strengthens protection against underage access to alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and gambling. It improves stronger consequences on those who exploit, endanger, and unlawfully supply children and young persons.

This Bill offers our young people rehabilitation rather than criminal records. Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, this Government is demonstrating that it is prepared to make the difficult but necessary decision in the interest of the next generation in our country.

Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up, I want to say this to the whole of Trinidad and Tobago, as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I support this Bill because I believe deeply in the potential of every young person in Trinidad and Tobago. I believe in the young athlete training before sunrise. I believe in the students striving for a better future. I believe in the young entrepreneurs with an idea. I believe in the young persons who only need the opportunity, a mentor, a safe space and a reason to believe. Our responsibility in this honourable House is to create the legal and social conditions in which the potential can be flourished, Mr. Speaker.

Let us protect our children. Let us support our young people. Let us strengthen families and communities. Let us promote healthy choices, positive opportunities and purposeful lives. Mr. Speaker, with that being said, I respectfully commend this Bill to the honourable House. I thank you.

Hon. Member: Well said. Well said.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the previous speaker and was trying to think of a description of that contribution.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And the words that came into my mind were: Pie-in-the-sky, incoherent rambling, barrage of political rhetoric.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Let me repeat that: Pie-in-the-sky, superficial rambling, barrage

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of political rhetoric.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Completely meaningless.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And it also demonstrated to me that the Prime Minister made a very bad choice with respect to the Minister for that Ministry, because he has no understanding of young people.

One of the biggest problems with this legislation and the Government's approach is the betrayal of the promises made by the UNC and, in particular, the Prime Minister. And I quote from the Prime Minister's swearing-in speech of the 1st of May, 2025, where the Prime Minister spoke about the idea, the thought, the concept of listening. And the Prime Minister said:

“Our highest priority will be not just to communicate with you, but to commune with you.

I will always be listening.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:

“I will be following you.”

Hon. Member: Wicked.

Mr. C. Imbert: There has been no consultation whatsoever—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—with the persons who are to be most affected by this law. And the statistics are clear. The number of persons between the ages of 18 and 25 in Trinidad and Tobago is somewhere in the vicinity of 130,000 persons. There has

been no formal, structured or known consultation with 130,000 people who will be directly affected by this Bill.

Now, what happens when people are not consulted, and particularly the young people? The most direct argument is that those who bear the cost should be consulted. There are new offences, fines, lost job opportunities, and young people, in particular, are the ones who are least likely to be heard through ordinary lobbying. They are not organized the way the Chamber of Industry and Commerce is organized, or the way the Bar Association is organized, or the gaming agents are organized. Young people are not organized like that.

So that when you want to get the views of the persons who will be most affected by this Bill, you have to adopt special approaches to consult with young people in particular. You have to organize. You have to have proper forums. You have to have proper means of communication with them. None of that has happened with respect to this legislation; none. There has been no data produced, no evidence of anything, just talk.

Now, the worldwide experience is that once people are consulted and they feel that legislation has been enacted fairly, and that they have been given an opportunity to be heard, persons are more likely to comply with legislation. What happens when they do not, when they are not given that opportunity, Mr. Speaker? The research shows, the evidence all over the world shows what happens. The most common reaction is that the young people feel like they are being spoken about rather than talked to. And if the Government on that side does not want to speak to young people, but speak about them as if they are children, and speak about adults and infantilized adults—because that is exactly what this Government

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is doing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: It is infantilizing adults. If they are not prepared to talk to young people and find out what young people think about this Bill, then we on this side will do that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: The PNM will have forums. Now, this is an ambush Bill, as usual. We get it, what? Monday night for Wednesday? Typical ambush Bill. Typical, typical, typical with this Government in recent times. But when young people feel that decisions are being made for them by older people who do not understand their lives—and the last speaker is a classic example of an older person who does not understand young people—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—they come across as paternalistic and disrespectful, especially for 18- to 24-year-olds.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I know every time I get up, they do not like what I say because I hit hard at them—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—so, they start to make a set of noise.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So, I am asking you from now, could you stop the usual suspects, Oropouche East and Barataria/San Juan, from interrupting me? I am asking you from now. Now, if you are between the ages of 18 to 24—

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Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: There they go—a legal adult, the Government wants you to vote for them and put them into office and give them the right to—well, not the right—give them the ability—not even the ability, because I am sure we will deal with the unconstitutional zones of the Special Operations Bill in the courts very shortly. But when you are telling young people to vote for you, and then you are using your majority to oppress them, without even consulting them—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, when a law restricts something that people were previously allowed to do, the sense of losing your ability, your privilege, and so on, can lead to all sorts of things. The first thing it leads to is low political involvement. That is why so many young people in this country are not interested in getting involved in politics, because they feel that adults, such as adults on that side, have no interest in them. Look, the Minister for Sport and Youth Affairs just boasted about demolishing all the youth programmes that have been—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: He boasted about it. Beat his chest., man. “Yeah, I do it, man. I mash it up.” Boast. Boast.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And that is what causes young people to be averse to getting involved in politics because they believe that participating makes no difference. Disengaged, they do not vote, they decide that politics is not for them.

Other young people, what do they do? Frustration turns into activism, and we have seen that most recently with the shooting death of those young people up

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in the Valsayn/St. Augustine area, where you had young people involved in activism, and being prepared to get involved in activism to the extent of being arrested, charged and being before the courts because they felt strongly about something. This is what happens when young people feel that they are being disrespected and ignored. Frustration turns into activism. Exclusion mobilizes young people into protests. So, one of the major flaws in this Bill is that the 130,000 persons between the ages of 18 and 24 have not been consulted in any meaningful or serious way.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And they are the ones who now face the brunt of the law.

The Attorney General also gave very incomplete statistics in his introduction of this Bill, to the point of being downright misleading. These are the facts, Mr. Speaker. There are about 195 countries in the world, approximately. In 130 of these countries, 65 per cent, the age for drinking is set at 18. The vast majority of countries in the world set the age for drinking at 18. Those are the facts, over 130 countries.

In terms of smoking, over 150 countries set the age for smoking at 18. For gambling, for those countries—there are some countries that do not agree with gambling. Most Islamic republics, most Muslim countries could ban it outright. But those countries that legalize gambling, again, 120 countries in the world have set the age for gambling at 18. Those are the realistic statistics. Trinidad and Tobago is now going to be an outlier.

With respect to those countries that have legalized the use of cannabis—the possession of cannabis, as the case may be, in small quantities, my research tells

me there is not one country in the world that legalizes cannabis that has an age limit of 25; not one, Mr. Speaker. And with respect to gambling, it is a handful of countries, very few, that set the age limit at 25.

So, this Government is just going along, doing what it wants. It is not based on any scientific evidence. It is not data driven. It is not in terms of any norms all over the world. And I would come to the reason why these norms are there, but let me deal with something first.

4.30 p.m.

One of the foolishness, the idiocy in this Bill—and this is in clause 6.

Clause 6, page 25, starts off

“...by inserting after subsection (3), the following new subsection:”.

And it says:

““...Subject to sections 38C to 38G, a child over the age of ten years who contravenes subsection (1)(a) to (g), or subsection (2), commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of fifty thousand dollars.””

And when one goes in the back and sees what it is, (a) to (g) it includes, in possession of tobacco, in possession of or drinking alcohol and so on.

Now we have heard all the talk about the maturity of the juvenile brain, the development of the frontal cortex, all of these medical things are well known. But how could a Government, talking so much about the fact that an 18-year-old, their frontal cortex is not fully developed for them to make a decision whether they should drink alcohol or not, and they have to be 25 to do that? But you are assuming a 10-year-old has the cognitive ability to understand that being in possession of a bottle of Carib is an offence that they are now subject to a fine of

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\$50,000? Foolishness. Absolute foolishness.

Why would you penalize an infant, someone whose brain is going through transformation? Their brain is still in a transitional state, going through great transformational changes, and you going to charge them \$50,000 “if dey hold ah cigarette, or dey are in dey parents’ home, and dey pass and dey see ah beer and dey hold it, or dey hold ah cigarette; \$50,000 for an infant with an undeveloped brain?” That is to show you the incompetence of this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Totally incompetent. If you want to penalize somebody, penalize the person who gave the child, the 10-year-old, the alcohol or whatever.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “How yuh go penalize the infant?” Nonsense! Absolute nonsense, Mr. Speaker. But let us go to the meat of the legislation itself.

Why is the majority of the country—why are the majority of the countries in the world, why have they set 18 as the legal age for drinking? Why? It is all about the argument that if you could vote—and my colleague from Diego Martin West has made this point—if you could sign a contract, if you could marry without consent, most—

Mr. Gonzales: Own Property.

Mr. C. Imbert:—yeah, own property, but most importantly to be tried as an adult. Because when you are 18 and over, when you go in court, you are no longer a juvenile. You are an adult, you will face the full brunt of the law. You will be put in the adult prison, you will be convicted under the penalties that an adult is subject to. But you do not—so you have to face that. You are supposed to know the

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difference between right and wrong. So that you will be tried as an adult, but you cannot make an informed decision as to whether you could drink or not.

That is why all of these countries in the world who have set the age of drinking at 18, that is where the argument is. It is the medical argument on one side, about the development of the frontal cortex, and on the other side, the whole question of a person's—the way you treat people. You treat them as an adult for so many things, but then you tell them they are not developed enough to drink. And one of the other foolishness in this Bill, there is no definition of alcohol, Mr. Speaker. You have to go to the Liquor Licence Act and see what is in there. And the Liquor Licence Act defines a whole series of things as alcohol: rum, scotch, puncheon, beer, wine.

Now the alcohol content by volume of beer is 5 per cent. The alcohol content of puncheon rum is 70 per cent. The alcohol content of White Oak and so on is 40 per cent, but the penalty applies uniformly. So, somebody with a glass of puncheon rum, which is 75 per cent alcohol and could impair their judgement—drinking a glass of puncheon rum at 75 per cent alcohol could certainly impair someone's judgement in terms of operating a vehicle or heavy machinery or whatever else is being faced with the same penalty as somebody drinking a Carib. You know, this Government brings so much incompetent legislation to this Parliament, it is tiresome, it is tiresome.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And you see, when you look, Mr. Speaker, at what this Government has been doing—let us take the Special Operations Bill for example, and let us look at how the two bits of legislation are going to interact.

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Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, please, Standing Order 48(1). We are not responsible for the Member previously being absent during that debate. We are on to a new debate here. We are not about the Special Operations Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I think we have an undertaking from the Member that he is going to demonstrate the relevance. So let us give him—

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

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course.

Mr. Speaker: Alright. Let us give him an opportunity—

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we are not getting into wasting time with that interruption. We have to look—

Mr. Speaker: And then you complain when they make noise when you are speaking.

Mr. C. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]*—*you standing up.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: No, I did not see you. I was looking so. Oropouche East is so annoying. I was looking at him, not at you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: But let us go to how the two bits of legislation are going to interact, okay. The Special Operations Bill gives the police wide powers to search people and premises without a warrant in closed areas. So let us say you and Diego Martin in District 1 or whatever district is, right? “And the Prime Minister ketch ah vaps and decided dey declaring Bagatelle and Rich Plain and wherever, closed area. So, now yuh have ad curfew, yuh have ah cordon, and yuh have to

have ah permit to go in and ah permit to come out. Right. So, the police now decide they are going to exercise their powers under the Special Operations Act and decide dey going into an area to search for various things, for gang activity, for guns, ammunition, whatever. And when dey reach there, dey meet a fellar 20 years, 11 months, and 29 days old with a Carib in his hand”—\$50,000 for you. And you see, Mr. Speaker, it leads to selective policing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Mr. C. Imbert: It leads to selective policing. I mean, come on. This is absolutely ridiculous.

In some of the more progressive countries, in Germany, for example, you can drink a beer at the age of 16. You are not allowed to drink hard liquor until you hit the age of 18, but you could drink a beer at the age of 16. Some of the provinces in Canada are like that as well because they recognize that one has a very high alcohol content and one has a low alcohol content. But, be that as it may, let us look exactly at what this Government is doing because they have missed so many things, Mr. Speaker. They have missed so many things.

The way the Bill is drafted, let us look at people within the sectors who are going to be affected by this Bill, Mr. Speaker. Let us look at people within the sectors. And section 38A makes it an offence for an 18 to 20-year-old to be in possession of alcohol or tobacco. It has and makes no exception for employment, okay. “So, if someone is ah bartender, ah waiter, ah server, ah cashier in ah supermarket, somebody packing de shelf in a supermarket, somebody promoting ah brand, ah crew on a truck delivering alcohol throughout de country, you are

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going to be in possession of alcohol or tobacco, and is \$50,000 for you.” One would think a sensible government would make an exception for employment.

You are now saying that nobody under the age of 21 could work as a cashier in a supermarket that has an ordinary liquor licence. You are saying that when the person comes with the rum or whatever they buy in the supermarket, they cannot go to the cashier. From the time the cashier touch it, they are in possession of that alcohol or the pack of cigarettes as the case may be. The person is not breaking any law, you know. This is as a result of their employment.

You are telling a waiter in a restaurant that if somebody orders a drink, this waiter is 19. They just come out of school, that is the only job they could get, but when they go to the table, they have to carry the drink for the person, they are in possession of the alcohol, they are subject to the fine. As I said, the man in the delivery truck. They do not think things through, Mr. Speaker. In the casino worker, you are telling somebody they have to be 25 years old to work in any significant way in a casino. “Dey cah be ah bartender, dey cah be ah waiter, dey cah be ah server, dey cah be packing drinks in de back of de storeroom in de back of the casino”, because they are going to be in possession of the alcohol or the tobacco.

Mr. Speaker, “to tell yuh these people just doh think.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “Dey doh think.” And listen as far as I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, I am not afraid to say that this Bill is culturally offensive.

Dr. Moonilal: What?

Mr. C. Imbert: It is culturally offensive.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: I am not afraid to say that. Not afraid to say that.

Let us take Queen's Park Cricket Club for example. They have a bar there, they sell alcohol there, they have little children, 12 years old, playing cricket and football and various other sports at Queen's Park Cricket Club. What happens now? When they go in from one section of Queen's Park Cricket Club to the other, or any other club in this country for example. "What dey hadda do? Dey hadda to put a chain over de bar and if dey want to pass through the bar to meet their who parents coming to pick dem up—wha dey go do? Dey hadda stay outside, because if dey go inside, dais the end of them. Dais de end of dem", Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: You know, what bothers me about this Government? They do things that are completely contrary to what they have said. They do things without thinking. "They do things—dey are going to marginalize a whole group of employed people between the ages of 18 and 25. Dey going to make several sectors of industry unavailable to persons between the ages of 18 and 24. What are young people supposed to do? Yuh done in a ZoSO."

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: "Yuh done have ah curfew and yuh cah get ah job as ah bartender, yuh cah get ah job as ah waiter, yuh cah get a job as a delivery driver or ah packer on ah truck." Mr. Speaker, I am asking you to tell them to stop disturbing me, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I did not realize you were that easily disturbed. Well, had I

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realized—look, just continue.

Mr. C. Imbert: Wow! Say that all the time, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Ameen: “You too experienced for dat”

Mr. C. Imbert: Yeah, too experienced for what? For you all just to be yapping away there?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: You complain about it and you are doing the same thing.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, okay.

Mr. Speaker: Well, no, come on.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am speaking.

Mr. Speaker: Come on. Come on.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “I not disturbing dem, dem disturbing me.”

Mr. Speaker: Come on. Let us just get on with it.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, a group of young people in a restaurant, in an area close to the bar, what is going to happen to them? “Dey not supervised by a parent. Dey are over the age of 18, dey are under the age of 21, dey gone there, dey just finished CXC or something like that. Dey gone to a restaurant and the restaurant have ah bar and the restaurant is selling alcohol. All ah dem guilty of an offence, yuh know, every single one of dem”. And I am asking the UNC—first I ask you to withdraw this Bill. There is no way I can support this nonsense.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Withdraw this Bill. Withdraw this Bill and do public

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consultation. Do public consultation. You could do public consultation in many different ways. You could go to a Joint Select Committee, “but of course only alyuh aint go do dat, because alyuh have no wish to do dat”. But you could do it that way, or you could have structured consultations throughout the country with young people. Honour your manifesto. You said you would consult, consult with them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.45 p.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Ah child left sitting in ah bar area, what happens there? De bartender guilty? De child guilty?” I mean, come on, Mr. Speaker, they have got to do better than this, Mr. Speaker. Smoking, as I have said, a little child passes and picks up a cigarette, \$50,000 for the little child. Even somebody who is 20 years old picks up a cigarette, \$50,000, because they are going to be in possession of it. And, you know, the business people in this country are so afraid of this vindictive Government; they are so afraid, because they have seen what happens to you when you criticize them, you know. “Is jail for yuh, yuh know. When yuh criticize dem, is jail, yuh know.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So, the business people now—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I think that is taking it too far, 48(6). The Member is imputing improper motives on Members of this Government.

Mr. Speaker: I think you could rephrase that. And you should withdraw the fact that what you said, “if you criticize them, is jail for them.” You are sufficiently experienced. You want to make that point, draw from the reference of Diego

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Martin West, and borrow from him his salami tactics. That is acceptable in debate, but not what you just said. That is frontally unacceptable.

Mr. C. Imbert: I saw somebody criticize them and get “lock up”. So, if you want me to withdraw it, I will withdraw it, no problem—

Mr. Speaker: Not if I want you to withdraw it. It is offensive to the Standing Orders. It is not a matter of whether I want you to withdraw it.

Mr. C. Imbert: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Right. So, do not make it seem as though I am imposing my will on you. That is the will of the Standing Order.

Mr. C. Imbert: Okay. The other problem is, Mr. Speaker, there is no distinction being made between public use and private use. Once you are below the age of 21, it is \$50,000 for you. Now, this is not the norm throughout the world. You have supervised consumption of alcohol, where parents will supervise persons—and certainly you are going to be below the age of 18, because that is the worldwide norm, 18. So you would have supervised consumption of alcohol in certain places. They are regulated. There are bans. In many countries, they go between 18 and 20 to allow you, but not in this Bill, you know. There is no distinction between private and public use.

So, if your son is at home taking a drink, and he is 20 years, as I said, 11 months and 29 days, and somebody, some nosey neighbour decides, well, they go set you up, send police. They come inside. They find the young “fella” in his home taking a drink, “crapaud smoke his pipe.” These are things that one needs to look at, Mr. Speaker.

These are the things that would come out if there was public consultation on this

Bill. You would get the comments of young people. I mean, for those of you who may drive down the western peninsula—“and now ah days we have parties that go from 1.00a.m. tuh 9.00a.m. in de morning.” So, if you are driving down there at 9.00 a.m., you will see all these people coming back from all these fetes. What is the average age of these people? Twenty years old, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Would you like your 15 minutes?

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course, of course. The average age of the people there, the vast majority of those people, is 20 years old. What are they supposed to do now? What are they supposed to do? Go and drink water and mind their business, as we heard in a calypso recently? Why have you not asked young people what they think about this? Why have you not created a regime of supervised consumption of alcohol? Why are you not following the worldwide norm of 18 years? What is the rationale for all of these things?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Where is the basis? Where is the evidence, Mr. Speaker? Why are you criminalizing private use? Why? Where did that come from? Which pocket is that coming from? Who thought of that? So, Mr. Speaker, these are the questions that people need answers to.

Of course, my colleague spoke about religious freedom. “Well, yuh doh care about rasta at all. Yuh doh care. Yuh just doh care, right?” And what about the whole question of cruel and unusual punishment? Fifteen to 13 years’ imprisonment for selling a drink to a 20-year-old? Fifteen to 30 years’

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imprisonment for selling a Carib to somebody who is 20 years, 11 months and 29 days old; 30 years in jail for that? It is not proportionate. It is not proportionate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And certainly, the example I gave of the child aged 10 and over caught drinking, \$50,000 fine. How “yuh” go fine ah infant? Which country does that? Which country in the world “does” fine a 10 year old \$50,000? Who does that? Who thinks of this rubbish? Mr. Speaker, I cannot—

Ms. Ameen: “Well, dem drink it.”

Mr. C. Imbert: “No, yuh punish de person who gave dem de alcohol. Yuh doh punish de child.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “De child does not have de mental capacity.” If a 19-year-old does not have the mental capacity to make a decision whether they should drink alcohol or not, according to the UNC, that is what they say, “Ah 19-year-old does not have that mental capacity, because their brain is not developed. So, we have to protect them.” Certainly, a 10-year-old would have a far reduced mental capacity than a 19-year-old. But this is the foolishness in this Bill. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the 130,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 24, I completely reject this Bill. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Toco/Sangre Grande.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Defence (Hon. Wayne Sturge): Mr. Speaker, let me start by rebutting immediately the scare tactics that we were just subjected to—

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge:—by a man who claims that this Government is oppressing. He should be the last person to talk about oppressing people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: He is the quintessential oppressor.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: And now, he is running out of the Chamber.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Alexander: And he is not alone.

Hon. W. Sturge: And he is not—of course. Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with a number of things that were raised by the last speaker. But let me start, first of all, in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, let me start my contribution by putting on the public record my sincere appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and the Attorney General, the hon. Sen. John Jeremie for bringing this Bill to Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Some may say this is no country for old men, and that applies to the last speaker. The thing is, the last speaker would give you the impression that he is in sync with what the young people want, and he gives the misleading impression that there was no consultation. One way of consultation happened, and it happened in the last general election, is you tell the public, you telegraph to the public, that if we are elected, this is what we are going to do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: And we did just that. We did just that on the hustings. Yes, we

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told the public, and I am certain that the young people were listening, because the campaign targeted them, because they were very disenchanted by the last Government who did not care to hear their views on anything.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So, let me, again, thank the Attorney General and the Prime Minister for bringing what some may describe as bitter medicine. And sometimes that is what people need. They are saying now, maybe we should seek the views of the young people. Those who are going to be affected, the young people who love to drink puncheon and smoke ganja, you know what they will tell you? “I want to continue to drink and smoke weed.” That is what you will get from the consultation.

They do not know the dangers involved. They live today for today. They do not care, most of them, the ones who are affected. I am not talking about the ones whose lives are on the right trajectory, the right track, who are at university studying, and who would pick up a book and research and see the dangers that these poisons cause. How inimical they are to their well-being, not those.

The thing is, since they are represented here by all of us, we had this since Monday. Is not social media the fastest way? That is what they use. They do not read the *Guardian*; nobody reads the *Guardian*. They use social media. All you have to do, if you care to solicit their views—and it is clear that they did not care to solicit the views—all you needed to do is put it on social media, say this is what the Government intends to bring, these are our concerns, tell us what your views are. You do not have to go to a town hall. That is long-time thing. So, Mr. Speaker, it is time for bitter medicine. Some may see it as bitter medicine. But

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you know they say, “Buckley’s tastes awful, but it works.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: And this bitter medicine, that is going to affect a particular demographic—and that is who we have to focus on, those who are most at risk. This bitter medicine, and let me immediately go to my own constituency, this bitter medicine is what many young men and women in my constituency so desperately need.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: This Bill is a manifestation of motherly love, even grandmotherly love, fatherly love.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: When you love your children, you are strict with them. When you do not truly love them, you share a joint with them. You say, “Hold ah spliff, smoke this one. This one is Jamaican red beard. Try this one.” or this one is—

Mr. Des Vignes: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Sturge: [*Laughter*] I see, “DJ Hans” of Diego Martin West is impressed.

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr Speaker, 48(5), 48(5).

Hon. W. Sturge: I apologize. I apologize. Right, when you love your children, you do not want to see them go the way you have gone. So, it is clear now who loves the children of Trinidad and Tobago, the young people, and it is not them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Although I said Toco/Sangre Grande, I am from Belmont, originally. This Bill would, in essence, reverse a decline that you are seeing along

the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, among the urban ghettos, in particular. The young people might complain now, when you we share licks, they does complain, not so? And then years later, they say, “Daddy, thank you for busing meh tail. Because if you didn’t care, if you didn’t buss meh tail, I would nuh learn de lesson. I would ah been listening tuh meh friends.” That is what caring people do, and that is what we are doing. We care about the effects.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.00 p.m.

Hon. W. Sturge: But if there are some people in the lower levels of the socioeconomic demographic, if they are angry with us now, you know the one set of people who would not be angry with us? Their parents. Most of the parents, at least when I looked on social media and I read. I made it my business to read the comments on social media, particularly the comments when the Leader of the Opposition stated her view, and all of the comments in support. Virtually every single comment supported the Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: [*Inaudible*—you all. [*Laughter*] And I know my friend from Malabar/Mausica was one of the commenters, and his bots may have tried to change the balance. But now is a time, Mr. Speaker, for tough love. Now is a time for tough love. Let me tell you, there were two campaigns being run in Sangre Grande, and that is how I got to realize how bad things were at the time and are now. Imagine I am walking every nook and cranny in my constituency without a music truck, without all of the drama, meeting people, and then the minute the election is called, a music truck showed up with gallons of puncheon. Free

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puncheon, free weed—

Ms. Ameen: That is the PNM—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Sturge: No. [*Laughter*] I do not even want to call names. Free puncheon. Free weed. And I remember once I was walking in Rampanalgas, and it is free puncheon, free weed and Trinibad music. And I had to pull the mic and tell them, one, change that music, that is gangster music, it is promoting violence. I am walking, and because you are hearing music, the children are coming out. And I am greeting children. And you know what? People high on puncheon and weed. And not just weed, because you know the difference in smell. There is one called “black”. When you sprinkle some cocaine in it. You know the smell is different. I grew up on Savannah Road. I tell you that. Sorry, I almost said Mr. DJ.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Sturge: And I have—there were several videos posted up, and they were saying I was out of touch. I was out of touch with reality. And they were saying you should not come from Westmoorings—mind you, I do not live there—but they were saying, “Do not come from Westmoorings and impose your views on us. That is our culture”. So, when the Member for Diego Martin North/East said this Bill was culturally offensive, I was wondering, what culture is he talking about? He echoed the sentiments of Diego Martin West, who also said, well, words to the effect, culturally offensive. And I needed to ask, what exactly is our culture when he raised that? Because I am told in the ghetto, the culture is Trinibad music, puncheon, black cigarettes, lasciviousness—

Hon. Members: And weed.

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Hon. W. Sturge: Well, black cigarette is weed with coke. Wanton lasciviousness, leading to HIV/Aids, leading to communicable diseases, leading to unwanted pregnancies. The list could go on. So, what exactly? And I hope my friend can go up on his social media, my friend from Member from Diego Martin West. Is our culture—since he said it is not our culture—is our culture puncheon? Is that what you are saying? Is it rum and Red Bull? Is it weed? Is it the objectification of women? Normalizing sexual violence? Because there are aspects of our music that do exactly that. There are aspects of our music that normalize violence. That is why the gang culture has reached where it has reached. And then you come here and complain and say, “We are not dealing with root causes”. Is this not dealing with root causes? You come here and say we have no crime plan. Well, you had the crime plan because you had all the plans: you had MiLAT, you had MYPART, you had CCC, you had all these plans, and guess what? In keeping with your plans, the murder rate went up. Maybe that was your plan. What we have is an anticrime plan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So, look back at all of the bits of legislation that we have passed since we started, and bit by bit you will see the pieces of the mosaic coming together. This is just one. We are not targeting young people to criminalize them. In fact, the last speaker, on three occasions I can recall, tried to scare young people into thinking, well, if you do this and you do that, you will get a fine of \$50,000. Read the Bill. He likes to come here and give you the impression that he knows law. He is not a lawyer. He has never practised law a day in his life. Maybe he should stick to finance. Well, not even that.

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Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Sturge: [*Laughter*]—because that is to ask him for further oppression.

Mr. Hosein: Build a stadium, and it falls down.

Hon. W. Sturge: Right, build a stadium, and it falls down. But listen, let me rebut that immediately and tell the young people this. The first thing is, what he said about, you are going to get a fine of \$50,000, everybody knows, and we have said it here in the Parliament several times that before you even reach that stage—or let us deal with that stage. Worst-case scenario, you are convicted. The courts have a discretion. So that argument he made about the law treating a Shandy or a Carib the same way it is treating puncheon, that was a bogus argument.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: And had he been a lawyer, he would not have made that argument because there is a Court of Appeal case called *Francis and Hinds* that basically says that the court can do anything; \$50,000 is the maximum. And the sentencing jurisprudence says that courts do not go to the maximum unless you are a serial offender, or unless the offences are so egregious or things like that.

Hon. Member: Discretion.

Hon. W. Sturge: So, they use their discretion, and they start with the lowest. So, do you think the court is going to watch a 10-year-old and say, well, I am going to fine you \$50,000? He does not work. If you go to court, you will see the courts do not do that.

So, if you are convicted—and you do not have to be in this Bill, the emphasis is not on conviction. If you are convicted, you can get even a reprimand and be discharged, which means no conviction. But even before you reach there,

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right in this Bill, there is a separation between those who should know better, the facilitators, and those who are the intended victims: the young persons, the adolescents. And the regime dealing with the adolescents makes it clear, first of all, that you can contest your fixed penalty notice. You can say the police charged me wrongfully and contest it. But if you know you are guilty, you can use the option of rehabilitation. And there are two forms of rehabilitation.

You could go to church, or you could go to a psychologist. And both, one in a spiritual way, will help you deal with your addiction because some people need Jesus and Buddha, and Rastafari, and Nyabinghi and whoever else is the Gods. But some people would say, “I do not believe in the opium of the masses”. “Let me go by the psychologist.” And you know when you are finished with that, you know what the Bill says? And if he were honest, he would read it for the public to hear it. The Bill says you are not convicted once you complete that period of rehabilitation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So, the short point is, we are about protecting young people. You know, before I go a bit further, I wrote something. It is a coincidence that I heard this song this morning from a former client, Rodney Price, known by the name of Bounty Killer. And the song fits this, Bill. The name of the song is “Mama”, and he is a poet in this regard:

“...Mama she’s not in a good mood
di basket inna di kitchen runnin outta food
Papa can’t find no excuse
him drink out di money and gamble and lose...”

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That is this Bill. These words, these poetic words written in about 1998 or 1999.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Yeah. This is even more applicable today. This is even more applicable on the ground. Every bit that we are targeting, from cigarettes, to cannabis, to alcohol, to gambling, right here in essence. And the ills are relevant. And I have to go back to my constituency because I remember one time, we had a—is it a cottage meeting they call it? And I am trying to tell the youths, first of all, forget about URP and CEPEP. That is not a future.

Mr. Manning: They had a choice.

Hon. W. Sturge: Well, they have no choice now, thanks to us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Because you who boast about a PNM education, that is all you had for them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: That is what you ask young people to aspire to. The young people on the ground, you want them to aspire to a CEPEP job and a URP job.

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, 48(6).

Mr. Speaker: Continue.

Hon. W. Sturge: Right, so you got overruled, by the way. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: And this is the disturbing part, and it deals exactly with the poisons we are dealing with in this Bill because they are all poisons of one form or another. I am going to talk to young people. I am telling them, listen, forget about CEPEP, forget about URP, think about the army. They are telling me, “Well, we

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doh have maths”. So, I told them, “Well, from my understanding, you do not need maths”. Then when I raised it one time, a certain “Sauce”, somebody named Sauce or Saucy something.

Mr. Hosein: Saucy Pow?

Hon. W. Sturge: No, it is not Saucy Pow.

Hon. Member: Saucy nation.

Hon. W. Sturge: [*Laughter*] It is the other gorilla-looking one—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Sturge:—said that I am trying to lower the standards of the army. But you know, only recently it was made clear in the presence of a few of my colleagues by the Director of Personnel Administration, you remember, that the only arm of the protective services where you need mathematics is the police. I was able to clear that up. I went back to them to tell them, “Well, it’s easier”. “We can get you in the army, right, even if you do have maths, because you do not need maths now.” They do not want that. They do not want that.

I am trying to get them to form a cooperative so they could plant lettuce and these other things and supply it to downstream industries, sell them—well, KFC has coleslaw and these things. That could be your client. Form a cooperative and approach them. They say, “That is slave thing, nobody ain’t working in the hot sun, you goin mad or what”? Or let me put it how they say it, “D boss, you goin mad or what”? And they say, “D boss, you could do that”? And then the few who I managed to talk into—there was a batch last year. There is a batch now.

5.15 p.m.

Hear what is the biggest problem now: 18 to 21 in Toco/Sangre Grande, that

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is rural community, athletically built. It seems nobody could do 50 push-ups. Right? They cannot do 50 push-ups.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes, I could do 50 push-ups. I do 50 and more every day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: And San Fernando East, I will show you the photos.

Mr. Manning: Please do not show me.

Hon. W. Sturge: I have a six-pack. You do not.

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

Hon. W. Sturge: You have a keg. You have a keg. But the thing is—

Mr. Speaker: Enough of that. Enough of that.

Hon. W. Sturge: The thing is, the youths cannot—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I see denial is not just a river in Egypt.

Ms. Mohit: You disturbed the man first.

Hon. W. Sturge: You disturbed me first “You look for dat”.

The thing is, Mr. Speaker, they cannot do 50 push-ups. They cannot do 50 sit-ups. They cannot run 200 yards. You know what? We decided, cut it in half. You know, they still cannot do 25 push-ups? They cannot do 25 sit-ups? They cannot run 100 yards? They cannot run 50 yards? “Dey bun”. You know why? “Everybody smoking weed and drinking puncheon”. And then, when it is time to do the medical, they have more—you know there is blood alcohol level? They have more alcohol than blood. “Dey have weed in dey system. Some ah dem have coke in dey system”. And then, the very few who manage to get past the physical and get past the medical, next thing you see, “dey fail the vetting. You know why

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dey fail the vetting? Dey in gangs. Dey in gangs”. So, you all want to complain about the SOB Bill? The SOB Bill is to end that gang culture.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: We have to save the young people from themselves.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes, we have to save them from prison too.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Sturge: No, we do not send them to prison. This Bill does not send anybody to prison. You did not read the Bill. And you know he is studying law.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes. So we are trying to root out the gang culture. Because that very gang culture— “yuh liming, is not your gun, but you want to pose with a TEC-9. And then, yuh post it, yuh share it on your status picture on WhatsApp and somehow, military intelligence end up with it”. And then hear what you will tell them. “Well, I have experience as a shooter.” And for them, that makes sense. There is something wrong in this country and it takes a leader, a visionary leader like the Prime Minister, with motherly love, to change it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: But all we are hearing now is about rights. We want to talk about rights. The young people have a right to do what? To destroy themselves? To destroy other people? Because that is the reality.

Someone sent me something about two judges who died in high-speed accidents where it was reputed that alcohol was involved: Justice Bharath in 1999, Justice Kangaloo some time ago. And you know the persons—I remember the

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persons whose vehicle collided with Justice Kangaloo's vehicle. One of them is from Belmont, a young girl. She must have been about 19/20. She had a newborn. That child is now orphaned. So, when you are looking at the effects of these things and why we are trying to save people, as opposed to you all, you all prefer rights. You want to give people the rights to do the wrong thing. You want to give them the rights to destroy themselves. You want to give them the rights to destroy everybody else. You want to give them the rights to be a burden on the taxpayer. That is what you want. We have to save them. We have to save them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I suppose you would like your 15 minutes.

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes. Oh God, I did not even finish 10 per cent of my contribution. What to skip? But you see, I understood when they came with this decriminalization thing, but you did not have to give people the right to have four plants in their house. Decriminalization is if "ah ketch yuh with it, you would not go to court and go to jail." They went the extra distance. They do not just want to decriminalize. They want it in your house, so you could smoke your ganja. And you know what children do? There is a saying, "What monkey see, monkey do." Right? "So, daddy smoking ganja and listening to Bob Marley, wa yuh think de little one going and do?" Same thing.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the thing is, we are caught between a rock and a hard place with these fellas. Because these fellas, on the one hand, is rights, and on the next hand, they are echoing what the Chamber of Industry and Commerce has to say about this. "The Chambers of Industry and Commerce doh business with nobody but deyself. The Chamber of Industry and Commerce doh care that dey

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destroying young people”. They want more customers. That is what they want.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: We have to protect the young people from the Chamber of Industry and Commerce. “Because all dey studying ’bout is their right to make money”. They are not studying that when these young people get high, that they have lascivious wanton and lascivious sex and they bring a child into the world.

Have you read the material on alcoholism and marijuana and the effects on unborn children; the effects that last long beyond, after the child comes out of the womb? Have you read that? You are born with deformities. Your brain is not developed. Sometimes the lungs are not developed. And who pays for that? Because the bulk of—you know when rich people do it—this might sound elitist—rich people could tell you, “Leave me, leh me drink meh Johnny and smoke meh crack.” But when they get sick, you know what? They have too much pride to end up in the Port of Spain General Hospital, which is the best health care. They will go and lie down in a nursing home and die, and that is fine. Because there is this point of view that I am a man, this is my body. I am responsible for what poison I put into it. Right? That is all well and good, you know, as long as your poison does not affect me, or as long as your poison does not affect the taxpayer. “But when dey drink dey puncheon, because that is what they can afford, when dey drink dey bay rum, you know what does happen?” Alcohol poison, diabetes.

“When is diabetes, you know wa happen? Dey cyah work. Dey have children to mine. So dey gone by welfare, by the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services to get ah welfare cheque”. Should that money not be used for something better? For children with Down syndrome? Children

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who had no input into maladies, into whatever is afflicting them? Now you have to inconvenience other people because the doctor chop off—“dey start by chopping off yuh toe, then dey chop off from yuh ankle, then yuh knee, then yuh is one foot”. And then you have to inconvenience other people. Most times your children, 12 and 13, are now being parentified, as the social workers would say. Instead of the 12- or 13-year-old being allowed to enjoy their life, they have to look after you. They have to wipe you.

Then the workforce loses. “Allyuh did not factor that in with alcohol?” And all we are doing is saying, listen, we are trying—not 18 to 21, because the short point is we are aware that the process starts from 12, 13 and so on. So, we are not just saying, we are penalizing 18 to 21. It is 21 down. And for the statement made by Diego Martin North/East—let me remind him. He is saying, “What go happen with the 10-year-old?” Does he know what the age of criminal responsibility is in Trinidad and Tobago? From my recollection, up to a few years ago, it was below 10, it was eight. I do not know if it has changed. Right? And you know what? It is eight years old. So, you can be liable for murder, rape, all of these things. So, I do not know where Diego Martin East was going with that. The Government is basically enacting the law. Yes, he is clueless, poor fella. He does not understand because he is small.

Let us look at—I mean, he also made a statement, which I was aghast to hear, that the medical people are advancing an argument that your prefrontal cortex is not developed until 25. That is not an argument, that is a scientific fact.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: But he is so crafty and he is such a persuasive orator that he

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could go to Siberia and sell snow cones, when the reality is, what he said and nothing is the same thing. He did not say anything and is misleading people. We are trying to tell young people, listen—I do not need to go through the entirety of this thing because your prefrontal cortex, all you need to do is Google it and you would see what is fact. You would see the effects it has, alcohol has; the effect nicotine addiction has. You would look at the effect of cannabis, and all of that might be vogue. I mean, that is a very old term, that is 1990s. It might be vogue for the young people but they are destroying themselves.

So, what should we do as a responsible government? A responsible government does not sit down and wait and consult, and all these things, when we have already consulted. We told them what our position was before. They know. And their parents voted in droves.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Their parents are going to thank us for this in 2030. And by that time, the young people will say, “You know what? If the Government did not do this, I might have been falling down by the side of the road, drunk, ah expose mehself to rape, ah dead.” In keeping with the former, former, “who dead, dead, he eh care”. But they will thank us for it. Yes. “If we bussing yuh tail now, it is because we care about you”. We care. We are not satanic and demonic, like some people who boast about being satanic and demonic.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: You know why they could boast about that? Because their children do not drink puncheon and smoke black. Their children “doh sit down at the side of the road and when dey are smoking black, a gunman come up and finish

dem.” Their children do not lime around gang members. Their children are not at risk. But if you all, who you claim to represent, the black and brown, if you all claim and you are not protecting them, we will protect them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: That is why we are here and you are there. That is why you all do not know who is leading who. You all do not know if “yuh coming or yuh going”.

All this stuff about—you know, I really wanted to deal with Diego Martin West. Let me make something clear, because I know my time is running out. Let me make this very clear because you said something that was very unfortunate. We did not defend child marriage. So, when you said that, I was misleading. What we did was we gave persons an opportunity, of the Muslim faith, of the Hindu faith, to come and stake their position. Did we support it? No. So, stop saying things that are not true because you want a little soundbite. Yes, you have enough experience on the radio. Stop misleading.

What is the other thing he said? He said that he should be able to be trusted to take a drink.

5.30 p.m.

Listen, I think I have gone through all that already, and I will leave the bulk of it to my other friends. I just want to close with something because he said, “Who will enforce this?” The police, Diego Martin West, that is who enforces it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: If you take that position, then what is going to happen with all the other Bills that we have passed, not just in this Parliament, but all the previous

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Parliaments? When you pass a Bill against dangerous drugs, against opium from back in the 60s, and against alcohol, and against underage sex, you can make the same argument, “Who go police it”? But are persons not charged and regularly before the court? Because at some point you will be caught.

Mr. Alexander: “Da why de cocaine bun yesterday”.

Hon. W. Sturge: Exactly. That is why we were able to “bun cocaine yesterday, bun dat white powder”—

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge:—because we are taking back the communities from “alyuh. All alyuh only leave a CEPEP, URP”, and then have the gall to come and say we shut down programmes. But as my colleague just stated, if you have integrity, bring the report and read it out, and let the public know that you all were planning to close it down, not us.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So, I see that my time is drawing near. I understand I have a minute, is that right or less?

Mr. Speaker: Five minutes.

Hon. W. Sturge: Five, oh Lord! Yeah.

Mr. Speaker: Four and a half.

Hon. W. Sturge: Four and a half. Let me respond to the Member for Diego Martin West again. [*Laughter*] He complained. I love him, you know, but you know, “make sense, nah man”. He complained about: Well, how is this thing going to work? You did not put this in the Act; you did not put that in the Act. Then complained about regulations. That is the point, Member for Diego Martin

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West. There is something called parent legislation, which is the framework. There is something called delegated legislation, where all of this is fleshed out.

We have been seeing this pattern, not just here, but in the other place, that some persons who love satanism and demonism come and say: “Well, you didn’t do dis, and you didn’t do dat, and you didn’t do de other.” We do not need to. We do not need to. These things are fleshed out, so the law is simply a framework. You simply have to have the framework, and then we flesh it out. Okay? So, that is pretty much—no, I have more for Member for—right. He also spoke about criminal sanctions. I think I dealt with that, and he was saying: “Why not educate”? Well, we do educate.

But you know the thing is, reality, Member for the Diego Martin West—“doh bother with Port of Spain South, you know, he cah help yuh [*Laughter*] is waste ah time”. Education is just one means. We do educate, but the point is, some people, no matter how much “yuh drum it into dey head, it doh work”. So, you have to have a backup plan. As my grandmother used to say: “Who doh hear, does feel”. That is what the law is for. “Who doh hear, does feel”. Right?

So, you need to stop these scare tactics and trying to tell us we could do other things when you have done nothing, you did not do anything. Just fearmonger. That is all you have done for the last 10 years and then have the gall to come and tell us. Yeah. Right. Let me close by saying, I welcome this piece of legislation, more particularly for Toco/Sangre Grande.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. W. Sturge: Toco Sangre Grande, I saw an excerpt from the multi-poverty index stating that: Toco/Sangre Grande is perhaps, the most economically depressed region in the entirety of Trinidad and Tobago. Crime is high. I am the MP. Well, the last MP, you know what the boast was? The last MP—the boast was—“dais wah dey telling meh: ‘We MP used to come and drink with we’.”

Let me tell you what my response was, and it remains to this day. Your MP used to come and drink with you, but he never stood up in Parliament to talk for you in five years.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So, we need to change the mindset of communities like that and have them look up to somebody else. You cannot be looking up to somebody because he coming and drink puncheon with you, right? Look up to somebody who could go and address US SOUTHCOM or something like that. Look up to somebody who is articulate.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Not because your “teletubby” drinks with you, that is a flex.

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Yeah. So, Mr. Speaker, there is so much more but I do not want to go into the medical aspects, I printed so much last night, but I think I can leave that to my colleague, junior Minister of Health, Minister Seecheran, and I close by thanking you for allowing me to contribute to this debate.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker: Malabar/Mausica, I recognize you, but I propose to take the afternoon tea break now. We will suspend until 6.15, we return. Thank you very much.

5.36 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

6.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dominic Romain (*Malabar/Mausica*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to my lone colleague from Diego Martin North/East. [*Laughter*] They will be joining us shortly. Fear not, fear not.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate this afternoon, and my colleagues on both sides, on both sides.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: My colleagues who spoke before me, several of them would have made reference to the issue of consultation and not wanting to run afoul of Standing Order 55(1), I will not delve into it too much. Save and except to say, Mr. Speaker, that as you may recall, earlier this week on Monday, in fact, we would have had the pleasure, and by we, I mean your good self, the Deputy Speaker and myself to attend a briefing session for this year's cohort of the Youth Parliament. Interestingly enough, the age grouping of those participants was between 17 and 22.

After you would have departed, you and the President of the Senate would have departed the proceedings. The Parliament staff would have asked the Deputy

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Speaker and myself to stay back for a little bit to have a chat with some of participants to answer any questions that they may have had, which the forum did not permit due to time constraints. I would have visited about three or four tables, which had about five of the participants each.

The consensus coming out of that interaction with them, Mr. Speaker, was borne out today. The feeling or the belief that when it comes to them being able to make a contribution to—well the politics or what is happening in society, they feel marginalized, they feel left out, they feel unheard. Interestingly, as well, the topic that they will be debating this year, as I was told, has to do with age limits as it pertains to the use of social media. I recall, Mr. Speaker, you would have mentioned that you would have lost out in terms of the options as to what the topic should have been, your preference being, of course, the death penalty.

Some of the participants, indicated to me that you know they would have preferred that as well. When they shared their views with respect to the death penalty, Mr. Speaker, I mean, I have to be honest, I was blown away. They would not have done much research, but the views that they would have expressed, how they feel about it, their thoughts. So, it really shows that these are young adults who have ideas, who have perspectives that need to be heard, and unfortunately, it is not heard enough.

Now, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, in his contribution, would have mentioned about consultation, and he spoke about—but if we go out and we talk to the folks to those who are to be impacted, well, they will tell us some of them that they want to be able to drink and they want to smoke and so on. But, Mr. Speaker, we need to be mindful of the fact that consultation is not simply about soliciting

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opinions and perspectives from stakeholders. It is also about providing information and clarity where ambiguity exists in the law.

On numerous occasions, I have had cause in my contributions to this House to remind all of us that when we pass legislation in this House, it is not just for the 42 of us here and the 31 in the other place. We pass legislation for all 1.5 million persons who have the privilege of being called citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We must be mindful of the fact that the large majority of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago does not have a learning in law. So, when we bring legislation here, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that most people would get an idea as to what the legislation entails if they are inclined to listen to the Parliament Channel, but even so, the amount of information that they would get would be limited.

So, for consequential legislation such as this, I think it is absolutely imperative that we go beyond the norm, and that we provide an opportunity where persons can ask questions with respect to the provisions of the law, so that they may not find themselves in the situation where they run afoul of the law. Because for those of us who even are not attorneys, I think we are familiar with the legal maxim, I think it is called *ignorantia juris non excusat*, meaning, ignorance of the law is no excuse. So, persons who may run afoul of this legislation here today cannot take comfort in the belief that they could say: Well, I did not know, and therefore they get off with a slap on the wrist.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are some clauses in this Bill, some sections in this Bill, which I believe, and based on questions that were posed to me by persons who have been having discussions about this legislation, that are a bit ambiguous and require some level of explanation by Members opposite, whose responsibility

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it is so to do. Now, the Member again for Toco/Sangre Grande said: Well, you know, you have social media, Facebook, you could look at the comments. He referenced a post that was put out by the Leader of the Opposition. Referenced the comments therein and suggested that the majority of commentators supported the Government with this legislation.

Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday, CNC3, which Members are not really minded to support, which they like to call Sabga media, probably say is PNM. CNC3 puts out an article entitled: “Government moves to raise legal age for alcohol tobacco to 21”. As of now, Mr. Speaker, there are 300 comments under that post, I would have gone through the majority of them, and the majority of them does not support the legislation. It is there, you all could just go and pull up CNC3 on Facebook and see for yourself. Read the comments, you know, I am not telling tales out of school. I quoted the source. You all could go and check it for yourself, right?

When you read the comments, Mr. Speaker, you know, it explains—persons are indicating what their discomfort with the legislation is. It is clear that a lot of them—they are seeking further information. So, Mr. Speaker, let me give you an example of one of the concerns that was raised to me. Now, my colleague from Diego Martin North/East, raised the issue of what constitutes, and well, in terms of alcohol, what constitutes—let me see if I get the term here correctly “eh”. Well, with respect to the liquor, Mr. Speaker, and he referenced the alcohol volume content, and I think that is important.

Because, Mr. Speaker, I visited Massy stores a couple days ago, and one of the items that I picked up was a Shandy, single Shandy, and I went to the self-checkout, and when I scanned it, age verification message came up on the screen,

which required an attendant to come and scan a card and put in a code to allow me to continue to scan the other items. So, it means that, as far as Massy is concerned, Shandy, which has an alcohol volume of 0.9 per cent, they consider that, of course, to be an alcoholic beverage.

Now, Mr. Speaker, clause 38 speaks about 10-year-olds, and they would commit an offence if it is they were to be found to be consuming alcohol. One of the questions that was posed to me by one of my constituents has to do with, Mr. Speaker, the issue of communion, because they are practising Catholics. We would know that some of us who would have done first communion, tend to use the wafer and also the alcohol, the wine, which represents the blood of Christ. I did, Mr. Speaker, just a quick Google search enquiring as to what is the alcohol by volume content of the communion wine, and it says: Communion wine typically has an alcohol content ranging from 11 to 18 percent alcohol, Mr. Speaker—from 11 to 18 percent.

6.25 p.m.

Now, when I looked at the parent legislation, Mr. Speaker, in terms of—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah. Again, I am reminding Members opposite, I am not an attorney, and I am asking this question on behalf of persons who are not attorneys and who want to get the answer. So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the parent legislation as it pertains to the Liquor Licences Act, it defines “intoxicating liquor”. It:

“means spirits, wine or beer, or any liquor being a mixture, beverage or preparation containing the same;”

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In terms of reference, when we look at “beer”, Mr. Speaker, it makes reference to it:

“includes ale, stout, porter, spruce beer...”

And then it goes on to say:

“...and which on analysis of a sample thereof at any time is found to contain more than 1.2 per cent A/c./Vol.;

So, if it is, and we are asking the question, 1.2 per cent—this legislation before us today does not explain specifically what is the alcohol content level that would constitute “intoxicating liquor”, because that, I assume, is where the charge would come, where the penalty would apply. So, I think, perhaps, it may be useful to put that in the legislation, because the average citizen is not going to say, “Well, leh me grab ah copy of this legislation and sit down with ah cup ah tea and go through it”, and know that they need to reference the parent legislation for clarity on other things.

So, perhaps, when the Attorney General is winding up, if he is so minded, he could probably address that issue, because there is another definition as it speaks to alcohol, Mr. Speaker, that references anything more than 24.1 per cent. So, there is a little bit of confusion there in terms of that issue. So, I am asking if it is Members opposite could provide some clarity there, because persons would be very cautious not to run afoul of this law because of the draconian penalties. We are looking at about \$50,000, and so on. If they are not sure, that could have an impact, Mr. Speaker, on how it is they go about treating with this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, clause 82A, it says:

“Subject to sections 82B to 82F, where a person under the age of twenty-five

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years -

- (a) gambles by any method, electronic or otherwise; or
- (b) enters or is found on gambling premises, other than a race track, that person commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of fifty thousand dollars.”

Now, let me treat with (a) first, Mr. Speaker. It says:

“gambles by any method...”

—and, again, the question has been posed to me, “Does this include scratch tickets because that is a form of gambling?” You do not need to go on a gambling premises to be able to purchase a scratch ticket. In fact, some supermarkets actually have those on sale right by the cashier. So, you are cashing out your goods and you just notice, “Aye, leh meh grab two tickets.”

Is it now that you would, in order to do so, you would be required to provide your ID to the cashier in order to be able to purchase such a ticket? Now, I was also asked the question, Mr. Speaker, a very popular product, scratch product that the NLCB has, is something called “BIG RIDE”, where you could win a BMW or a Hilux, or something like that. It is very popular. The person is asking, “What would be the difference between spending \$50 or \$100 to purchase a BIG RIDE ticket, or two BIG RIDE tickets, and somebody who spends \$100 to purchase a raffle ticket where the prize is a car?” Is there a fundamental difference between that, because a raffle, technically, Mr. Speaker, is a form of gambling. It is a game of luck and chance. You spend your money, you are hoping to win, you may not. The same with the scratch ticket, you spend your money, you scratch, you hope to win, “yuh don’t.”

So, they are asking for a distinction between that as well.

“enters or is found on gambling premises, other than a race track...”

Again, Mr. Speaker, as far as I am aware, and I stand to be corrected, a lotto booth would most likely be considered gambling premises, because that is the main thing that you would go there to do. But, Mr. Speaker, you may be aware that lotto booths do not only provide gambling services. You could go there to top up your phone. You could go to pay a bill, a utility bill. I think you have CourtPay there as well. I am not too sure if they still offer that. But there are a number of other services that that facility offers besides gambling.

So, if somebody decides to go in there to utilize one of those services, Mr. Speaker, and they happen to fall under the age limit of 25, would that person be in contravention of the law? Based on what we are reading here, it says:

“enters or is found on gambling premises...”

So, a police officer passes and he sees a young boy, probably Upper Sixth, in his school uniform, and he is standing in line probably to buy a phone card to top up his phone. Obviously, the police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that this person is there for the purpose of gambling.

Mr. Speaker, now, the Attorney General mentioned that they intend to bring amendments with respect to providing ID to enter gambling premises, and that is good, but, again, not everybody, between the ages of 18 to, let us say, 21, may have an ID, because not everybody is inclined to go get their ID card at 18. Not everybody is inclined to go get their driver's licence. So, we are now going to make it mandatory that persons have ID on them should they find themselves—if they fall within that age bracket and they find themselves on gambling premises,

Mr. Speaker, to ensure that they do not—well, if they are within the age bracket, they may very well be in contravention of the law and that could present a problem.

So, the Government may wish to look at that, Mr. Speaker, taking into consideration that unique situation with respect to these lotto outlets that offer services beyond gambling. Mr. Speaker, the Bill increases penalties dramatically without establishing clear enforcement strategy. So, the Member for Tunapuna would have told us—not Tunapuna, sorry. Toco/Sangre Grande would have responded to my colleague for Diego Martin West, indicating to him that it is the police that would be carrying out the enforcement strategy. We know, Mr. Speaker, we have heard many times that, you know, the TTPS is strained, while there is an exercise ongoing to increase the manpower strength. They are still not where they should be. So, with the SOE that passed recently, and we know there is going to be some strain on the manpower to treat with that. Then we have the 30 police posts that will also be taking some officers as well. This particular measure, I would imagine, in order for it to be properly enforced, Mr. Speaker, would require a significant amount of manpower.

So, it is going to put up a strain on police resources, and that concern, therefore, causes us to want to ask the question, how efficient is the enforcement aspect of this going to be? If the Government is serious about this legislation, it should not simply be, “promise made, promise kept, promise delivered.” We made a promise, we kept it, but in terms of the rollout, you know, whatever is whatever. At least we could lay claim to say that we kept the promise. So, perhaps, I do not know if the Member for Tunapuna, the Minister of Homeland Security, if he would

be contributing today, if he could probably speak to that. Because, Mr. Speaker, I recall that we would have approved, for financial year 2025/2026, \$500 million for police overtime. Just overtime, not the normal wage bill, which was significant, Mr. Speaker.

So, at a time when we know that the country's finances are a bit constrained, I do not think we would want to see that we would have to approve \$750 million in the next financial year. That is a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo would have mentioned, there are other uses that that money could be put to. So, it would be interesting to hear how it is that the Government intends to treat with the issue of police resources.

Mr. Speaker, also, the issue of court capacity, because with a fine of \$50,000, there is a likelihood that you are going to have a lot of persons who may be caught up in this—who may run afoul of this law, primarily because they do not know, and in doing so, they may find themselves before the court, or they have the option to pay the fine, and that is likely to cause a logjam in the court. We would have seen it with the traffic fines, the increase in traffic fines, where for a lot of people, because of how exorbitant those fines are, they are opting instead, Mr. Speaker, to contest. We saw the dilemma that the Judiciary now finds itself in.

The honourable Chief Justice, in his speech at the opening of the law term, would have indicated that the Judiciary is seeking to treat with an issue whereby persons have found a loophole in the law. That they are going to court districts to contest the tickets where there is a significant backlog, and they are receiving court dates as far as 2032, 2033. It is a deliberate exercise where the belief is that, “If I get a court date to contest this ticket that is six and seven years hence, that by the

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time the court date rolls around, that the police officer may not be in the service. The police officer may not recall the circumstances of giving the ticket, and the likelihood of these persons being able to escape unscathed is increased.”

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, with this, where we are treating with the issue of court capacity, we would want to know that if the Government is serious about enforcement, this is not another issue or challenge that the Judiciary is going to have to face, where you are treating with the backlog from one piece of legislation, and meanwhile you have another backlog that is building up as a result of another piece of legislation. So, if it is that we are going to be bringing legislation like this, Mr. Speaker, it is important to ensure that we have the infrastructure in place that will facilitate its efficient and effective rollout.

Public education, again, Mr. Speaker, is very, very important, because if we are looking at fines of 50,000, and I am hearing some \$300,000, 30 years in prison, clearly it speaks to the fact that we need to go beyond just the Parliament Channel, and we need to go beyond social media. Permit me to quote from an article, Mr. Speaker, in today’s *Guardian*, and it reads, “Business groups raise concern over proposed age-limit Bill”:

“The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Trinidad and Tobago Beverage Alcohol Alliance are calling for the proposed legislation to raise the legal age for alcohol consumption to be put on hold, with wider consultation before Parliament proceeds.

The two organisations are urging consideration of a Joint Select Committee to examine the evidence surrounding the proposed age threshold, penalties and enforcement capacity, as well as possible unintended consequences.

In a joint statement issued yesterday, the TT Chamber-the country's largest business group-and the TTBAA said they are particularly urging scrutiny of the potential for the legislation to drive some young people towards 'unregulated or illicit sources of alcohol.'

They said a Joint Select Committee would give 'stakeholders, experts and policymakers' an opportunity to examine the available evidence and assess the practical implications of the proposed measures.

'A structured, evidence-based process can help ensure that the final legislation is practical, proportionate and effective,' the organisations said."

Mr. Speaker, just a few hours ago, we were able to demonstrate on both sides that consensus legislation is possible in this House. It went through seamlessly. The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, in his contribution, would have made the point, you know, that we ought not to simply oppose for opposing sake, and that is not what we are doing, Mr. Speaker, because we recognize that in this legislation there is some utility. There are some proposals, Mr. Speaker, which we can back, we can align ourselves with, but there are some that we have discomfort with.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: You know why the banter, back and forth, you know, it might make good fodder for the cameras, Mr. Speaker.

If you were to go on the Parliament Channel on YouTube and you read some of the comments, you know, it is not nice. Because, Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago, five decades ago, the late calypsonian "Explainer" sang a song, "In Parliament dey kicksin", and it is interesting, and none of the parliamentarians who were there 50

years ago are here today, and the population holds the same view of the Parliament, unfortunately.

6.40 p.m.

And we are saying on this side, that we would like to see more consensus legislation and it can start with what is being proposed by these two bodies here that is why we have the Joint Select Committees, where we can have representatives from the Government, representatives from the Opposition, representatives from the other place and we sit down and we present our ideas, our perspectives and we try to arrive at legislation that everybody is happy with and that is in the best interest of all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: But it is not lost on us, Mr. Speaker, that when Members opposite were on this side, they were the de facto proponents of consultation. Everything was consultation, consultation. In fact, that was one of the things that helped them get into office, Mr. Speaker, and I recall when they came into office and they said that they would engage in consultation for the stand-your-ground legislation. They received kudos from across the board. People were happy, yes, the Government is going to engage in consultation and listen to the voice of the people and include it in the legislation. And since then, consultations seem to have become anathema to them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, and we wonder why and it is, again, cause for concern, listen to the people. And it is not just about, well, we told the people on the campaign trail what we were going to do, and they voted for us because of that.

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The Member for Toco/Sangre Grande knows better. There were people who voted for you all because all they heard was 10 per cent.

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

Mr. D. Romain: Now, they are hearing the Government has other bills to pay, so “yuh hadda hold up on da back pay”, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill also gives considerable power to the Minister to determine penalties later, which is another concern for us. For several offences, the Bill does not itself specify the eventual fixed penalty, instead, it provides that the fixed penalty will be prescribed by the Minister by order subject to negative resolution of Parliament. So essentially, Mr. Speaker, this means that the Parliament is being asked to establish the offence now, while leaving a significant aspect of the punishment to be determined later. We are of the view, Mr. Speaker, that if the Parliament is creating criminal offences, the Parliament should have a meaningful role in determining the consequences of those offences. Because, Mr. Speaker, foreknowledge of the penalty can, in fact, serve as a deterrent. But if it is people figure, well “ah doh know, it might just be a small fine”. They may be more inclined to engage in activity which will run afoul of the legislation and find themselves in a spot of bother, as they say, Mr. Speaker.

There is also the concern, Mr. Speaker, of excessive reliance on police discretion. The Bill provides that where:

“...a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a person under the”—relevant—“age...committed an offence...”—the officer—“may issue a fixed penalty notice.”

Mr. Speaker, that creates a significant discretion at the street level. So for

example, what constitutes reasonable grounds? I had cause to ask this same question when we debated the Special Operations Bill this term again, “reasonable grounds”. Will different officers apply the provision consistently? What evidence is required? How will officers distinguish personal possessions from possessions on behalf of another person and what safeguards exist against inconsistent enforcement?

So, Mr. Speaker, again these are some of the concerns that we have. As I mentioned, the ambiguity in the law and I am hoping that in the wrap-up or in the contributions that are to come, that Members opposite will seek to address that particular issue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I knew there was something I wanted to mention again with respect to the issue of—

Mr. Speaker: This seems like the time to ask you—

Mr. D. Romain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Again, if you would permit me, Mr. Speaker, just to revisit a point that I touched on earlier with respect to the alcohol content level and whether or not —how, would the police be able to determine if somebody who falls within the particular age bracket, 25 and under or between 18 to 25, whether if they are found in possession of alcohol if it meets the prescribed level that the law suggests.

Because, Mr. Speaker, Christmas is coming up, you have homemade wine. Now, while commercial alcoholic beverages would have on the label the alcohol content, homemade wine does not have that, Mr. Speaker. When I was growing up, Mr. Speaker, my mother—

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Mr. Sturge: A long time ago.

Mr. D. Romain: That was “not no” long time ago. Mr. Speaker, I recall again at Christmas time, my mother used to soak her fruit cake in Vat19, yeah, that cake always had to be moist.

Hon. Members:

Mr. D. Romain: Now, I am not drinking, but yeah, two bites “ah dat”, Mr. Speaker. Reminds me of one time I heard a gentleman say while he was in a room, a hotel room bearing the number 201, “Ah cud drink rum whole day and whole night but two pull an ah gone”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: 48(8), 48(8). You know better than that, Dominic.

Mr. D. Romain: And that is what he was saying, like in my own case, if I take two sips of Heineken, “I gone through”. “I doh drink alcohol.” I attempted and alcohol and I came to an agreement a long time ago we are not friends, but there are some people who could drink five, 10 beers and it does absolutely nothing to them.

Now, all of us here, Mr. Speaker, at one time were between the ages of 18 to 25 and we were able to navigate those years, those are critical years as young adults, not children, young adults. And so we are asking the question, what is it today that makes Members opposite believe that the current 18 to 25-year-olds cannot navigate those years as we did? We all came out good for it, Mr. Speaker. I am sure there were some here who would have consumed alcohol during those years.

Mr. Sturge: That is you.

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Mr. D. Romain: That did not happen to you?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: You were a drinker? [*Laughter*] “Yuh still come out good”, I think, you are in Parliament, you are a successful attorney, so, yes. But I am saying we need to have faith in our young people, Mr. Speaker, in our young adults, that they, just as we did, can navigate those years.

Mr. Speaker, I have a cousin who is 21 years old and never ceases to amaze me. During COVID, you know, he was one of those who fell out of the school system because he did not have a device and when we were finally able to get him one and so on, you know, he just lost interest in schooling and so on.

Mr. Sturge: That would have never have happened to him.

Mr. D. Romain: We gave out 78,000 laptops.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, he works in a factory and he is on his third vehicle. Yes, he buys second-hand vehicles, he used one for a while and then he gets rid of it and gets another one. But I am amazed, Mr. Speaker, at how responsible he is. He does not drink alcohol, he was just able to put a studio apartment in his parents’ yard. Very industrious, very ambitious. Came to me, I gave him some financial advice. He followed it and you know, he is doing well, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Mohit: No money? You gave him advice?

Mr. D. Romain: Yes. We need to understand that there are more young people like that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: It should not be a case of “Peter pay for Paul and Paul pay for

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all”. Right, that we use a big stick to kill a small spider, which is what this is. Essentially, Mr. Speaker, what this legislation represents is, we are trying to create legislation or present legislation that is motivated by the moral compass of a minority, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: And I think, and as I said before, that we on this side, we recognize what the statistics may say and I wish Members opposite and perhaps in the contributions to come, some more Members would provide us with a little more data and statistics. You know, like when you all were on this side, and to support legislation you always wanted data, statistics?

Mr. Sturge: The AG did that.

Mr. D. Romain: No. No. We are asking for data, Mr. Speaker, as it pertains to the local reality in terms of numbers. How is the use of cannabis, how is the use of alcohol and so on affecting—

Mr. Des Vignes: Locally.

Mr. D. Romain:—locally. The hundred and thirty-some-odd thousand persons that had been mentioned by my colleague from Diego Martin North/East, what are the figures? Tell us how many of them are at risk or in danger, that is what we want to know. Because at the end of the day, as I said, we want consensus legislation, Mr. Speaker, right. We want to be—because I have a niece that falls into that category, right and I am concerned about her as well. But—

Ms. Mohit: Advice? More advice?

Mr. D. Romain: “Oh, gosh.” So I have a vested interest, Mr. Speaker, in this

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legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Marcelle: Focus bro, do not study them.

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, anyway, I will not be distracted further by the Member, Mr. Speaker. Simply to say, Mr. Speaker, that—

Ms. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]—own a casino?

Mr. D. Romain: No, I do not own a casino. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, simply to say that contrary to what is being proffered by Members opposite, that we are here today to just oppose for opposing's sake, certainly not.

In the short time that we would have had to scrutinize the legislation, Mr. Speaker, having gone through it, as we indicated, there are concerns. Whether or not the Government would be minded to receive and to give consideration to our proposed amendments, Mr. Speaker, is another issue. But at the end of the day, we would like to see legislation that we could all be satisfied with and I just want to tell Members opposite, simply because persons may not agree with your viewpoint, because you are entitled to your opinion as we are entitled to ours and we would love to meet in the middle, you should not refer to people as demonic, satanic, Luciferian and so on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Because at the end of the day, all of us live in this country, we want what is best for the country, right. As I keep saying, whether it is you all on that side, or us on that side, we want to see a Trinidad and Tobago that we can all be proud of.

And so, I want to say on behalf the persons, that cohort of young persons,

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Mr. Speaker, who this Bill applies to, in particular, they are of view or the viewpoint that we are seeking to impose restrictions on them. Restrictions which can last for as little as one year, or in some cases as much as seven years, Mr. Speaker. There are those who believe that it is unfair, that the persons who are making this decision, that we would have had the opportunity to enjoy our years and now we are seeking to infringe on them.

There is the perspective that the legislation is being made by persons who—well, will impact a future that some of those persons will not be around for. And so, on their behalf, I am pleading with the Government to please not just with this legislation but future legislation that may impact the lives of our young persons. The level of political apathy is growing in that cohort and it is very concerning, Mr. Speaker, and you may recall that one of the first questions that was asked at that briefing on Monday by one of the participants was, what can we suggest or what can we recommend to them that when they are speaking with their colleagues who are disenchanted with the politics and are saying they do not see the point in voting, they do not believe in politics, they do not see the sense in it.

They asked us to tell them what they can say to their colleagues to us bring them around to their side and I appealed to them, whatever it is that motivated you to offer yourself as a youth parliamentarian, make it infectious, make it infectious. And whatever we could do in the Parliament, even if it means that we need to modify our behaviour sometimes, it is not always of the best and many of these young people, those 40 participants, will be looking at what is taking place over the course of the next few weeks, Mr. Speaker, as they prepare to come and sit in this Chamber later on in November to debate that Motion. And I want to appeal to

all of my colleagues, please, let us give them something that is worthy of viewership and worthy of emulating. “We all doh” always hadda fight, you know.” At the end of the day, it could be one love. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, earlier in the day—before I recognise anyone on the Government side. Earlier in the day, I had notification that the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Development wished to make a statement. The easiest way of doing this is to now suspend the debate on this and allow the hon. Minister to do so, otherwise, I will invoke the provisions of Standing Order 19, which I do not see the necessity to do so. Thank you very much. Hon. Minister of Culture and Community Development.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Dr. Slinger Francisco – The Mighty Sparrow

The Minister of Culture and Community Development (Hon. Michelle Benjamin): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me at this point in time in the debate to make this statement on the passing of the Mighty Sparrow. Mr. Speaker, the sparrow is not the largest bird, it does not have the grandest wingspan, it does not need to dominate the sky to be noticed.

6.55 p.m.

But give the sparrow a place to stand, and it will sing. Give it a little space, and it will be heard. And perhaps that is what made our sparrow, the Mighty Sparrow.

Mr. Speaker, on Sunday the 27th of September, in New York, surrounded by his family, Trinidad and Tobago lost one of the greatest cultural figures this

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country has ever produced—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:—Dr. Slinger Francisco, O.R.T.T., the Mighty Sparrow, the calypso king of the world. He was 91. *The New York Times* called him the “Trinidadian titan of calypso”.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, led by the hon. Prime Minister, and on behalf of my Ministry, the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, I extend our deepest condolences to his wife, his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren; to the calypso fraternity that knew him simply as the “Birdie”; to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; and to his admirers around the world. And I say to the Government of the people of Grenada, where he was born, we grieve with you for a son we have shared for 90 years.

But before there was the Mighty Sparrow, there was Slinger Francisco, born on the 9th of July, 1935, in Grand Roy, Grenada, and brought to Port of Spain as an infant; a boy of Newtown Boys’ RC School, who sang his first calypso at the age of 18, and who moved so much on the stage that the older singers told him to, “Stand still and sing.” Like a sparrow, guess what? He did not. He did not stand still. He never would.

In 1956, at just 20 years old, he burst onto the national stage with “Jean and Dinah”, winning both the Calypso King and Road March titles. The prize back then was \$40. The Carnival Queen received \$7,500. And, of course, Sparrow being who he was, the next year, he sang “Carnival Boycott”. The calypsonians followed him, and out of that protest came the Carnival Development Committee. The calypsonians’ claim to be paid as an artiste was heard. That was the first thing Sparrow changed, Mr. Speaker, not only how calypso sounded, but what

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calypsonians are worth.

“Sparrow” earned his place among the greats because he knew calypso had more work to do. He knew calypso was worth more than just making people dance. He sang the “Federation” and “Our Independence.” He sang “Education” and “Dan is the man (In the Van)” to a young nation learning to think for itself. He sang “Ten to One is Murder” and “Melda (Obeah Wedding)”:

“...oh, you making wedding plans”.

And made us, as a people, laugh at ourselves and, of course, then think again. He sang the truth when others kept quiet. He stood up to those in power, that he did, and he held up a mirror so ordinary people could see their own lives in his songs.

Over a career of 70 years, he composed more than 500 calypsos and recorded more than 70 albums, carrying the song and spirit of Trinidad and Tobago from the calypso tents of Port of Spain to Madison Square Garden and beyond. He won eight Calypso Monarch titles, eight Road March titles, and twice the title of Calypso King of Kings.

This nation and the region gave him the highest honours as follows: The Hummingbird Medal in Silver, 1969; the Honorary Doctor of Letters of the University of West Indies, 1987; the Chaconia Medal of Gold, 1983; the Order of the Caribbean Community, 2001. And in 2014, it was a government, led by the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that gave him the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: And this Government did not wait for his passing to say thank you. In February, this year, my Ministry dedicated Dimanche Gras, 2026, to him, while he could still hear the applause and feel the love of this nation. But

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perhaps Sparrow's greatest honour was one no institution could confer. It was the love for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It was the way a Sparrow song could play, and the entire gathering would know the words. Mr. Speaker, a nation not only mourns a giant, it honours the gift he gave to us.

The House and the nation will wish to know what the Government intends. The Government has already constituted a committee to work with his family to accord Dr. Francisco, the Mighty Sparrow, a funeral fit for a legend. Under the direction of the Prime Minister, an official state-assisted funeral will be held, a date to be fixed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Calypso History Month, which opens on Thursday, tomorrow, will be observed this year in his memory. And my Ministry, in collaboration with TUCO, will stage a national tribute. Books of condolences will be opened at the following various embassies; the regional corporations; NAPA, the National Academy for the Performing Arts; SAPA, the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts; the Shaw Park Cultural Complex in Tobago; the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, main office, Level 8, Tower C, International Waterfront Complex from tomorrow, the 1st of October, 2026, from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. People will remember Sparrow in different ways. Some will remember "Jean and Dinah". Some will remember "Mr. Walker". Some will remember "The Slave". Others will remember another song that became the soundtrack of our own lives. That is the greatest testament to his work.

This is a time of mourning. It is also a time of gratitude. We give thanks to Almighty God for the life of Slinger Francisco, the Mighty Sparrow. We give thanks for the music, the wit and the courage of his voice. We give thanks for a

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man who understood that a people who can tell their own story can never be made small. We give thanks that the small bird from Grand Roy made his nest amongst us in Trinidad and Tobago, and sang for us until the very end. That mighty man, the Mighty Sparrow, has taken his final bow. His music and his legacy remain, and it is ours. May his soul rest in eternal peace. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: We will resume debate on the Bill which was before us. Chaguanas East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (ALCOHOL, CANNABIS,
DANGEROUS DRUGS, GAMBLING AND TOBACCO) BILL, 2026**

The Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Vandana Mohit): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you sincerely for this opportunity to contribute to this debate, which I believe, coming from the Ministry that I serve, is a critical debate at this point in time for a society of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, there are Bills which amend laws. There are Bills which reorganize systems. There are Bills which compel us as a Parliament to confront what is happening in our homes, what is happening in our communities, what is happening within our families, and what is happening among our young people and within the social fabric of our country.

Mr. Speaker, as I begin, I want to commend the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Member for Siparia, as well as the Attorney General, for bringing this Bill to this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in his contribution, quoted our hon. Prime Minister here in this august Chamber today. And he quoted our Prime Minister when she took her oath of office, her speech. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to begin today by quoting my Prime Minister, and I quote *Express* article, dated September 29, 2026:

“Tougher measures needed to protect young people”

Mr. Speaker, and I quote the Prime Minister:

“I am resolute in my duty to protect and safeguard the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, the future custodians of our beloved nation, from the pernicious consequences that result from the use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other dangerous drugs,’ she stated.”

Mr. Speaker, I quote our Prime Minister again:

“These measures are not arbitrary. They are deliberate and rooted in our unwavering commitment to the health, safety and moral well-being of the young people of our nation,’ Persad-Bissessar said.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt—there can be no debate on the hon. Prime Minister’s commitment to the youth of this country. We all know in this House, she served as Minister of Education. She once served in the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services. She served twice as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and she is always concerned about the children and youth of our nation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: So, when Members opposite, Diego Martin North/East, Diego Martin West in particular as well, want to come to this House and speak about

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Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

consultations—and, Mr. Speaker, I reiterate again, when they were in government, they hated that word called “consultation”. They hated that word. Whenever we use that word “consultation”, they will line up, they will gang up against us in Opposition, and they will try to tell you they had consultation. And when you ask, “Well, tell us where?” They could never tell you where. Now you are in Opposition—“well, dey really say when yuh there, you cud say whatever yuh want, yuh know”. But really and truly, you are just saying whatever you want.

Because if you read, if you monitor the newspaper, if you monitor what is happening in the UNC—since most of you love to do that—if you do so, you will see that the hon. Prime Minister now, when she was in Opposition, as the Member for Siparia and the Leader of the Opposition, she went throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, hosting anti-crime consultations, more than five of them. And she dealt with issues such as these.

In addition to that, we campaigned on the ground with the people and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And in doing so, we presented a Manifesto to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to invite you, Diego Martin West, and other colleagues—I know Laventille West, he is always quoting from our Manifesto when he is contributing in this House. So, Diego Martin West, I want to read from our Manifesto for you.

Mr. Sturge: Read, read.

Hon. V. Mohit: Page 27 of our Manifesto.

Mr. Alexander: Page 27.

Hon. V. Mohit:

“Raise the legal age for marijuana use and gambling to 25 years and older.”

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Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and
Tobacco) Bill, 2026 (cont'd)
Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: This is our Manifesto. We presented this to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We are not here, Malabar/Mausica, as a majority by guess, you know. We are here as a majority because the people voted us to be the majority.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

7.10 p.m.

Hon. V. Mohit: And they voted for us to be the majority based on what we presented to them on our campaign trail, and this is what we presented to them, and what we are doing here. Whether you like it or not, we are delivering on our promises to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Alexander: Consult them. Consult them.

Mr. Sturge: Promise made, promise kept.

Hon. V. Mohit: So, when you want to talk about consultation, we consulted. In the process of consulting, we listened, and you know what, we did not just consult in that short space of time prior to the election. In the 10 years when you suffered the citizens. In the 10 years, Diego Martin West, you spoke about salami tactics. When you locked this country down in COVID, and you never allowed citizens back here to vote in an election, that was salami tactics.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh love salami, eh”?

Hon. V. Mohit: In those 10 years, we were consulting with the people on the ground. Whether it be a pavement report—you do not like to hear it. Whether it be

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Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

Monday night forum. Whether it be pre-budget consultations, we were consulting during the 10 years you were in power to work out to get you out of office, and we did it just right. We did just right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, as I continue. As—

Mr. Sturge: “Share licks. Share licks.”

Hon. V. Mohit:—as I continue, Mr. Speaker, during our campaign trail, I want to commend the Prime Minister and the Attorney General and all Members of this team. When you speak of substance abuse, marijuana, alcohol, et cetera. It eventually develops into a problem, abnormal behaviour, then it leads to possibly committing an offence or a crime. This is why we are so focused on our anti-crime plan. Mr. Speaker, pre-election I made a commitment during my campaign that when I get back into this House, those folks are not going to lecture any one of us. We are here to serve, and we are doing that for and with the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, when we were walking during our campaign, you know what people were saying to us? “You all have to do something about crime, Vandana. If you all don’t do something, if PNM come back in power, we gone from this country, you know.” Those were the words on the ground and the conversations on the ground coming from the people and the citizens you are speaking about. For years, the conversation has been that we need to work on the root causes of crime.

Mr. Speaker, we have been coming to this Parliament in the last year with

Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol,
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Tobacco) Bill, 2026 (cont'd)
Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

Bills to deal with the root causes of crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: They stand up here and they “palance” about social impact. Today. I thank the Prime Minister for placing me in this Ministry once again. Because each and every day, while I am sitting in this Ministry, I see the problems within society. I see how we need to fix them, and when we sit as a team, I see each and every day the decisions we are making and how we are treating with the social issues within our country. And that, Mr. Speaker, we must commend the Prime Minister, who is the head, for.

Mr. Speaker, I will share some information with you because I see they are asking for statistics. I will share with them some statistics shortly from a place which they neglected, which is the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: “Ohhhhhhh.”

Mr. Sturge: Oh dear. Oh dear.

Hon. V. Mohit: But I will do that shortly.

The Member for Malabar/Mausica would have spoken a short while ago about support for this Bill and the business chambers and so on. The business chambers and the comments on social media—and all are negative, and Toco/Sangre Grande made reference to social media comments, et cetera. Malabar/Mausica, you read what you want to read on social media. I think we know that. I see you struggling daily behind four walls trying to talk to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. V. Mohit: I feel really sorry for you. I really feel sorry for you.

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Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from today's *Daily Express*, Wednesday, 30 September 2026.

Hon. Member: Today.

Hon. V. Mohit: Today. You quote from yesterday. We quote from today.

Hon. Members: Mhmmm.

Hon. V. Mohit: Fresh.

“...Dianne Joseph said fulfilling the campaign promise...”

Let me read the headline:

“...Business groups call for effective enforcement”

Yes, but what they are doing in this article, Mr. Speaker:

“...Dianne Joseph said fulfilling the campaign promise was a commendable, forward-thinking step.

‘Whilst the...’—Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Services Industries—“...TTCIS...”—President—“...always monitors policies affecting commercial operations, some matters transcend profit margins. The health, safety, and moral fabric of our young people are of far greater significance and value than short-term revenue. Protecting our youth from early exposure to addictive substances and habits is a long-term investment in our national human capital,’ Joseph said.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote again because it is important to put this on the record. The support in which this piece of legislation is receiving.

“Bar owners...”

Let me see—Wednesday 30 September, 2026, *Guardian* newspaper.

Mr. Sturge: Today.

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Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

Hon. V. Mohit: Today again.

“Bar owners back higher drinking age...”

Mr. Speaker:

“The Barkeepers and Operators Association (BOATT) supports raising the legal drinking age from 18 to 21...”

BOATT president Sateesh Moonasar said the association understands the Government’s intention behind the proposed change and accepts that bars will lose some business.

‘We are not against or opposed to the Government changing the age from 18 to 21,’ he said.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from another article. We will keep it coming for you, Malabar/Mausica. Four hours ago, Trinidad and Tobago *Guardian* newspaper. Four hours ago.

“Psychologist backs increase in age for alcohol and drug use.”

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

Hon. V. Mohit: He is lifting it for me. He has it. But he refuses to read it. That is hypocritical.

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

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, this is a piece of legislation that psychologists will understand, social workers will understand, NGOs will understand, police officers will understand, those who are working with our at-risk youths will understand, parents will understand, families will love, who are facing challenges. Whether they like it or not, this is going to help our society.

Mr. Speaker, I want us to understand something, and I want—when we

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understand this, the citizens must understand as well. Mr. Speaker, before I go to that, I just want to touch on one thing. I heard from Malabar/Mausica on some—I think it is the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, you know, raising some concerns. Mr. Speaker, I am referring to the campaign trail again. Even before the campaign trail, businesses were complaining about crime et cetera and root causes, and we need to tackle root causes and treat with society ills. To the business community, I want to say to you today: Your Government is working for you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Diego Martin West came out here today to speak as the best youth of Trinidad and Tobago. But following Diego Martin West's speech, where he even said to our Attorney General—he criticized him for piloting the Bill. But I want to let you know, we have a great Attorney General on this side, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: He is not afraid of standing in this House and piloting good stuff, if you want to speak youth. So, when you come here and champion youth, do so with some morals and values.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, because of Diego Martin West, I want to speak—

Mr. Sturge: “She hit yuh hard dere, Hans”.

Hon. V. Mohit: —and, Mr. Speaker, let us not forget they had a gentlemen sleeping on a chair serving the youth of this country.

Mr. Alexander: “Which part? Way de chair?”

Hon. V. Mohit: The former Member for Laventille West.

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Mr. Sturge: “Etheldread.”

Hon. V. Mohit: You all remember that?

Mr. Sturge: “Fitzherbert Etheldread Hinds.”

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. V. Mohit: I saw him sitting in one of the Chambers recently.

Mr. Sturge: Sleeping again.

Hon. V. Mohit: I am sure he was taking a nap at some point, because he is not accustomed to being awake. He did nothing for the youth, and you want to come here to talk to my Attorney General or our Attorney General about piloting a Bill on youth? Come on, Diego Martin West. But, Mr. Speaker, because of Diego Martin West here today, I want to speak to the youth of this country directly through this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: This piece of legislation that your Government is piloting here in this august House, the House of Representatives, today. To our young people, this piece of legislation is for your protection.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation will protect you, the youth, and children in the future. This piece of legislation is a piece of legislation that will protect our children. It will protect our young people. It will protect parents. It will protect communities. It will protect families. It will protect our systems, Mr. Speaker. Because one of the things we are sitting in here and not understanding is that you are speaking about manpower for the police service. Understand that our systems are under strain. Why are our systems under strain?

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Because, as legislators, we have a duty to help them tackle the problem. When we help them tackle the problem through legislation, then enforcement becomes easier.

Mr. Speaker, today I stand here in my capacity as the Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services, and I want to share with you that our systems are indeed under strain. This is why today I am in this House, and I am supporting this piece of legislation wholeheartedly. Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation for our youth listening is a big win for you and your future.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, you know, when the Member for Diego Martin West, as well as Diego Martin North/East, spoke here today, I saw them, you know, saying all sorts of stuff about my colleague while he was speaking, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. They spoke about cutting programmes. On the last few occasions, I sat in this House, and you know, I listened to Members opposite continuously refer to us, the UNC Government, cutting youth programmes.

Today I want to correct this record once again. You know, Mr. Speaker, they really say—Diego Martin West, when I was a councillor on both sides of the House, whether it be UNC or PNM, one thing persons always tell me: “Yuh young, you now coming listen, learn, and then shoot.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: “Doh talk outta context.” Do not speak about what you do not know.

I had the opportunity to sit in the JSC Committee on Social Services and

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Public Admin. Mr. Speaker, in that Joint Select Committee, we had the opportunity to treat with some of these youth programmes. Mr. Speaker, they are here preaching about us cutting youth programmes. But today I want to ask them, what did you do with all of these youth programmes? Did you even know what was happening in them, or were you clueless about it and you just wanted to say, “We had something?”

There was a particular one for La Horquetta/Talparo in this last Parliament, Mr. Speaker. Every time he got up to speak, it was the same speech about MiLAT, MYPART—

Mr. Sturge: CCC.

Hon. V. Mohit:—CCC.

7.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we wondered. He kept saying, “We are working towards this very soon,” and those were his speeches. “Very soon” and “we are working towards this.”

Mr. Sturge: Soon come.

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, today we tell the national population, do not believe anything they say. They have no shame.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: They have absolutely no shame. And I will ask you: Have you no shame?

Hon. V. Mohit Have you no shame to continuously speak about this in the public domain when you know, when you know deep down inside, these programmes were in jeopardy since you were in Government? These programmes were in

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jeopardy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record a *Guardian Media* article. Let us treat with this. Let us treat with these programmes. Headline:

“Cabinet appoints Committee to probe misconduct allegations at CCC” —
under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, up to now, we do not know about anything in that report. I quote:

“Cabinet has appointed a committee to investigate allegations of misconduct within the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Programme.”

Hon. Members: Corps.

Hon. V. Mohit: Ah yes, Corps, sorry. I am reading. I am quoting.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. V. Mohit:

“Minister of Youth Development and National Service, Foster Cummings, presented letters of appointment to Committee members today. The Committee will gather evidence, conduct of interviews and submit a report with recommendations within a month to ensure the programme remains effective and accessible to the youth of Trinidad and Tobago.”

Within a month, Mr. Speaker. A month has passed, Mr. Speaker. They themselves were probing misconduct in CCC, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, in 2020; *Guardian* article in 2020:

“MYPART workers get termination notices.

Twenty-one months after the Government gave an assurance that the military-led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training, (MYPART) initiative...was again arisen about its future, after

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termination notices were allegedly given to staff members, ending their respective contracts this month end.

MYPART is now under—”

A member of MYPART is being quoted here.

“MYPART is now under the CCC, and right now we are not sure what is happening with us.”

Mr. Speaker, this is in 2020.

I want to quote now from the JSC Committee, Sixth Report, Social Services and Public Administration. Maj. Benjamin:

“Thank you very much, Chair, and members, and good morning to the listening public. In terms of the recruitment strategy for youth programmes in general, the Specialised Youth Service Programmes encompassed the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) programme, the MiLAT, Military-Led Academic Training Programme, and MYPART, Military-Led Youth Programme..., also the CHINS, Children In Need of Supervision, under the auspices of the SYSP, which is managed by the Trinidad and Tobago Defence force, on behalf of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.”

Mr. Speaker, that was Maj. Benjamin, right, referring to what those programmes were. Mr. Speaker, I want to go to one Member Monroe.

Hon. Members: Hmmm.

Hon. V. Mohit: In this JSC, the questions arose: What was happening with these persons who were involved in these programmes? What were the success rates? What was happening to them after they get a certificate? Are there job

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opportunities? What exactly is happening with these people? I want to go to one Member Monroe, who was the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande at the time. Here is the question Member Monroe asked:

“Thank you very much, Chairman. To the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, I continue. I would like to know, for those graduates of these programmes and courses, what strategy is in place to funnel them into the place of employment?”

Mr. Speaker, Maj. Benjamin responding:

“Member, thank you very much for that question. In the Civilian Conservation Corps Programme CCC programmes, we would have looked at the results of a tracer study that was done...and one of the key results there were that persons graduating from the programme, while they were certified TVET Level 1, were not introduced to the potential workforce. So, there was a bridging challenge in terms of getting them into job opportunities.” So, are you telling us you had this programme as a dumping ground when you were faced with issues with youth and children? “You just put them there for putting them there sake, call it a certificate. After the certificate, they have no opportunity before their eyes—

Mr. Sturge: Waste people’s time.

Hon. V. Mohit:—where they can get a job opportunity. So, when they cannot get a job, where are they going to? Are they not going into, what, unwanted activities?

Mr. Sturge: Hmmm.

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, so when I hear the Opposition speak about MYPART, MiLAT, and CCC, you left it in shambles. You left it in shambles.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, they left us with a country to pay bills.

Mr. Sturge: Uh hmmm.

Hon. V. Mohit: Every day we sit in our offices, we have to wonder and worry about how we are going to pay bills, Mr. Speaker. And then they want to come to this Parliament and speak about social impact, programmes cutting. If we are not seeing the value of it, what do you expect us to do, not review? You have a problem with reviews now? If you did not review it, we would review it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: That is all we are saying. You did not even try, and you lacked willpower, and that was your problem. Or you simply, what we all know, you did not care. Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Since you have started a new point, would you require your 15 minutes?

Hon. V. Mohit: Sure. Mr. Speaker, I would accept. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, in my 15 minutes, I want to move to some data because they kept asking me—well, they kept asking us—for some data, but I am not finding my—it is here, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sturge: We find it. Have a little patience. We find it.

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, quickly, because I do not want to lose the opportunity to speak about this. I want to move to the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, and I think it is important for our national audience to listen attentively to what is happening. The Children's Authority has

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in its possession, or they are responsible for, children in need of supervision. We refer to them as CHINS. Mr. Speaker, the role of the Authority in relation to CHINS: Children in need of supervision are deemed pursuant to “

“Section 50A of the Children Act, 2012, (as amended)-where a parent, guardian or person with responsibility for a child alleges that he or she is unable to control the child, he or she may apply to the court for an order deeming the child to be a Child in Need of Supervision. Two:

“Child in Conflict with the Law, CCL: any child who has been suspected, accused, detained for or charged with a criminal offence in Trinidad and Tobago...”

So, we have both CHINS and CCL, Child in Conflict with the Law. Mr. Speaker, I want to give some data in terms of what we are treating with in the Children’s Authority. There is a total of 130 children at the attention of the Authority dealing with marijuana misuse. There is a total of 59 children at the attention of the Authority dealing with alcohol misuse. There is a total of 38 children at the attention of the Authority dealing with both marijuana and alcohol misuse.

Mr. Speaker, a total of 20 children dealing with these issues are clients of the Children Drug Treatment Court. This is why this piece of legislation is so important to us. These are the figures before the Children’s Authority that I have before me. I have before me some profiles of children in need of supervision, just some profiles, and I want to share that with the national public and this House.

One, children in need of supervision, and I want to just share with you the profile in terms of the issues and challenges. One: frequent school suspensions, drug use, marijuana, deviant, aggressive behaviour. Two, this is another profile: violent

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outbursts, drug use, defiant, aggressive, nicotine and cocaine use disorder, conduct disorder. Another profile. Three, frequent school suspensions, Mr. Speaker, all of them within the ages of 14 to 17. Three, Mr. Speaker, frequent school suspensions for fighting and drug use, marijuana; verbally and physically aggressive. Mr. Speaker, we are going again. Four, suspension from school, alleged member of the Seven gang. Mr. Speaker, five, another profile: substance abuse, marijuana. Six, charges of housebreaking and larceny. Seven, substance use, marijuana, absconding from home, affiliation with known criminals in his community. Another one: substance abuse, alcohol, cigarettes, gang affiliations. Mr. Speaker, another one: cannabis use disorder. Another one, an active gang member. Another one: substance abuse, alcohol, marijuana. Another profile: threatened to kill parent, robbery, participated in a robbery, substance use, use marijuana.

Mr. Speaker, another one: absconding from home, substance use, marijuana. another one: concerns for neglect, parental drug and alcohol abuse. Mr. Speaker, we are going again. Another one: substance use, marijuana and cigarettes. These are CHINS, eh, Children in Need of Supervision, some of the profiles we have before us. Substance use, marijuana, cigarettes, stealing, disruptive at school, substance use, alcohol. Another one, another one again: substance use, marijuana, cigarettes, alcohol, threats of suicide, conduct disorder diagnosis, cannabis and tobacco use disorder, cannabis use disorder. Another one, Mr. Speaker. Those are the children in need of supervision, some of them that we have before or within our system.

7.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with this House, since we came into office, why I am

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saying our system is under strain. Early in the game, Children in Need of Supervision would have engaged in an activity—catching the home on fire in Siberan Drive, South Trinidad. Mr. Speaker, the former Government did not deal with Children in Need of Supervision, you know. When they closed the St. Michael's Home, they never looked for an alternative venue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: So, they left Children in Need of Supervision, helter-skelter.

Mr. Alexander: They left them. They left them.

Hon. V. Mohit: They left them.

Mr. Alexander: “Dey leave dem out.”

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, when I visited Siberan Drive after that fire, whether they are CHINS or not, I could not believe the filth those children were living in. When I walked in there, the smell, the look, I wondered if we were in the landfill. They lit the place on fire in retaliation.

Mr. Speaker, last week I had another experience which I did not want for this Government, but the CHINS are now in the NCEC because we have to, of course, place them somewhere whilst we put in place something for them. And last week they planned, and they planned for the security, and there was a riot at the NCEC, and the riot involved these young folks, which I just described for you. Some of them were in a huge fight, even resulting in me having to liaise with the Minister of Health.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Standing Order 48(1). While we are enjoying the regaling of the Minister, could she come back to the Bill that we are debating?

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Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

Hon. V. Mohit: I am dealing with the Bill

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sturge: “She talking bout your failure!”

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—which does not deal with children.

Mr. Sturge: “It hutting yuh. She talking bout yuh failure.”

Mr. Speaker: Member, if you read the Bill, the Bill seeks to amend substantial portions of the Children Act. The Minister was simply giving the context by which these provisions in the Bill are needed. Minister, continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: Rub it in, failure.

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, if they do not want to hear about the behaviours as a result of cannabis and alcohol, well then, I do not know what to else to tell you, but this is the behaviour that is as a result of that.

Mr. Sturge: Of your failure.

Hon. V. Mohit: And when we have riots taking place in a state institution, if you do not want to hear about that, as a responsible Member of the Opposition, I am sorry for you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, once again, I am rising on 48(1) because the Bill and the amendments are not dealing with children in state institutions. They are speaking about people who are 18 and over.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sturge: “Sit down. She tryna run down de clock.”

Mr. Speaker: I think if you read the Bill very carefully, Member, the Bill does

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Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

not deal—it amends substantial portions of the Children Act. So, the Minister is entitled to give the context which these amendments are needed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: She is entitled, and I will tell you the reason why. The reason why is that *Hansard* has now become routinely used in interpretations of statutes in court. Prior to that, *Hansard* was never really admitted. Since *Pepper v Hart* and other cases, subsequent to *Pepper v Hart*, the courts have routinely used *Hansard*. So, it is very important where the mover of a Bill is making her contribution, that the accuracy of the record—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, you invited it, you know. So please do not show displeasure when I am explaining it to you. All right?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: And it is very important where the Minister responsible—all right, is explaining the rationale for the provision. So, you invited it. You made the objection, so do not object when I am explaining.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Go ahead with the debate. Go ahead.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Minister, continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: “She tryin tuh run down de clock.”

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, the Member is just simply trying to make me run out of time

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: That is okay. The Children’s Authority was never of importance

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to them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Because they left the Children's Authority with over \$80 million in arrears, which bills they never paid. As I continue, and as I was saying. This is what the problems we are faced with are resulting in, and we do not want our state institutions to be facing any form of, you know, damages because we have other children in our care. And we have to also protect these children. So, when I am saying I am supporting this Bill, it is because of solid evidence existing within our systems.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, and you have heard about what is happening in our schools, and this is why I commend the Minister of Homeland Security. We are working toward, you know, the improvement of our citizens. I commend the Minister for bringing police into schools because when we are faced with CHINS and these forms of issues in terms of the result of use of cannabis and alcohol, et cetera, then the behaviour is taken into schools and communities. So, I commend the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I commend PACSO for the National Parenting Programme. We are working with them on this. I also commend the Ministry of Homeland Security for the continued work on the Youth Mentorship Programme. We are working on youth, and when you speak of social impact, we are working within our constituencies. This is why we took the JAVA programme from being held in one area to several constituencies across Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: At-risk communities, Mr. Speaker. This is why I have sent all of our outreach units, Social Welfare Division, Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, National Family Services Division, throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. We have our outreach programmes. Go into the communities. We have engaged in over 100 since we came into office.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill also speaks to reintegration, rehabilitation, working with faith-based organizations, working with religious leaders, et cetera, community groups and so on, and I want to share with you that we do not await Members of the Opposition to speak about social impact. The Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services, have a look at us. Every day we are out there delivering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and in one aspect we are delivering through our NGO unit. We have given 13 one-off grants to NGOs throughout Trinidad and Tobago because we believe in this fight, we must engage civil society. So, Mr. Speaker, we are doing our work, but at the same time, prevention is better than cure. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we must also discourage this or these types of behaviours. We are focused on human development, and we want to protect our young people as much as we can.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I want to just say that when you have an addiction, it consumes your household income, the social services sector feels the consequences. When you have substance misuse, it contributes to family conflict. When a parent is unable to function because of addiction, children carry the circumstances. When gambling drains income that should have purchased food, paid the electricity, financed school expenses, and maintained a home, the family carries the consequences. We are no longer about that, Mr. Speaker. Therefore,

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Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

we support this Bill wholeheartedly for change within our society. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government Business.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you most 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.

Question put and agreed to.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (ALCOHOL, CANNABIS, DANGEROUS DRUGS, GAMBLING AND TOBACCO) BILL, 2026

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Penelope Beckles (Arima): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I make my contribution on this Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and Tobacco) Bill, 2026. I want to start by making it abundantly clear that the Opposition has its concerns as it relates to the whole issue of alcohol abuse, and the Government says that: “The purpose of these amendments is...to raise the minimum age for the sale purchase, possession or consumption of intoxicating liquor or tobacco to twenty-one; and the minimum age for the sale, purchase, possession or consumption of cannabis to twenty-five respectively. Additionally, the minimum permissible age in respect of gambling will be raised to twenty-five.”

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Ms. Beckles (cont'd)

As has been said, this Bill contains 9 clauses. The Bill amends seven pieces of legislation, and therefore the first issue for us has to be that when you are debating an amendment that deals with seven pieces of legislation, we want to make it abundantly clear to the public that for us in the Opposition, this time frame of giving us this Wednesday night, it is less than 48 hours, is totally insufficient, it is unacceptable, and it will impact on what it is I am going to say and the position we are going to take.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Because, Mr. Speaker, the public must know that when you are amending these seven pieces of legislation and seven very important pieces of legislation, if you will allow me, I will be very quick:

“...the Dangerous Drugs Act...the Registration of Clubs Act...the Tobacco Control Act...the Children Act...the Liquor Licences Act...the Gambling...Control Act...and the Cannabis Control Act”

Those are very important pieces of legislation. And to give us less than 48 hours to respond, definitely is unacceptable and unfortunate. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that—and I want to start where in a number of things said by my friend. And let me start by making reference to her statement that we closed down the St. Michael’s Home. Because the hon. Member for Chaguanas East is making that statement, a totally misleading and inaccurate statement—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles:—and that is linked to several other contributions to give the impression that this Government, when we were in Government, we did not care

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about children. To make to say that we did not care about the Children's Authority and that we closed down St. Micheal's is absolutely false. Mr. Speaker—The Office of the Prime Minister and the Anglican church announced a mutual—

Ms. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, I never said they closed it down.

Hon. Members: “Noooo.” [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Mohit: I said after it was closed, they never found a place.

Ms. P. Beckles: Where is the Standing Order?

Mr. Speaker: Member, it has happened throughout in the past where Members have stood up without citing a standing order to correct the record.

Hon. Members: No, no, no—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: All of you all are guilty of it. Everyone in this House is guilty of it.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Forget that. If the Member wishes to say that that is not what she said, then we will get the *Hansard* to correct it eventually. But continue, Member. We can correct the record after.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Mr. Speaker, I am simply responding to the Member's statement that we closed down the St Micheal's Home.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And she said that. And I want to say that the Office of the Prime Minister and the Anglican church announced a mutual decision to close the St. Michael's School for Boys in Diego Martin, May 2018 after its 129 years of operation. The closure followed a drastic drop in residents from a capacity of 80 down to an average of just four boys—so do not mislead the House—

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles:—after legislative changes shifted youth rehabilitation and care responsibilities to other facilities like the YTC.

7.55 p.m.

I want to further say that the former St. Michael's School for Boys in Diego Martin was repurposed into a model residential restorative development home—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles:—for young people. It is further stated that the site underwent a massive \$5.9million facelift—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles:—and a restorative construction project. The repurposed facility includes the following key features: Target demographics and capacity: The site serves as residential space for up to 70 to 80 boys aged 12 to 18; core programming—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles:—physical upgrades/oversight: The facility runs under a new management model heavily involved in the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. I do not want to read more, but do not mislead the House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And further to that, Mr. Speaker, you see, if you listen to my friend from Chaguanas East, at the end of the day, they always want the public to believe that when things are not working for them, blame the PNM. So, my honourable friend from Chaguanas East is saying that they have to worry about paying bills in reference to what is happening at MiLAT—you see, you closed

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down MiLAT, you closed down MYPART, you closed down CCC, “and yuh blaming de PNM”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And now your argument is, because of us, we leave you in debt and you have to pay these bills, and you have to worry about paying bills. If you cannot pay the bills and you cannot run the Government, hand it back to the PNM. It is time to get out.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And further to that, to come and say that the Civilian Conservation—she said “Corps”. I mean, they closed it down and made it a corpse, but it is really—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: It is really the Civilian Conservation Corps. And let me say that there is absolutely nothing wrong, as far as I am concerned, if our Cabinet decides, for whatever information that you heard, that there is some difficulty, something suspect, you take a decision to have an investigation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Ms. P. Beckles: As a matter of fact, that is to be commended. But all of a sudden, MiLAT, MYPART, CCC, all the other youth organizations that were functioning, YAPA, that they have closed down, they are blaming the PNM for closing it down.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to say that I am maintaining my position that there is reason to express concerns about the issues relating to young people and drinking, whether it is the use of cannabis—it is not that there are not

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concerns, but when you bring something of this nature to Parliament, where you are amending these several pieces of legislation, it is not just only what you do, but it is how you do it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo spoke about all the platitudes about what is being done in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and our main point today, and several of my colleagues made it, is the issue of consultation. Now, I have in my possession from the *Guardian*—last week Friday, the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—there was a conference and exposition: putting youth voices at the centre of policy development, and the hon. Member said, and I quote:

“I want this conference to be more than a gathering. I want it to be a starting point for a stronger relationship between young people and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, a relationship based upon respect, honesty, opportunity and action...”

Now, my question is this: This conference brought young people together, entrepreneurs, youth serving organizations, dialogue, learning, networking, and exploration of opportunities for personal and national development. This would have been an ideal opportunity to at least have some consultation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: The hon. Member for Chaguanas East indicated that their method of consultation—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b).

Hon. Members: “Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah”.

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Mr. Hosein: The Member for Arima is the seventh speaker, and every speaker has spoken about this issue of consultation already, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: This is a debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, I understand it is a debate, but every Member, so far, has spoken about consultation. Member for Arima, if you would like to respond to what the Member for Chaguanas East has said, that is allowed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to make it clear that my recommendation, and that of the Opposition Bench, is that this should go to a joint select committee.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: I am sure that my response to the hon. Member for Chaguanas East is in order. I am simply saying, and I am giving my position as to why I am saying that I am talking about consultation. And I am saying that the hon. Member made reference to the fact, and she gave her reason that they had their consultations through their Manifesto. Nobody said that. That this is perfectly in order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And I was very happy for that information, because I also read the Manifesto, and in that Manifesto, the hon. Member needs to tell us where in that Manifesto reference is made to all these punishments, these increases in fines.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: The hon. Member needs to tell us when they did the campaigning

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that she referred to, that the hon. Prime Minister went throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, did they tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago about these fines and these increases? That is what I am talking about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: My colleague from Chaguanas East was very skilful in reading the *Guardian* of today, and nothing is wrong with that, I am going to do the same thing. The hon. Member selected the portions of the paper that supported her argument. I will now use the part that will support mine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: With your leave, please, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I am allowed to read, as my colleague did:

“The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Trinidad and Tobago Beverage Alcohol Alliance are calling for the proposed legislation to raise the legal age for alcohol consumption to be put on hold, with wider consultation before Parliament proceeds”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Interestingly enough, that is the first paragraph.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. P. Beckles: The second paragraph:

“The two organisations are urging consideration of a Joint Select Committee...”

Hon. Members: “Ohhh”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles:

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“...to examine the evidence surrounding the proposed age threshold, penalties and enforcement capacity, as well as possible unintended consequences.”

Third paragraph—

Mr. Gonzales: She missed all that. She missed the third paragraph, too?

Ms. P. Beckles:

“The two organisations are among several business groups...”—are—
“...raising questions about the practical implications of proposed legislation that would increase the legal age for alcohol and tobacco from 18 to 21...

In a joint statement issued yesterday, the TT Chamber—the country’s largest business group—and the TTBAAsaid they are particularly urging scrutiny of the potential for the legislation to drive some young people towards ‘unregulated or illicit sources of alcohol.’”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Paragraph 5.

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

Ms. P. Beckles: And I can read several paragraphs that were not read, that she missed, but I will read one more:

““They said a Joint Select Committee would give ‘stakeholders, experts and policymakers’ an opportunity to examine the available evidence and assess the practical implications of the proposed measures.

‘A structured, evidence-based process can help ensure that the final legislation is practical, proportionate and effective...’”

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is all we are asking, you know. That is all we are

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asking.

We are of the view that if it is this process and procedure takes place, the likelihood is that we can come up with a piece of legislation for which we all agree. Now, another point that my colleague made is that when we were on this side—when they were on this side, and we were on that side, we objected or made a lot of noise when they talked about consultation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to make reference to two pieces of legislation, and that is the legislation relating to cannabis and the other legislation relating to the gaming industry. As it relates to the legislation relating to cannabis, the consultation took some two years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And it was following the Government completing the debate and then indicating that it was going before the Joint Select Committee, and that Joint Select Committee meant that several persons came, all the stakeholders, and the piece of legislation that was arrived at was following that two-year period. We also know, as it relates to the whole issue of gambling and gaming, that piece of legislation, the consultation took how many years, Mr. Imbert? Do you remember?

Mr. Imbert: Many years. Many years.

Ms. P. Beckles: That piece of legislation took anything close to five years, because there are times when there are pieces of legislation that require the input of stakeholders.

So, I want to come to the point of the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, who spoke a lot about the fact that this Opposition, we do not really care about young people. He spoke a lot about his constituency and he talked about the fact

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that whilst he was campaigning, so many people were drinking puncheon, smoking crack, cannabis. The hon. Member seems to have deleted a particular video.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Either he deleted it, or he forgot about it. Because in that video—and I have assumed it was him, because I know that sometimes they have people from on their side, that when you see them sometime in a hotel room, wrapping up certain paper, they say, “It is not I.” So, I do not know if he will do likewise, but I remember that video of him skanking and moving, and others around looked like they were in a very good space.

8.10 p.m.

But the impression that he is giving is that when he was walking in his area by him, he encouraged no drinking and no smoking. And the unfortunate thing about his contribution is that he would bring in a colleague who was a former Member of Parliament, who is not here to defend himself, and I am talking about former Member Roger Monroe.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And to suggest and to state that when he was walking, the people of Toco/Sangre Grande said the only time they saw Roger was when he came by a bar to drink. I mean, how low can you go?

Dr. Gadbsy-Dolly: Despicable. Just despicable.

Ms. Ameen: He did not say that.

Ms. P. Beckles: He did not say that? Did you not hear it?

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And further to that, to talk about the fact that when you want to

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support or select somebody, select somebody who is articulate. It is for the people to decide who is articulate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And it is never unfortunate that you have to go down that road because there are many persons on your side who may be very simple, and when people vote for them, it has nothing to do with whether they are articulate or not. So, try not to go down that road.

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

Ms. P. Beckles: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to—

Mr. Sturge: “She not saying nothing of substance”.

Ms. P. Beckles: You do not worry about me. When you ready to talk, you talk, right?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Madam Deputy Speaker, because they would prefer that you leave some of those comments and you do not respond to them. I am not leaving them on the record without responding to them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Especially when people are not here in the Parliament to defend themselves.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And I want to say that as it relates to the principal changes, we know that alcohol and tobacco, minimum age to 21; cannabis, minimum age raised to 25; gambling, minimum age raised to 25. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to now simply make reference to some increases, and I want to refer to the Liquor

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Licences Act. A \$6,000 penalty becomes \$300,000, and a \$2,000 penalty becomes \$300,000, and a 12-month sentence becomes 30 years, and a \$3,000 gambling-related penalty becomes \$100,000. But again, we remember that one of the Ministers said that they are getting problems to pay their bills. So, I hope the public remembers that part of this is about paying your bills.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And again, Madam Deputy Speaker, we would recall that the 2021 Finance Act increased section 48(1) penalties from \$10,000/\$5,000 to \$30,000 for spirits and \$15,000 for other intoxicating liquor. It also increased the additional penalty with section 48(3) to \$6,000. The present proposal will increase \$30,000 to \$100,000; \$15,000 to \$75,000 and \$6,000 to \$300,000 and imprisonment for 30 years.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, one of my main concerns would have been a statement made by the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. And it has to do with the section as it relates to children. Madam Deputy Speaker, the proposed Bill is that a child over 10 found drinking alcohol or possessing or using tobacco, cannabis resin or dangerous drugs on summary conviction faces a fine of \$50,000. Now I will be happy for the Attorney General to clarify this. Because the ease with which the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande said, “Okay, yes, the fine is \$50,000, but who is going to pay \$50,000? Nobody is going to pay any \$50,000. Normally, you go, and yuh doh pay no \$50,000. You pay less. You might pay...” I would really like to ask the hon. Attorney General to clarify that.

Now, it is not that I am not aware that you have a lawyer, or even if you do not have a lawyer, you can plead, and you can beg, and they could reduce the fine.

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But the way it has been explained, it is as though this issue of the \$50,000 fine should not be taken seriously. And not only the \$50,000 fine, you know, but all the other fines that I just mentioned. And that is one of the concerns that we have. That the fines have increased so drastically. The issue, therefore, is, is it punishment or is it protection?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Because if it is that you want to protect the young people, if it is that you want to say to the public, yes, there is a method by which you put in place certain things when you want to put a certain amount of fear, and you let people know that the penalties are very harsh. But then when you come down to the implementation of the legislation, it is almost as though the hon. Member is prejudging what a lot of the magistrates and so would do. And then he says, “Well, okay.” I mean, you have the whole issue of rehabilitation, you have the issue of reprimand, and it is as though a lot of these offences, there will be some mechanism where they will just disappear. That simply does not work.

I mean, it is not that you are not going to have some period where you could apply, because the concerns will always be there for young people having, you know, convictions. Because that is going to impact when they go to the public service, when you go to the police service, you go to the army, you go to the teaching service. It matters not. And you get that conviction very early. You want to go to university. We all understand very, very clearly the impact that it is going to have. But to create this impression that, “Okay, yes, you have \$50,000, fine. You have the \$300,000, you have this, you have that”, and it is going to just almost mean nothing. That for me cannot make any sense.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And to me, it is as though what the Government intends, which is really to actually dissuade persons by these types of fines, it really sounds rather, rather strange to me.

And the other concern that I have when we speak about that is the reference that was made to persons who he has come into contact with. And he made reference to the fact that a lot of the persons who apply to the police service do not pass the test, and if they pass the test, they do not pass the vetting, alright? And it is almost as though, when I listened to the contribution of the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, and some of my colleagues on the other side, it is like a lot of the young people in Trinidad and Tobago are almost hopeless. It is almost as though we find ourselves where, when we talk about the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, there seems to be no hope. And that is not the case.

It cannot be that even as we speak about this Bill, and even as we want to address the issue of those who are involved in drugs, those who are involved in alcohol, it cannot be that we are giving the impression—people listening to this debate will feel that most young people in Trinidad and Tobago are involved in drugs and alcohol.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, do you require your additional 15 minutes?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Take it. Take it!

Ms. P. Beckles: Yes. And let me say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that is not the case. And we all have to be careful when we make the statements. For example,

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“Everybody smoking weed and drinking puncheon”. We certainly, on this side, absolutely do not agree with that statement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to deal with the issue of implementation. And the other statement that was made is that when the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande read the column, he indicated that almost all the persons indicated that they supported the measure that the Government is proposing. And I want to say that that is absolutely false.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Under the same article that the hon. Member referred to and other persons, and if I could just be allowed to read two of them.

In reference to all the irrational policies being passed to oppress and take away constitutional rights, encourage citizens to demonstrate throughout T&T on one day.

Good morning, Penny Beckles. Today is Parliament or with interviews with the media, can you raise some questions over employment in restaurants, with bars, with gambling machines, casinos, how it is going to affect young people at fetes and playing mas for Carnival?

Now, some people might find, “That is what they are asking about?” But the truth is that that is the reality. The reality is—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: The reality is, when we think about implementation, I mean Tobago Carnival is in the next couple of weeks. It is next month, to be exact. And, of course, people have concerns. People have concerns. You have a

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wedding, you have young people at the wedding, I mean, what do you do? What do you do with all these all-inclusive fetes we have in Trinidad and Tobago? What do we do for the fact that it is a lot of young people in Trinidad and Tobago who go to these fetes. And my simple question is whether or not this Government has solicited the views of the young people as it relates to this piece of legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Because what does it mean? What does it mean for families attending functions together? What does it mean for concerts? What does it mean for activities in many of the public spaces that we have? Christmas is coming, and you have parang that is coming up. When we pass legislation in the House, the average citizen, at the end of the day, wants to be comfortable and to be able to say, “How will this impact me?” Because that is really what is important when this piece of legislation is passed. How much time do I have? Five minutes?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You end at 8.35.

Ms. P. Beckles: Okay, thanks. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like just a simple example to be given as it relates to how we will treat with this matter. You know, you go to a restaurant, and I know Mr. Imbert mentioned it, but I am speaking specifically because it was a question that was asked by one of my constituents. Because I am sure my other colleagues have the same problem. People come to you from time to time, and you may or may not be able to assist them with a job, and they end up going to many of these casinos. And I would really like that to be one of the areas that is addressed. Whilst the hon. Member, or more than one, talked about CEPEP, and sometimes in a very disparaging way. The fact is some young people worked there. Some did not. Some young people

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go wherever they best feel that they can earn an income.

Mr. Gonzales: An honest income.

Ms. P. Beckles: An honest income. And therefore, it matters not. We should never disparage them. We should never, once they are earning an honest living.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

8.25 p.m.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, some of us, whether we are from Port-of-Spain, and we go, and from time to time we pass on Ariapita, or whether we are in Arima, and we pass on Lord Kitchener Avenue, or whether we are in San Fernando, and we pass on Broadway, or we go to Gulf City, it matters not. We know for a fact that a lot of the people that we see enjoying themselves are young people. And I am urging the Government that it is very, very, very important to listen to the views of the young people; those in the university, those who are working in an environment that they have concerns about, and that we are not denying that they should not have concerns, talk to them. Be brave.

Very important, the hon. Attorney General indicated that they would have some amendments, and we want to also indicate that we too will have some amendments, because at the end of the day it is very serious. I mean, we would have liked some time to be able to study these amendments, and to put forward what we consider to have been much more robust, but we simply do not have the time. And we would have also liked the opportunity to do some consultation, similar to what we did as it relates to the cannabis and the gambling.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Unfortunately, we do not have that opportunity.

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The last thing that I want to raise, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. P. Beckles: The last concern that I have, is that, from time to time, when we pass legislation of this nature, we understand that what can happen is what we call the underground economy. And the underground economy simply means that if you do not have sufficient police to monitor, the likelihood is you can have an underground economy. Now I know that, and I heard more than one of my colleagues on the other side, how will it be monitored? It will be monitored through the police. But we know very well this is not something simple.

For those of us who live in communities where you still have illegal whe-whe, because some people feel that does not exist, but it does. And that is a typical example of what I mean when we often feel that we put laws in place, and some things that have existed for generations, it is not that easy to remove some of these illegal activities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill will not operate in a vacuum. It will operate in our businesses, in our communities, in our schools, in our Carnivals, and entertainment industries, and through our police, our courts, and our criminal justice system. It will affect the young people trying to find a job, the parent trying to raise a child, the small business owner trying to comply with the law, and the communities already struggling with crime, addiction, and limited opportunities. That is why legislation of this magnitude cannot be driven by the appearance of action alone.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the question before the Parliament is not whether the Government wants to protect young people. Of course, it should. The question

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is whether these particular measures are necessary, proportionate, evidence-based, and capable of achieving that objective.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And whilst they have provided some evidence, as a matter of fact, I listened very carefully to the reference or the data provided by the hon. Attorney General. He made reference to Georgia, he made reference to Singapore, and one other country that I do not quite remember.

Sen. Jeremie SC: The United States.

Ms. P. Beckles: The United States, thank you. And Canada, thank you very much, yes. If it believes that 25 is justified, as we say, please, give us more information on how you arrived at that, especially when there is no comparator country.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: None.

Ms. P. Beckles: If it believes that 50,000 is a proportionate penalty, justify it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: And if it believes that these measures will make Trinidad and Tobago safer, tell this Parliament how they will be enforced, and what will be done alongside the law to address the causes of the problems we are trying to solve. Because a statute cannot substitute for policing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: A penalty cannot substitute for rehabilitation. And criminalization cannot substitute for opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: We understand that restrictions are needed for more young people

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from time to time. We also understand they need education, employment, guidance, rehabilitation, and a genuine pathway to a productive life. Madam Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has a long tradition of using legislation to respond to national problems. But the test of the legislation is not how quickly it passes through the Chamber. The test is what happens after it reaches the communities it intends to serve.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Does it reduce harm? Does it protect our children? Does it protect public safety? Does it work in practice? And does it command the confidence of the people who must live under it? These are the questions this Parliament has a duty to ask. The Government may have the numbers to pass the Bill, but the numbers cannot replace scrutiny, and a majority cannot substitute for evidence.

Our responsibility is greater than that. We are not here merely to create offences. We are here to make laws clear, enforceable, proportionate, and suited to the realities of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

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

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to intervene and contribute on another landmark piece of legislation, at a time when we have heard several of the Members opposite regurgitate, really, their one or two thematic lines, which becomes, you know, unbearing to hear all day and all night with monotonous frequency, no consultation, JSC, freedom of the youth, and, you

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know, those themes that I pray that we do not have to hear all night, because they are just two or three main thematics. And I will just deal with one or two as we go along, because the Attorney General, I understand, is eager and raring to reply to at least one or two of the Members opposite. Certainly not all.

But I wanted to begin—no, I do not think several Members opposite bothered the Attorney General. But I am sure the Attorney General would have something to say to Diego Martin North/East, fresh on his return. The Attorney General would like to greet him. He found himself writing all day and then ended up saying nothing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to just begin by speaking about legitimacy and moral authority in this business that we have today. There is no political leader, no Member of Parliament, and with great respect, no Prime Minister that has the moral authority to bring and pass legislation to protect children and young people than the Member of Parliament for Siparia, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And I say that with respect to all the former Prime Ministers, although I may not respect all former Prime Ministers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to remind the national community that in 2010, upon taking office as this country's first female Prime Minister, May 24, 2010, at our very first Cabinet meeting, hours later, upon taking office, the very first Cabinet Note that came to the 2010 Cabinet was the Children Life Fund Act—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—to approve a fund to give resources in the event that children are ill, injured, serious injury, and they have no money, the families have

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no money, to undertake urgent emergency medical treatment. It was the first note that came to a 2010 Cabinet, led by the Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And that came about because prior to that, children were in emergency situations, health-wise. I think the Member for Couva South has good memory of that bad time. And children were in a situation where the parents and the village needed to organize a barbeque, curry-que veggie-que, other “Q”, raffle, so that they can raise money for an emergency surgery for a child.

And upon coming into office, the Member for Siparia said, enough is enough, we will not stand for that. That gave birth to the Children’s Life Fund. And I can go on and on about progressive legislation for young people, programmes for young people under the Member of Parliament for Siparia as Prime Minister 2010 to 2015. And later in my contribution, I will just reflect on that experience as well.

Today, no Prime Minister except the Member of Parliament for Siparia would have this courage, would have this tenacity, would have the depth of commitment to do what we are doing today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Member for Arima, who may or may not be a prime ministerial candidate in the future, may or may not, exposed herself. She said, I mean, she is speaking in her delivery. She said that this should go to a Joint Select Committee. That tells you that as a leader, the Member for Arima will find herself, or could find herself, regrettably, in a position of over-analysis leading to paralysis. You will analyze and analyze and analyze and you will do nothing. They are begging for scrutiny, but what do you think we are doing tonight? You are

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scrutinizing the Bill.

It is not like long time. Long time when you are Member of Parliament, Madam Deputy Speaker, you had no office, you had no staff. “You come downstairs your house and you meet constituents on a bench or a peerha.” Today, all of them opposite, Members opposite, they have full offices. They have staff, support staff, research staff, at the tune of, I believe, \$50,000 per month. You have research staff, you have computers, you have Google, you have iPads. This is not 1975, “where you have to go in the library and read all the newspaper and then go and beg somebody to photostat.” Today, you sit and you have all the information and you complain about timing. You do not even know the word. Today you have the information, you have the staff, research staff, and we are scrutinizing. They are asking for a joint select committee, we will have no part of that. We will have no part of that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Remind the Members, there is a matter before a joint select committee, called the Shipping Bill. Anybody remember that? I think that is there for about 20 years. The classic is in 1993, a Minister by the name of Russell Huggins brought a Bill called Private Security Industry. I think it is still before the joint select committee. Yes, before a joint select committee. It was introduced in 1993. And there are many others, I just remember those two. You take this to a joint select committee? Involving who? The satanic and demonic? Involving who? My colleagues opposite? When there was a procurement JSC, they walked out. They could not finish, then they have other JSCs and so on. I am really stunned that the Member for Arima would call for a JSC.

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8.45 p.m.

Because last time the Member for Arima placed members on a JSC—I think that person was John-Bates—

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—had to be dismissed for tampering with a witness; advising a witness before a joint select committee. They want to go back and do that now?

Hon. Member: Fabricating evidence.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Fabricating evidence. That is what you want to go to a joint select committee to do? That will only consume time. Then the Session is finished. We go to a next Session. Then that Session is finished, and nothing happens. You know what is important today as well? When you read the comments—and we do not have time to read every comment on every newspaper article and so on—everyone makes this issue. They say, “Passing a law is one thing, you can pass a law, but enforcement—that is the crisis”. Regrettably, in this country we have had challenges enforcing the law. We pass laws—challenges enforcing them. I have heard these arguments before. I have been on the compound for some time. I have heard these arguments. When we introduced legislation to make it mandatory to wear seatbelts in the car, everybody screamed, “Whoa, \$2,000, \$1,000”. “Poor people have to put on seatbelts. If not, police stop them on de road.” Today, Madam Deputy Speaker, enforcement—very few people will drive in this country without seatbelts in the front seat or back seat.

Hon. Member: Lives have been saved.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Lives have been saved.

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Hon. Member: The cellphone now.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Then we come again. The police and the data told us that this mobile phone distracts, has problems when you are driving, and so on. You are on your phone, you are making calls, receiving texts—and the evidence suggests globally, not just in Trinidad and Tobago, that cellphones were creating this problem for dangerous and reckless driving and so on—use legislation. When the fine comes again, “Wow, so much money for this fine”. “So much money.” That is the same argument, you know; the quantum of the fine. Whether it is \$2000 or \$300,000 or \$50,000, the quantum of the fine is the issue. You know what happened now? People got so paranoid, they would not even hold their phone in their hands. If a policeman sees them with the phone in their hand, you get a ticket, or you pay a fine. That is enforcement.

Regrettably, we will not have a situation where every policeman or every CCTV camera—we will be able to police 2,000 restaurants, bars, nightclubs and hospitality centres. We will not be able to do that. But what the fines do—whether it is seatbelts, phones, or other infringements—is they discourage. They seriously discourage criminal offences or from creating danger to the public. And this is not danger to the public we are talking about tonight; this is danger to yourself. This is saving yourself, not just saving the public. And fines are one element. It is not the only element, but one element of serious enforcement. When people know that there is a serious fine—a summary conviction—we would get to that just now—concerning these offences. There is a greater tendency to desist than if you reduce it and you put some type of soft penalty. You pay \$200 in court, or you pay \$500, and they tell you, “Do not do that again”. And then you do it again because it

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means nothing. So, I have heard all these arguments with fines, and you will continue to hear them. I have heard this issue of the joint select committee; they will continue to say that. So, the scrutiny is tonight—all day today, not just tonight, all day. Then this matter is in a bicameral Parliament system; it goes to another place. Whatever they do there, they will scrutinize as well. The Attorney General will look at matters raised. That is the purpose of a debate. Members opposite already indicated that they have amendments. Well, you got your amendments quickly. Because I remember we gave you a Bill for two months and you had no amendments.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: So you brought amendments quickly.

Hon. Member: “In de red village you eh see no amendments.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: If you go in a JSC, it is the same amendments you would bring. What would be different? So tonight, it is important that we look at this in the context of saving lives and young people. The Member for Siparia and her Government have the moral authority and the legitimacy to do this. I do not think the colleagues opposite can. I do not think they can. And this is a serious matter. I am told by colleagues here, who are more in-the-know about what happens in the school system, and what happens in the criminal justice system, that young children go to schools and they go to the school system with a plastic bottle—a see-through bottle, we say—and it writes “Sprite” on it. And if you open that, it could be vodka or puncheon rum.

Hon. Member: They get drunk.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And there is a bottle sealed—well, not sealed, but

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tightened for Sprite. It is Sprite. They are going to school with Sprite. Listen, I think you have spite, not Sprite. To vote against this, you must spite the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And we create serious offences and fines so that the younger persons, their parents, and their guardians will desist from this behaviour. And since this was introduced, the Prime Minister announced this in a campaign. This was introduced, and nobody protested. I cannot remember anybody coming around the place with placards and demonstrations and so on about this. People knew this was coming. This was suggested and defined as a policy a long time—over a year ago. The Prime Minister announced this in a campaign. Nobody complained. No group of parents—the national PTA, I do not know. I have not heard from them. They have not made any statement.

Today, persons are suggesting, “Okay, we need scrutiny”. “We need more information.” You are getting information now, and you will get information in the next few days, because the matter will be in the public domain. So, you must get information and clarification; you will get that, too. But we have to move to protect the young people and the children in this country, and we have to move now. Every government could say, “Let us go and talk, and we will come back later in the year”. “We will come back next year.” Every government can say that, and nothing will happen at the end of the day. And this is part of a wider programme. Again, Members should not see this in a vacuum. This is part of a wider, strategic approach to dealing with criminal activity and protecting citizens. This is not a crime debate, but we came here and recited for you the very good

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news about the decline in serious crime and in murder.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I am reminded again, for road and traffic accidents and fatalities, that they are also going down.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: When the Government increased the fines, again, there was a protest. There was this chorus of howling, “Fines too much for these road traffic accidents” and so on, for reckless driving and what have you. You know, the figures all show a decline, and in some cases, a very steep decline in offences—road traffic offences and deaths by road traffic—

Hon. Member: Accidents.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Fatalities. I mean, one is too much, but we cannot have 80 people being killed every year or 150 on the roads that way. And along with others—policing and so on—are really the penalties that are introduced. So, the friends opposite—the Member for Arima spoke and was making the point about consultation, then spoke about enforcement and so on—that is fine, that is fine—then went on to deal with the issue of employment and so on. Now, I just want to say this—probably the other speakers will get into more detail on it, and particularly the mover of the piece of legislation, who by definition has to speak. Madam Deputy Speaker, this issue that the Member for Diego Martin North/East raised with all the drama of a returning resident, was absent, of course, for some time. He is entitled to that.

Hon. Member: He gone—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He is not here either now, but he came with drama, sound

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and fury, signifying nothing. And given the rest, came back to tell us that a child walked through the premises and you nabbed the child because you were passing through the Queen's Park Oval Restaurant and Bar, and you nabbed them. This is really an intoxicating fear that they are planting in the national community that everybody now is in danger. This is not so. The gentleman from Malabar.

Hon. Member: He is sleeping.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: All right, let me not say that. The gentleman from Malabar makes a point about the law all the time, right? It is not the first time. And I want to make a point that everybody, when they come to this place for the first time, there is no requirement in the Constitution that you have to be a lawyer.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: There is none, all right? So, remember, when I came here—when Members came here, we were not lawyers and so on. You read a Bill, and you have a literal translation of what you read, then you see “reasonableness”, and you say, “Well, what is reasonable”?—and so on. But the statute has, by definition, certain legal principles that are involved. And the court has common law; they have principles, and they have definitions and so on, that define certain things. And you are right, the national community—I do not know, 90 per cent or 95 per cent are not lawyers. Neither some—many of us here will be attorneys and so on. But what you are raising, some of those issues are already dealt with, meaning they are understandable for those who have to understand them, and they are teachable for those who have to understand and learn them. It is not foreign. So, when you read in these things that there is a stiff penalty for this, and the police can go—the police just cannot walk in a place and grab people and nab them and

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drag them out Nazi style and so on. Because you have to come to a court, you have to make a report, and you have to stand test. There are other judicial processes involved. And in the child on the premises—I think it is 60(b)(1) child on premises:

“Subject to this section, the holder of a licence specified under section 35 (304) who knowingly invites, causes, or permits a child to be in that part of his premises where intoxicating liquor is sold or consumed, commits an offence, and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of \$300,000, and the licence issued under this Act may be revoked.”

I just read it. Now, this has two elements, Member for Malabar. The Executive, by virtue of passing this in a Cabinet, and by virtue of the Executive bringing this legislation, we are introducing the offence, which is to knowingly invite, cause, or permit the child. That is what we are introducing—the offence. But it is liable on summary conviction. Who will do the summary conviction? Not the Cabinet. The Cabinet does not summarily convict anybody. It is the court. It is a judicial process. And they will go through this process and determine a fine. It may be no fine. It may be a wrap on the knuckle, as we say. It could be a lesser fine. But they have a width—a band here—they have the maximum fine—and they may revoke a licence. But you have to go through all of this: knowingly invite, cause, or permit a child. And there are rules and principles involved in doing that. It just cannot be that you snatch someone at the Queen’s Park bar, which may be frequented by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, so he understands how it works there.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And I am not asking you about your membership of anything. And we have always had this issue of children in bars. Those things are issues that have been around for a long time. When you travel abroad in Trinidad, you cannot take a child and put them to sit down at the barstool. Even now, it is against the law. You cannot do that. Then you ought not to be bringing the child into the premises, even now. So, we already have these things set up. All we are saying is that where you knowingly invite, cause, and permit the child to be in that part, which again, there will be legal principles involved in determining this matter for the purpose of summary conviction. All we did as an executive was create that offence and plant it in the statute. More could be said. And related to that is this matter of employment. Again, I do not know if, between cocktails in the business class on return, the Member saw something in the Bill that we did not put there, which created an offence to, if you are between the ages of 18 and 21, to sell, handle beverages, alcohol, whatever, in a hospitality centre, in a hotel, in a bar, or in a restaurant—unless, I mean, I do not know where the Member saw that. There is no offence here of that.

Mr. Imbert: Possession.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And again, they are using the word “possession”. What is that? “Hugging up de bottle?”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “Yuh hug it up like a pillow?” Which possession? They will determine that. They are legal principles that govern what possession is and what possession is not. So, you move with a glass five feet from pouring it; you possess it.

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Hon. Member: That is Ravi B?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You possess it. I mean, you gave a speech like Ravi B. And he is, I think, a bit more intelligent.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But the point I am making is that, do not frighten the population—

Mr. Imbert: Why not?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—that you go into—he says, “why not” frighten the population. Okay, you frighten them. Frighten them, frighten them all. They will not riot. They will not riot. You frighten them all.

8.55 p.m.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, to you I am saying that this issue of the possession, and so on, it will be interpreted and there are parameters for doing that. The issue of employment does not arise. The law, the Children Act, and so on, the law provides for the age of employment. You can be employed in a restaurant, a bar, 18 years, 19 years, 20 years, 21 years, and thereafter. You can be employed. All we are saying is that you cannot be serving the individual who is between the age of 18 to 21. Then remarkably, the Member raised the issue, he said, “This goes against our culture.” What culture is that? What culture is that? The Islamic community will ask you what culture you are talking about, unless you are now saying that this culture that you have noticed and you believe that this is the culture of Trinidad and Tobago for persons between the age of 18 and 21 to be consuming, to be smoking, gambling under 25, and that is the culture you want to protect. We

say, no. We do not believe that is a culture that you should protect. We do not believe that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Because the same 18-year-old, 19-year-old—do not forget an 18-year-old or 19-year-old just got their licence too, “eh”. No pun intended, but do you know what is the fatal cocktail here? I got a licence. I have the right to consume alcohol. I can consume alcohol and I just got my licence. What that means? That means you are on the road. You are on the highway. We do not have laws as yet. I am not saying that we will, but we do not have laws that when you get your licence, you could only drive within five miles of your residence. We do not have that. Some places have that.

You can get your licence, and then you go and you are celebrating with your friends, your peers, and so on, and then you are intoxicated. You are on the highway, you crash, and we have had that before. We have had it before. It is not that we did not have it before. You are off the road. You take your own life. You take the life of the occupants in your vehicle, and others on the road who may be completely, you know—

Mr. Hosein: Innocent.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—innocent. They may be completely sober. They may be completely, you know—coming from church, and you take their life because you were under the influence. That is what we are trying to deal with. It may not stop everything, but this is a perfect, very good start to prevent those situations and you cannot consume under the age of 21. So, it is not that you could consume and sit on the back seat now, because you still ought not to. I do not know why the

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Members opposite will resist this. What do you have, you know—are you frequent limers with under 21-year-olds who consume?

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Are you in some way frequent friends of children 10 years old, 12 years old, 14 years old, who maybe—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I do not know. I find they have a passionate defence.

Mr. Hosein: Obsession.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They have a dangerous obsession with children consuming alcohol and drugs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I have seen it over the years, not only today. I have seen that, that obsession with defending, protecting and promoting the consumption of drugs and alcohol by children.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I saw this before, and today, I heard it. Today, I heard it, and I cannot unhear it.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I heard it today in that defence.

Ms. John: Say less.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. They should have “say less”. Yeah, and consult young people and so on. I mean, I think among the eldest in the Parliament today had to tell us to consult youth.

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Talk about their track record. They had a former youth officer of the PNM who qualified for pension by this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He qualified for the Parliament pension and was proudly the PNM youth officer.

Mr. Hosein: Correct, correct, Fitzgerald Hinds.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, Fitzgerald Hinds. The only political party that had a pensioner as a youth officer, and today, talk about their great track record in doing what? Defending what? Defending which group of children? I mean, you really do not want me going into newspapers and go into that business and so on. I do not know about that, and I will not get into those kinds of business. Madam Deputy Speaker, the next issue now. I heard a Member opposite speak about this matter of programmes being cut and so on. Now, in defending children, there are many avenues that you take to do that. The Member for Chaguanas East made a very dynamic contribution on our approach to dealing with the defence of children at all points: Health, social development, our strong stance—I think the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande—is he there?

Hon. Member: Destroyed them.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, it was a one-man demolition job by that Member.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I thought it was a “public flogging”—

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—to use that term, and they may have appreciated that. So, the Member made the point that you have to take strong action and bitter medicine.

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But seatbelt was a bitter medicine. Using your mobile phone was bitter medicine. Breathalyzer—I mean, we are forgetting there is a companion issue here, the administration of breathalyzers, and so on, you know. Sadly, there were Members of the opposite side, who are not in the House now, but who found themselves running afoul of breathalyzer business, and so on, and, you know, caused their little problems and so on. You remember?

Mr. Hosein: Yeah. He had a problem, yeah. A Senator.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, it was a problem, I think, with a Senator at some time. **Madam Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member—

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker:—you have one more minute. Do you require your additional 15 minutes?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Please, thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Sure.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: It was two of them, not one.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, it was several of them would have had that problem. Then the former—the same Fitzgerald Hinds spoke about spiritual walks, and so on, that he takes at times, you know.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. The Member for Couva North—Member—yeah. He spoke about spiritual walks and descending into this. The last thing he was

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doing recently was, I think he was encouraging Her Excellency the President to impeach herself.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That was the last act I can remember in the last days. He was encouraging her to impeach herself.

Mr. Hosein: “Cocaine does fry brains, yuh know”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, and clearly there is some business there too.

Mr. Hosein: “Cocaine does fry brains”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, the Bill before us now speaks, as I said, to tickets, fines, penalties, the use of the court, and so on, to do that. But the Members opposite, I just want to remind them that scaring people, parents, children, and so on, will not work. This campaign of misinformation will not work. The next speaker who will come after will say that they got no time, and they have no time for this, and they have no time for that. That also will not work because this strong action will not be resisted.

I remember seeing in the newspaper—and I just want to go through it quickly. To my, you know, amazement, it happened just today. Wednesday, 30th September, the *Express*, and the big question they say on page 9: “How do you feel about Government moving to increase the legal age for alcohol and tobacco to 21?” I was taken aback with most, if not all the responses, and just to give you a few:

“Lucy Liu”

—I think that is a film star or something as well.

“No problem, we have a severe drinking culture here.”

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Culture.

“Many parents let their young ones drink at home so the majority won’t be losing it they just can’t do it in the public.”

“Great job to many young people starting to smoke and drink at early age...”—and—“...you should charge anyone caught selling to underage people.”

—from “Judy Ramsumair”.

“Simon Templar

Cigarettes should be completely banned.”

Well, that is taking it a little further than us.

“Michael Drayton

I wish everyone in T&T could choose a sober lifestyle and be smoke-free.

The body is a temple. I cannot understand why anybody would be against this law.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Who is that?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Drayton, I hope you are watching the Parliament. You will not understand, but you will certainly see who is against this law. These are the views of people. You do not have to go—as the Member said, we do not go—you do not go to the Town Hall and call out people eight o’clock in the night to come in the dark with a flashlight to be talking about the Bill. This is the modern age. You pick up all of this. This is also on the Internet. You pick up all of the views of people. And as people get to understand what is happening here—I can tell you, I do not know a parent who will be unhappy. Who will be vexed?

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Who will be vexed blue to condemn the Government on this measure? I really do not know, unless the parent themselves may be under the influence. No parent will have a problem with this.

As a parent, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will tell you, I feel a little, little more comforted now. I was comfortable, and so on, before, but you see now, I feel now a little more comfortable, knowing that this threshold has been raised. I feel a little comfortable. Of course, I mean it is not the be-all and end-all, but as a parent, this should bring a happy feeling to parents who love their children, to know that the Government of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia, has taken this action to protect the lives of their children.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: With the other matters, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the few minutes I have—I was reflecting on the Member for Arima, and really, the Member for Arima was not prepared to speak today, as I think she admitted; made the point that somehow the Government is suggesting that most young people are involved in drugs. That is untrue. It is a fib. It is a fabrication. It is abominable to suggest that the Government comes today to say that this Government believes most young people are involved in drugs.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: No, the Prime Minister, every Member of this Government. Could I point out to you that there are Members of this Government who are experienced—some retirees—who have come here with other experience, but there are youth on the side of the Parliament? Look here, the Member for Mayaro.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I can call them all.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, I mean, I cannot bring you in the debate, you are in the Chair, but the Member for Princes Town is the youngest in the Parliament, is it?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, yes, she is. She is the youngest in the Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Other Members, the Member for Chaguanas East, the very youthful Member for San Fernando West.

Mr. Hosein: I am younger than Chaguanas East, “eh”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Member for Couva South.

Mr. Lee: Moruga.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Moruga/Tableland—I just have to stop now.

Hon. Member: Tabaquite.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Tabaquite, yes; Cumuto/Manzanilla. This House can boast of having the youngest team in government ever.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I do not want to talk about Members opposite. I do not want to at this time. I have to move on.

So, this fabrication—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They have 1,000 years between all of them, I feel. Madam Deputy Speaker, this fabrication that most of the young people are involved in drugs, that came from the Member for Arima. It is abominable. I want to ask the Member for Arima, which Member of Parliament on a political platform, which Member of Parliament said the following, and I quote:

“Many of these children...misbehaving...”—in those videos belong to—“PNM mothers, PNM grandmothers, PNM fathers.”

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Who said that?

Hon. Member: “We doh know”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Who? I am moving down from Arima, Diego Martin North/East, St. Ann’s East, Port of Spain—I will stop there.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I will stop there. That was bleated out by a Member of Parliament—

Mr. Hosein: On a platform.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—a sitting Member here on a political platform, and then to tell us that the Government thinks most young people involved in drugs. I think the Member for St. Ann’s East could answer that question. I think the Member is in a position to answer that question.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard the Member for—where is he from?—Diego Martin West, yes, he spoke. In fact, it was so sad that the Chief Whip did him the injustice—

Mr. Lee: Of opening.

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—of opening and responding to the Attorney General. I thought that was a deep injustice that you committed.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I do not blame the Member for Diego Martin West, you know—

Mr. Alexander: “Wickedity”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—he did as best as he could.

Mr. Hosein: “Dais wickedity”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But that was “wickedity” on your part of Arouca/Lopinot—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—that you would do that, you know; that you would do that. You put the number 11 to come out and face the first ball. I mean, what upside down kind of business is that you running on that side, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: While he was speaking, he talked about this Government closing down programmes and so on, but he mentioned an interesting programme. I think he did. MPower Programme. They had a programme called MPower under the former administration, and it was for under 40 years—persons under 40 years; not 21 years, under 40.

9:10 p.m.

Those programmes went on, and they were—what?—every year the persons involved were, you know—well, the record has it. The reports that we have

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received were also, you know, “intoxicating themselves while on the MPower Programme”. They were paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to what they call, “influencers”, going to schools and giving speeches. But there was no follow up. There was nothing. They had a crazy plan. Who was that? Now, I have here in my hand—I mean, I cannot display—

Mr. Lee: Call names.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: —one of the influencers was, one, Hans Des Vignes.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Hon. Members: “Woooo.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He was an influencer. A next one, was one—am I reading it right?—Kareem Marcelle.

Hon. Members: “Woooo.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Another influencer, one, Kobe Sandy, whoever that is. I “doh” know who that is. One—

Hon. Member: Point Fortin.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: From Point Fortin, alright. One, Rheon Elbourne, an influencer, but you do not know them, but they are influencing.

Hon Member: Who are they influencing?

Hon Member: What are they influencing?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They are influencing.

Then for good measure, it had one influencer name, Richie Bansraj, whoever that is. Hundreds of thousands of dollars to influence people. To do what? What was the outcome of that programme? They found a way to pass money to

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themselves.

Mr. Lee: “Himself to himself”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “Himself to himself”. That was the great programme with influencers going to the school system. That is what they boast about, you know. That type of programme, they boast about. Today, the Minister of Public Utilities, in Energy, in several Ministries across here, we boast about the increased intake for interns at the Ministries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Young people who want experience in a Ministry, in a state enterprise, we boast about increasing that number. TSTT, I think, had some 1,000 young people who were interns at the TSTT, 1,000.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We increased in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries from 30 to about 65, young engineering students to come in.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: In one case, a youth begged us to come in, not to work for money, just to get the experience; to be in a workplace and see what they are doing, and participate, and so on. That was what we were about in the last year, getting the young people at the place of work and industry, so they get the appetite for employment, for industrial life.

They get up in the morning—when you work in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, we had interns there. They are from far-off places. They get up early in the morning, 5.00 a.m., to get to Port of Spain for 8.00, because that is the time you have to take up your job, and you stay there until 4.00 or 4.30, and you go

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through all the different departments. That is the programme we have in place. The public servants, I must say, in those Ministries and state enterprises, they become mentors. I had the opportunity to go to a graduation in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, and I was so taken aback by how the young students spoke about certain public officers. They are in awe, and how they were treated and how much they learned. This is not “MPower”, your style, this is real empowerment through giving young people an opportunity for employment.

Those same young people and others, this Bill before us tonight is about protecting them. It is about protecting them. The Member for Arima, “CEPEP, CEPEP”, that is all they want to talk about, “CEPEP”, and “It is important”, and so on. But we believe that there is a type of employment in industrial life, with the workplace, that is critical for young people to aspire to. Young people should not be aspiring to really go and paint stones on the road and cut grass, and thing, although CEPEP really did more than that when we were there, when we were in office, 2010 to 2015.

Today, we speak about the consumption of alcohol and, of course, tobacco. I mean, I am not here—I have colleagues, others who are medical people who have done the research, and thing, my job is not to come here and bring all the medical research and quote from every journal about the deadly impact of tobacco or alcohol, as the case may be, and so on. I think people know that. I do not think we need to carry an argument too far with that. We have to carry the argument that you have to take tough measures if you want to see results, whether it is seatbelt, whether it is using mobile phone, whether it is breathalyzer, whether it is now increasing fines and penalties and age for consumption of these products.

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Gambling, you know, Madam Speaker, because I have not in my life been a gambler. I think, I was telling a colleague earlier, I think when I lost \$20 or so, that was the end of it; you know, 30 years ago, whatever. But this thing, I never knew until I came into public life, and later, that this was such a deadly disease, gambling—I never knew that. People look normal, people look happy, people look sad, normal human people come in front of you and you do not know that they are addicted. I cannot overstate—the next point I am making—well, I go to a gym; believe it “eh”.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I go to a gym. But the gym, the gym is located next, or nearby to a gambling place, and you know what amazed me, when I come out this place, the gym, I see people sitting down waiting, like, you know, you are waiting for cinema to open; you buy your ticket outside and you are waiting. One day, I asked the people, I said, “But why are they in front here like this, hanging out, and so on, here? They can come in the gym. They can go anywhere they want”. “No, no, no, no, the casino opening at a certain time and people go there.” I mean, like junkies, they gamble.

People come to my office, young persons “eh”, and they ask for help, and you know what is the help some people need, young people, financial help. You know what, to pay debt. You know where the debt came from, gambling. They lose family. They lose house. They lose everything in life because of that gambling. Today, what we are saying is, “Listen, increase that age to 25, at least until later”. You will develop in your employment, you will develop in other interests in life, you will have other things that you do, because as you get older, and this is

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something experience will teach you, there are other interests you pick up in life as you get older. At 18 years, you have one or two interests you pick up, and it includes gambling. It will include alcohol consumption in excess. But as you get older, there are other interests you pick up.

There are other activities. There are other family, you know, imperatives, and so on, that you become a little more disciplined. You should, as you move on.

Mr. Elder: Responsible.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That is the word I am looking for, La Brea, thank you. You become a little more responsible. So the gambling is also very, very critical that we look at the young people who are employed in that, and, of course, to what end? Why do you come with this kind of legislation, to what end? It is to save lives. In cases involving intoxicants, and so on, it may also be with crime, to reduce the level of crime. If you can reduce crime by 5 per cent, by virtue of this legislation, you have done well. We will handle the next 95 per cent in other policies if you can reduce crime. So it is gambling. It is the tobacco. It is the alcohol.

You know, I have my next 30 minutes of my speech here, my notes here, but I will just remind the national community, that this Opposition today has no authority to defend children or to stand in defence. Guardian Media Newsroom, January 10, 2023, former Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, activist—everybody knows that in this country—had this to say in an interview, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the last couple of seconds, I will tell you. She says, referring to that Government:

“‘The Children’s Authority has had their...’—biggest—“...budget cuts at least four times, and I think it’s because the Government...”—of the day, those

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opposite—“...does not care enough about what happens to children...”

—former Senator, Diana Mahabir-Wyatt.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Today, I think the listening and viewing audience will now support the view taken by former Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, an activist, and the view that we believe holds today. Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Keith Scotland SC (*Port of Spain South*): Madam Speaker, the Opposition does not, will not, and cannot support any strong-arm approach with dealing with social problems and the rights of young people, or any person in Trinidad and Tobago. It is just not happening. I hope the young people of Trinidad and Tobago are watching, listening and paying close attention to the frivolous and vexatious mannerisms, and way that some Members of the Government take such a serious Bill. Their demeanour, their approach, their delivery, the very content of their speeches shows a sort of contempt for you, young people. I hope the 130,000 of you, and your parents, take note of what is happening in this House tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill is based on a false premise. The premise is, is that the young people, ages 18 to 21, or 18 to 25, they are addicts; they are alcoholics; they have no self-control; they cannot take care of themselves; and they do not self-regulate. They are people from Presentation College, people from Convent, people from Fatima, people from St. Mary's, people in university, people from what used to be Government secondary schools, all young people who drink responsibly, who act responsibly, who gamble responsibly, and they are in the

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majority.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: That is just it.

To quote that there are 30 children who are in a child home, every country has children in a child home, but 30 out of 130, that is about 2.8 per cent. All it says is, there are some who are uncontrollable. Is it linked to alcohol abuse or marijuana abuse, it is not. But what struck me about this, and sometimes when you speak with a forked tongue, it comes back to gurggle your inside. The hon. Member for Oropouche East gave a description of an event, a young 17-year-old, or 18-year-old, now getting his licence, driving their car, let us say, a Prado; let us say, on the highway on the Beetham, overturned the car, killed somebody. That sounds familiar, Oropouche East? It certainly has not occurred to any Member on this Bench.

Look closely before you speak, Sir. Look closely with the examples that you are bringing, because that could be very much akin to something that happened to a Member. Maybe not of this House, but another House, but a Member on their side. So when you speak of your example of the young person getting their licence, and I am sure that person was not 17. He might be 201, but not 17. Also, I heard, in the same manner, you spoke about the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, who, by the way, cannot put his foot in Roger Monroe's shoes, "eh".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: You flogged him, but I am sure that Guerra is turning in his grave. But you said that he gave a public flogging, it was a self-flogging in public,

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because that speech was nothing more than total irrelevance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The Parliament descended into something I did not know about, and then the rushing of this legislation and the debunking of a JSC. For the listening public—who is the person I speak to every time I stand up, I remind myself of that—you know what a JSC is, it is a temporary grouping of parliamentarians from both Houses, temporary, for a specific purpose, for a limited time to deal with scrutiny of certain issues like this. That is what a JSC is, but according to Oropouche East, there is no need for a JSC anymore, because it is permanent. It will go on ad infinitum, forever we will be debating that. But why we say that is because this was rushed, and I did my research. It is not the first time. The Public Health (Amdt.) Bill, brought on the 7th of September, to be debated on the 11th of September, 2026. The Freedom of Information Bill, brought on the 14th of September, to be debated on the 16th of September, 48 hours—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b), a lot of speakers have made this point with respect to the timing of the Bill. The Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Member for Arima, and now the Member for Port of Spain South, and the Member for Diego Martin West.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, absolutely. Member, can you move on to something that was not—

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, has anyone referred to the Bills that were brought before?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, I am on my legs, I am speaking.

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Mr. K. Scotland SC: Go on.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We cannot both speak.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: “Um-hmm.”

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am asking you to move on because it has been said many times by Members on your Bench.

9.25 p.m.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Okay. I am not speaking about this Bill. I am speaking about other Bills. Thank you. Other Bills.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, I have given my ruling. I am asking you once more to move on.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, as I move on, the point I am making, it is becoming a habit. It has happened four times that we get under 48 hours to prepare for very serious Bills.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: In fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for that. You do not want me to put it on the *Hansard*. I will put it outside so that people will know. I would not put it here. Thank you

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Thank you. So, here is what is happening. When we rush, how could we get the data to scrutinize this? So, we say, “Let us go to a JSC.” They say, “No.” They say, “No. That is wasting time.” Like a JSC has no function in the laws or in the movement and the conduct of this Parliament. That is what they say, Madam Deputy Speaker, and they do not want us to tell the public

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the little time we have gotten. Okay. What I will tell the public, however, Madam Deputy Speaker, is this—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you have imputed improper motives against me not once but twice. You said that “I do not want it on the *Hansard*” and I—

Mr. K. Scotland SC: No. I said they do not want it on *the Hansard*.

Madam Deputy Speaker:—you said the word “I”.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I withdraw that, Madam Deputy Speaker. They do not want it on the *Hansard*, not you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Very well.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: They do not want it on the *Hansard*.

Mr. Alexander: Careful.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I am very careful. They do not want it on the *Hansard*. But what happens, Madam Deputy Speaker, is this. Based on this false premise that young people cannot self-regulate, and the Government now has to regulate for you, and when the hon. Members on this side speak about culture, speak about the fact of the “salami slicing”, it is a serious thing. When they speak with their forked tongues—let me give you another example about the fork tongue.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The hon. Member for Oropouche East, “he do he maths”. He said, “The youngest Bench.” And he congratulated them. He said, “Here is Methuselah, 1004, if you add up all the ages.” Yes. So, the Chief Whip and Leader of the Opposition say, “Let us put a young man in to start the debate.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: “Yuh know he criticize dat. He criticize dat!” So, “what he

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want? Da'is de fork tongue, yuh see". A young man. Member, I want to tell you, well done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I learned salami slicing. I did not know that before. I learned something. Well done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: We are proud of you.

So, let us now deal with this Bill because, Madam Deputy Speaker, I gave myself a time. I do not want to use the 45 minutes and "ah doh wah yuh to tell meh to sit down".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So, let me start by accepting that there is real harm done by alcohol, and done by gambling. But where is the emphasis on those who are the suppliers? Where is the jurisprudential emphasis, hon. Attorney General, on those who are the facilitators? Because to my humble mind, this Bill, it raises more questions than answers. In your reply, and I know you have a very broad bandwidth, what is the evidence that supports 21 for alcohol and tobacco but 25 for cannabis and gambling? Where is the science behind that dichotomy? Two, why did the Government tell Parliament in January 2026 that cannabis would move from 18 to 21, but now they are legislating for it to 25? In January, that happened.

I did my research. I went back to the *Hansard* of Friday the 16th of January, 2026, and I pulled the address to the Parliament by none other than the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC. This is what she had to say in the debate in laying out the Government's legislative framework:

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“So, for example, we have a miscellaneous provisions, alcohol, cannabis, dangerous drugs, gambling...tobacco Bill, where that Bill seeks to amend about seven pieces of legislation, which include the Dangerous Drugs Act, Registration of Clubs Act, Tobacco...Act, Children Act, Liquor...Act, Gambling...Cannabis Control Act, all of these amendments to be brought for us to deal with setting age limits for the sale, purchase, possession or consumption of intoxicating liquor or tobacco, to change that age from 18 to 21; for the sale or purchase or possession or consumption of cannabis, from 18 to 21; in respect of gambling, from 21 to 25.”

This is what was said to the Parliament. What happened between January 2026 and now to change the age from 21 to 25? What transpired? We do not know, but the records speak for themselves.

I want also to ask why should a child just over 10 years be exposed to criminal liability and a potential fine of \$50,000? I heard it said that, “Eight years is the age for criminal liability.” Does the Children Act not deal with that and say it is 14 years? I am just wondering, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am wondering.

Mr. Imbert: “He ah fake lawyer”.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The AG will correct him. He will school him. The Children Act is the specific Act that deals with that, and it is 14 years; that is the age in the Children Act. Why should an 18, 19, or 20-year-old commit a criminal offence merely by drinking or possessing alcohol? Why should an 18 or 24-year-old be criminalized for cannabis possession? What proportionality and sentencing analysis supports the increase in imprisonment from 10 to 15 to 20 to 30 years? “If

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yuh meet ah dread judge”— Judge Dread—we used to call, in a very loving way, Justice Volney “Judge Dread”. Yes. Hard sentencing, no matter what your mitigating factors are. Why is rehabilitation, though, not the presumptive statutory response for children? Why must it be incarceration? Why should rehabilitation, as one of the five principles of sentencing, not be the main foci in all the legislation, Madam Deputy Speaker? Is it necessary at all to have these draconian measures? Finally, what are the amounts of fixed penalties not before Parliament that will be part of this Bill? Madam Deputy Speaker, there are more questions than answers to this piece of legislation.

But I take this debate seriously. “I cah make any jokes about this, you know, and talk about when yuh add up age and dis and dat and flogging”. No. Because, here is why. There are constitutional issues that arise from this Bill. I know, as a former teacher of constitutional law, that at some time the AG will address the issue. I know that he may have addressed it in the previous—that Bill that dealt—the sibling to ZoSO Bill. But it is becoming a habit, and I feel, colleagues on this side, that our reluctance to go next door has made them now, you know—has given them Dutch courage. That reluctance must destroy itself, you know. We must start to move like—we must have an Anansi moment. Because I am of the opinion that this Bill may have some constitutional issues.

Here is my issue, hon. Attorney General, in terms of the theory of this piece of legislation, clause 9 in particular. Clause 9 relates, of course, to the consumption of marijuana. It inserts the words: “ over the age of twenty-five years,” into section 47(b), concerning persons to whom a sacramental dispensary may dispense cannabis. In section 49, it replaces “child” with the “person under the age of

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twenty-five years”.

Here, the Constitution requires the House’s careful attention. Because section 4(h) recognizes:

“(h) freedom of conscience and religious belief and observance;”

So, there are three factors. It is not that they are all individualized.

Freedom of conscience, that is coupled with freedom of religious belief, and observance. If it is the consumption of cannabis is part of your observance based on your belief, then the protection is not confined to believing privately. The word “observance” concerns what people do in practising their faith; a fortiori. This makes every religious practice exempt from laws protecting health and safety. That is my view. I found support for my view in the Privy Council decision, always touted *Suraj*, because I went back to see the Privy Council decision in *Suraj and Maraj vs the Attorney General*. Paragraph 26 makes it clear that section 4 rights are assessed through proportionality. A restriction may be justified. The State must be able to explain the importance of its objectives, the connection between the measure and that objective and whether a less-intrusive measure could achieve it and the balance be struck.

So, when I went to *Suraj* for the distillation of this principle, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is what I came upon. This is the balancing of the fundamental rights and that principle of it being reasonably justified in a democratic society. This is what the Privy Council had to say:

“In a judgment which was proved influential, this was interpreted as imposing a proportionality test. The test has been somewhat refined in the caselaw since then: see...Robinson...Bulkan and A Saunders, *Fundamentals*

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of Caribbean Constitutional Law, 2nd ed...

Paragraph—“...473-475...”—states:

“It is now taken to conform with the modern conventional approach to issues of proportionality, which involves asking in relation to a measure...whether its objective is sufficiently important to justify the limitation of a fundamental right...whether it is rationally connected to that objective...whether a less intrusive measure could have been used...whether, having regard to these matters and to the severity of the consequences, a fair balance has been struck between the rights of the individual and the interests of the community...”

These questions have particular force here. Why must an adult aged 21, 22, 23 or 24 be excluded from sacramental dispensing? What evidence supports 25 as the threshold in a religious setting, particularly when we were told in this House in January that it would be 21?

I am not going to deal with whether or not the religious persons who were affected by this have been consulted. I would not deal with that. I am not asserting, Madam Deputy Speaker, that clause 9 has already been found to be unconstitutional and whether it requires a special parliamentary majority. I am simply asking the hon. Attorney General to “showeth” the evidential justification before this House according to the standard set out in *Suraj*. That is why we have made certain proposed amendments. I found support for my propositions when I looked further in the case of *Suraj* in this paragraph:

“68. A very large part of ordinary legislation, passed by Parliament for good reasons of the public interest, must inevitably interfere with or operate

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as restrictions on those rights. In the Board's view, it is not plausible to suppose that the framers of the 1962 Constitution and the current Constitution intended to disable Parliament from taking ordinary legislative action in the public interest. The natural solution to accommodate the inevitable friction which always exists between individual fundamental rights and democratic decision-making in a constitutional liberal democracy like Trinidad and Tobago is that conventionally adopted so often in such states, namely to require that interference with such rights should be permitted in the public interest, but only if the interference is proportionate to a legitimate aim."

9.40 p.m.

Is that a legitimate aim to protect the young people? Because that is the aim, really, proportionate to what is being proposed here for these 130,000 people outside of the religious—the persons who are practicing their religious beliefs, Madam Deputy Speaker, I begin to doubt that.

So what we ask and what I ask in wrapping up, is whether there was any consideration given to that clause 9 and its effect on the constitutionality of the Bill, particularly that part. If so, if the answer is yes, whether that portion is severable from the Bill, it is a miscellaneous Bill. My understanding of a miscellaneous Bill is that the Bill is taken in toto, so maybe that is an issue that needs to be addressed. But that these are serious issues, these are not "gig gig" issues, you know. These are serious issues that need to be addressed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing, I would want to suggest, respectfully, that they do not just do what Oropouche East and his sidekick Barataria/San Juan

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have suggested, you know, “forget them, no JSC, you do not exist, what are they talking about”. But consider the amendments that we have proposed seriously because there are amendments, that may, that may, may make the Bill more palatable, make it more palatable, and may garner the support of the Opposition. You can say to us, we do not need your support down here. In fact, you can say, we “doh” need it upstairs either, because apparently you do not, but I think it is worth being considered.

Something egregious was said against my colleagues in Parliament about the MPowerTT and their involvement in the MPowerTT and I really expected better from Oropouche East, but he is just not collegiate anymore. MPowerTT was a voluntary programme.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: MP Des Vignes and MP Marcelle were not paid one dry cent to participate in MPowerTT.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: To come here and to suggest that they were paid hundreds of thousands of dollars is unforgivable and is distasteful, it is heinous, and it is shameful.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Shameful.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I say, however, that in the alignment of the universe, right, gentlemen, that was a precursor to you all being here, that public service that you all performed. Your constituents recognised that and that is why they showed their

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support to you to bring you here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: But, but, but, but, but, but, par for the course, everybody could come and “dey cud just wash dey mouth” without any supporting evidence and it stands on the record in the *Hansard* that is what counts for the debate in this Parliament. They are here, they were not paid one cent for MPowerTT, they were doing public service.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: You could prove that?

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Well, here’s what, Madam Deputy Speaker, in speaking to you, I say to the Member who made the pronouncement, if you have the receipt or the cheque, bring it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Bring it. Or, or, or “hush yuh mouth”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, I really—and there is no mirth here, you know, because it is a pattern, it is a pattern and you say it often enough and throw enough dirt, some will stick on your suit. I would give that the nomenclature of satanic and demonic.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Yeah. But, but, but, Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing, this is a very serious piece of legislation that signals to our young people that this Government has no faith in you and your abilities. We speak about culture here and we understand what is happening. They want to change the way we do

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business in Trinidad and Tobago, we will have none of it. You have the majority in the house, you know, but people on this bench, people of Trinidad and Tobago we have the majority on the ground. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for 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, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, this morning I was asked to speak with the Archbishop of Port of Spain. I placed a call to His Grace, unfortunately, at that time, he did not answer. Within a few minutes, his Grace returned my call and I share this experience with you so that you will understand the conversations that have been happening, especially since my colleague from Port of Spain South raised the context of religious leaders in Trinidad and Tobago.

His Grace has often been referred to as part of the moral conscience of our nation, particularly with issues impacting on our young people and members of the flock. Madam Deputy Speaker, the last thing His Grace said to me in that conversation was that currently he is in Rome at the Vatican and he had an impending meeting with the Holy Father, the Pope and before he came off the line His Grace said, “Minister, I am praying for Trinidad and Tobago because its people are in your hands and that of the Government”.

It was on February 6th of this year that Minister Morris, Member for Mayaro and myself visited His Grace at Archbishop’s House on his invitation. We had some very frank, honest conversations regarding government policy as it relates to

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the trajectory upon which we wanted to embark on, particularly as I know several Members have discussed that this was part of the national conversation that we were having with the population prior to the general election.

We spoke with the Archbishop particularly regarding gambling, alcohol consumption, marijuana use among our nation's youth. But it was not restricted just to those three issues. Minister Morris will also recall, His Grace raised with us the issue of social media and the use of social media among our young people and what he described as the abuse of social media, which has become a prevalent issue contributing to school violence and other ills associated with children.

His Grace also spoke about pornography and the impact that it has had on our younger generation in particular, and His Grace was able to give us a lot of anecdotal information and evidence because of the membership of the church, but also the interrelated aspects of the faith working in conjunction with other groupings and other faith-based organisations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that was a very eye-opening experience and it was on the evening of National Awards that I whispered to His Grace that this Bill was coming to the Parliament and I recalled when the hon. Prime Minister first raised this issue, His Grace lent his support publicly, publicly as a religious leader in Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—understanding the challenges. And I heard my colleague from Port of Spain South end on a note that I find to be very disappointing, where he said:

...they are trying to—“change...”—things—“...in Trinidad and Tobago”—

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and—“we will have none of it.”

That is what my colleague just said:

“...we will have none of it.”

And you know why they will have none of it? They have been the beneficiaries of the destruction of young people, particularly from poor and dispossessed communities that they represent across the Bench—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Des Vignes: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(6).

Hon. B. Padarath:—opposite us, they have been the beneficiaries of that, they have also been contributors to that.

Mr. Des Vignes: The Member is imputing improper motives on the Members on this side, that we are reaping benefits from young people suffering.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I heard what the Member said, overruled. Continue, Member.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, they have contributed to the destruction of young people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: You look at the constituencies that they represent, you do not have far to look at the Selywn Ryan report. Every report that speaks about at-risk youth in this country speaks specifically to swaths of Trinidad and Tobago that Members opposite have held for 60 years and more in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: And therefore, we started off with the moral conscience and

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the moral compass. I want to refer you to a comment that was made by our colleague from Diego Martin North/East, Madam Deputy Speaker. Our colleague said, why not stick to the worldwide benchmark of 18 years?

And our hon. colleague from Diego Martin North/East repeated that. I want to say to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the reason why we are not prepared to stick with the international benchmark that is pervasive of 18 years, is that Trinidad and Tobago is not the Trinidad and Tobago of 30 and 40 years ago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: We are now among the top 10 countries, under your watch, under your watch, that brought murders to over 640 in any one year in this country. Therefore when you tell us to keep it at 18 years, unfortunately, we do not agree with the Member for Port of Spain South, who tells that we want to change things and they will have none of it. Come hell or high water, things will change in this country—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—starting under the leadership of the Member for Siparia, aided and abetted by all 28 Members that form the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the very things I am proud of, and the Member for Oropouche East, a former youth officer, of the United National Congress, a former Vice President of the University of the West Indies Guild of Students, many of us having come through the ranks of both the party and the University, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we served in Opposition, we did not only advance arguments opposing Government policy, we also came with real tangible solutions. I will give you two examples, Madam Deputy

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Speaker, and in the context of why we find ourselves in the debate surrounding increasing the age of gambling, alcohol consumption and cannabis use among our young people.

There were two issues, as the youngest Member to have served between 2015 to 2020 in this House, that eventually became government policy. One which was first rejected for two years, but you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, sometimes there is an expression in politics where they say you have to sometimes eat your own political vomit and it was the former Member for San Fernando West when I raised the idea of a sex offenders registry when I became a Member of Parliament because of the amount of sexual offences that were happening at that time. Then I came to Parliament with a Motion asking for that sex offenders registry to be established and for stand-alone legislation to support it. The Member then for San Fernando West said there was no need for it. Madam Deputy Speaker, you know three years later they had to come back and tell the Parliament they are coming to establish a sex offenders registry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: But, Madam Deputy Speaker, that was progressive, but that is an example of ideas that we have put forward, because serious times call for serious measures. We cannot continue to do the same things over and over again, which our colleagues opposite are asking us to do, expecting a different result. And therefore today, I am very happy to lend my support to this, because you know why, Madam Deputy Speaker, it will bring real results.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

9.55 p.m.

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Hon. B. Padarath: The second issue, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I raised when we were in Opposition was parental responsibility legislation. I am very happy to hear the hon. Prime Minister and Members of the Government speaking about elements of parental responsibility legislation. This is a legislation that has worked in other spaces and places. We have reached the juncture in our nation's history where we need to try something and do something.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: They have spoken ad nauseum for 10 years, Madam Deputy Speaker. They have been repeating the same old plan, policy, telling us about every single youth programme that did not work, despite the millions and billions of dollars infused into those youth programmes, which were really money-making schemes for Members opposite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at some of the audit reports—

Mr. Gonzales: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(6).

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will allow the Member to make his point.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. These things are factual. Just go and look at the audit reports, and where we continue to lay more audit reports; more audit reports that is to come to this Parliament, you will see hundreds of millions of dollars into youth programmes that went into politicians' pockets, and not politicians sitting down on this side of the House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. B. Padarath: When you see the web of companies, and so on, you will understand that they do not speak from a place of moral consciousness, of wanting better for young people, because through their actions, they have demonstrated that they did contrary to what today they are telling us they are seeking to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it was not my intention to enter the debate. I know the AG is anxiously awaiting to address some of the concerns that colleagues have raised, particularly on some of the clauses of the Bill. But I am very happy to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you speak about consultation, we have not only been consulting with the population through the mandate that we have been given, we have a constitutional majority. That is not a simple majority, Madam Deputy Speaker. A constitutional majority is an overwhelming mandate given by the population.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Then you are working with our religious and our spiritual leaders. I can tell you the date and time we met with the Archbishop, the continuing conversations that have been ensuing with him and others. And therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not saying the Bill is perfect, but what we are saying is that today, we are giving our young people a fighting chance, and it is a better chance than any chance that you ever gave them when you were there for 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will repeat what I said earlier. While we are fighting for young people here through our plans, policies programmes, and a Prime Minister who is bold and courageous enough to bring

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landmark and revolutionary legislation that will change the trajectory and the culture of the way in which we approach the lives of our young people. The only people who benefitted and who were beneficiaries of the destruction of young people in this country has been the PNM, and the evidence is there for all to see.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Look at their constituencies, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the evidence confronts you in their faces. They chose the 10 years, Madam Deputy Speaker, to pursue programmes and projects for financial benefit, not for the benefit of young people, because they understood that keeping them poor, keeping them destitute, will keep the People's National Movement in power through their votes and their vote bank. The young people, Madam Deputy Speaker, have awoken to that, and that is why on April 28th, they told them, "Gone from here, fire bun you."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Sen The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Madam Deputy Speaker, we have been here now for, just going on 12 hours. These are some marathon sessions, but they have all been useful sessions, and I think that we have been about, in a very rare sense, the job of altering, changing the trajectory of this country.

I was saddened to hear Port of Spain South, my friend, say that "It is business as usual." "Business as usual" is what got us to the position that we were

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in in 2024, when Trinidad and Tobago, a tiny island, recorded perhaps one of the top 10—one of the top 15 highest homicide rates in the world. That is what we met when we assumed office. That is the context.

Now, we have come with radical legislation. I heard the threat uttered—not *sub silentio*, it was uttered across the Floor today, to challenge the legislation. Go ahead and challenge it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Go ahead and challenge it. And on purpose today, I did not spend any deal of time—any great deal of time discussing *Suratt* and *Suraj*, because at the end of the day, what those cases decide is that it is the job of the Parliament to strike the balance between competing rights and interests. The Privy Council, of course, as our final court, is going to see whether or not we have struck that balance correctly or incorrectly.

A point that I did not raise before is that my colleagues on the other side, when they found themselves in difficulty with legislation, they had a habit of stripping off the special majority label. And the Member for Diego Martin North/East is on record as saying, “I took off the label because down here”—in the House of Representatives—“I would not be able to pass the law.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: That is what he said in relation to the revenue authority. He said that in relation to the revenue authority, and precisely that. You know what? As the Privy Council said, “No problem. Parliament does its business.” He is not a lawyer, you know, but he is making the point for me. He is making the point for me. He is not a lawyer, he is not an accountant, he is not an

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economist, he is an engineer, but he has been everywhere: Health, works, finance; everywhere—public utilities.

Hon. Member: He got fired from all.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Insecure enough to finish you off tonight. So, what I would like to say to my colleague and friend from Port of Spain South is that, you asked a direct question on the age—how “child” is defined in the Children Act. And the answer is that in section 20, for the purposes of sexual offences, it is defined at “fourteen years”. But under the Summary Courts Act, it is defined in section 2 as “seven”. Okay? So that is the common law standard. So, I have answered your question. I am not going to get into whether or not the proportionality test has been refined or not. That is for our friends in the UK. We know that they have spoken on it. The CCJ has had something to say as well on it.

Now, the Member for Diego Martin North/East raised a couple other points, because I am not sure why the Leader of Government Business asked the Member, the very capable Member for Diego Martin West, to respond this morning. The response was interesting, but there really is nothing in what he said that I can find to reply to. So, the first substantive comment came from the Member for Diego Martin North/East. And I hasten to add that I am secure enough to say that—to concede that his comments were the first substantial comments today. So, he says—

Hon. Member: They were not correct.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Thank you for that. They were not correct, but they were substantial. So now, he raised the issue of consultation, and I want to

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tell a story about consultation before I get into it. I know it is 10 o'clock. It is just going to be two or three minutes.

When I went into the Office of the Attorney General, I was met with a situation where the staff at the AG's Office explained to me what consultation meant for the purposes of that marriage law, which was controversial. And I was shocked. It resulted in the immediate departure of persons from the AG's Office. They had to be dismissed because they were party to what they described to be consultation. Now, what they described to be consultation was this. Just give me a few minutes. I know it is five past 10.00.

So, there was a TV station, and the then Attorney General presented himself to answer questions. But you see, the mistake was that one of the persons who was in attendance with the Attorney General was a public servant. So now, he is getting some strange calls. The calls are all coming from someone who sounds over the phone as if it is the same person. And then, the day before, there is a list of questions that he gets, and he then provides answers to that person. Now, this is not a bedtime story, you know, a grim fairytale. This is what consultation meant. So that, at the end of this hour-long exercise on national TV, no less—took place on national TV, they said that they had completed a consultation exercise, the politicians. The public servants were left dumbfounded because they knew that the whole thing was set up. It was staged.

Now, for us, consultation is something that is going to take time. It is going to involve real people. We had a consultation on the home invasion law. We went throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: We fought an election on a Manifesto in which this particular measure—these particular ages were mentioned. We made no secret of it. We won that election.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I have said this morning, when I piloted the Bill, I said that the Prime Minister says, “Listen, it is going to take some time for this law to come into force, and in that period of time, we continue to listen to people.” That is the kind of Government that you have. We are not going to listen to ghosts. That is not us. We listen to real people.

10.10 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, the Member for Diego Martin Noth/East spoke about the penalties not being proportionate. That is nonsense.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: It is nonsense because we—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: —it is nonsense. He then says that the legislation makes no distinction between public use and private use. Well, Law 101, even insecure people like me would say that legislation seldom purports to police conduct in private. Seldom purports to do that. People in private do all sorts of things. Unless you take some sort—you take a life. That is not a private matter. It is a public matter. So, the law sets a required standard of behaviour with respect to public activity in general terms.

Now, the Member made a point in which he said that there was no exception

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in the—and this too is a useful point. No exception with respect to employment. And that, my friends, in spite of the fact that I am a very insecure person. I am so insecure that I ask my “draftspeople” to take the point on board, and you will see it reflected in the amendments which I have circulated today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, the one thing that I would stand up on is the constant reference throughout. He has made a career. I know him, and he talks about insecurity. He is a very short, insecure person himself.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: But he is constantly, constantly deriding public servants. This Bill is horribly drafted.

Mr. Imbert: By you.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: The drafting is this—

Mr. Imbert: By you.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I do not draft legislation. No Attorney General drafts legislation.

Mr. Speaker: Can I have a second? Diego Martin North/East, no.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: He is hurting. Let him speak.

Mr. Speaker: No. No. This morning, let us not—

Mr. Imbert: He is very disrespectful.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. Imbert: “How yuh mean no?”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Listen, I am going to resist the temptation. I am going to resist. I

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am going to resist the temptation to respond to that. This morning, when you were on your legs, you constantly sought refuge from Barataria/San Juan because you wanted to speak in silence. I have sat here for the last 10 minutes, and all you have done is crosstalk with the hon. Attorney General. That is all you have done.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Because you are engaging in the same thing you complained about incessantly this morning.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: And you need to stop it. You are the most experienced parliamentarian here. You simply need to stop it. This unbridled insouciance which you seem to bring here. Stop it! Continue AG.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I hope that has done some good.

So, I was on my public servants, Mr. Speaker. You see, these public servants who are behind me here, they work, day in, day out. They were here in this Parliament, perhaps not in this Chamber, until two o'clock, four or five days ago. They are here at 10 o'clock today. They have been here for the entire day. They were here for the entire day last week, Tuesday. They worked over the weekend. I know for a fact that some of them were up at three and four o'clock this morning.

And I will not have—you could say anything about me. “Yuh could say, ah black. Yuh could say, ah duncy. Yuh could say, ah, chupid. Yuh could say yuh white and better than me.” But you know what you cannot say? You know what you cannot say? You cannot say that my public servants drafted bad law.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Mr. Speaker, there will be no joint select committee for this Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: The joint select committee, I know, and the Members opposite know, especially the Member for Diego Martin North/East, that joint select committees are a place where legislation goes often to die. This is not going to die.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: The amendments which we propose here will make the Bill better. We have taken one of the suggestions by Diego Martin North/East on board. Mr. Speaker, with those words, 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 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Question proposed: That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

- 3(a.) A. Renumber paragraphs (v) to (vii) as paragraphs (vi) to (viii),
respectively.
- B. Insert after paragraph (iv) the following new paragraph:

“(v) by inserting after subsection (2B), the following new subsections:

‘(2BA) Subject to sections 5B to 5BD, where a person under the age of twenty-five years contravenes subsection (2A) or (2B), that person commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of fifty thousand dollars; and

(2BB) Where a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a person referred to in subsection (2)(f) is under the age of twenty-five years, he shall require that person to produce a valid form of national photo identification.”

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, I have circulated an amendment. I would take it as having been read, and I would ask that the House adopt the amendment.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Attorney General, we have not too long received the amendment, so we were still going through it. But I do not know if you would be in a position to explain what this amendment was about to this House.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I did not hear the last thing you said.

Mr. Gonzales: What is the amendment?

Mr. Chairman: The hon. Member is suggesting that he has not had time to fully

digest the amendment and would like a short explanation of it.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Okay. In 3(a)—I do not have my glasses. Okay, so 3(a) deals with the quantity of marijuana. We are renumbering:

“...paragraphs (v) to (vii)...”

They become paragraphs (vii) to (viii), respectively. That is, 3(a)A. And 3(a)B, we are inserting:

“...after paragraph (iv)...”—a—“...new paragraph...”

“...Subject to sections 5B to 5BD, where a person under the age of twenty-five years contravenes subsection (2A) or (2B), that person commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of fifty thousand dollars; and

(2BB) Where a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a person referred to in subsection (2)(f) is under the age of twenty-five years, he shall require that person to produce a valid form of national photo identification.”

Now, we felt that the legislation, although it was well-intentioned and drafted with prohibitions—it would have been difficult for the police, I was told, to determine the ages of individuals, so that we inserted that photo ID requirement, and you will see it reflected throughout the Act today to ensure that the prohibition has teeth.

So, prohibition with respect—wherever ages are concerned, there is an objective means of determining what the age of the individual is by the police officer charged with enforcing the provisions of the Act at the time and place.

10.25 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South, I know you have some amendment—an amendment to that clause—circulated by you.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the gravamen of the proposed amendment is to deal with the age of over 25, and we are proposing:

“Delete the words in clauses 3A and B, A, B, and wherever they occur in the Bill, the provisions governing permissible possession and cultivation of cannabis, and substitute the words ‘who has attained the age of 21 years’,”

We have asked that be done in both clauses 3A and B. The rationale for it, Mr. Chairman, is because that is what we were told in January, and we are thinking it will make it less oppressive than it is now. That is the rationality behind the suggested amendment.

Mr. Chairman: So, for the benefit of Members of the House, this amendment simply proposes to change the age from 25 to 21 in both clauses, right? So, if we could sum it up in one sentence. Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: That is not our policy, and I hasten to add that if my colleague was here this morning when I referred to the communication at the CARICOM Heads, they focused on 24 as an age. So, this is not Government policy. We are unable to accept it.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I see. All right. For the ease of reference for all Members, this is what I will do. Because there are competing amendments here. I propose to put the amendments put forward by the Opposition first and take the yeas or nays, and then I would put the amendment proposed by the Government and take the yeas or nays. All right. Is that procedure clear, so that I do not confuse it?

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Question, on amendment, [Mr. K. Scotland SC] put and negatived.

Question, on amendment, [Sen. J. Jeremie SC] put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4.

Question proposed: That clause 4 stand part of the Bill.

Delete subclause (a) and substitute the following new subclause:

“(a) in section 9 –

(i) in paragraph (e) –

(A) by deleting the words “twenty-one” and substituting the words “twenty-five”;

(B) by deleting the words “eighteen years of age, or a person under the age of twenty years who is a student at any primary or secondary school” and substituting the words “twenty-five years of age”; and

(ii) by inserting after paragraph (e) the following new paragraph:

“(f) a person who is responsible for the control, supervision, management or security of a club shall, before permitting any person to enter those premises, require that person to produce a valid form of national photo identification.””.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The proposed amendment is to amend clause 4 by inserting, immediately after the amendment of section 9E of the Registration of Clubs Act, a further amendment, adding the following proviso at the end of that paragraph, and the proviso is that:

“The restriction on admission by reason of age shall apply only to the part of the club premises in which gambling is conducted.

- (i) A person shall not be prohibited solely by reason of that restriction from entering another part of the club premises for the purposes of participating in a lawful sporting, cultural or community activity.
- (ii) The club shall ensure that the part of the premises in which the gambling is conducted is physically separated from the part used for an activity referred to in subparagraph (i) and that access to the gambling area is controlled.
- (iii) Nothing in this proviso authorizes a person who has not attained the age prescribed by this paragraph to participate or to enter the gambling area.”

It simply makes sense. It gives the owners a sense that they can isolate the gambling areas and other areas, like where sporting and cultural activities are conducted, and it protects owners and it protects people who would frequent the establishment. That is the rationale for the proposed amendment.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I would like to comment on the amendments proposed by the Attorney General.

Mr. Chairman: But we have not put that as yet.

Mr. Imbert: Okay fine.

Mr. Chairman: So, if those are the contributions with regard to the amendment proposed by Port of Spain South, I will ask the hon. Attorney General to respond.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Again, Chair, not Government’s policy. We are unable to

accept it.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Alright. We now move to the—yes, I know. I am moving to your amendment now. Hon. Attorney General, your proposed amendment.

Sen. Jeremie SC: It is as circulated. I would hope that Members, by now, if they did not before have a chance to read the amendments, that they would have done so. Now, again, the key bit relates to the ID, the photo ID, at overleaf on page 2. By its overleaf on page 2—perhaps I could read that last bit.

“A person who is responsible for the control, supervision and management or security of a club shall, before permitting any person to enter those premises, require that person to produce a valid form of national photo ID.”

Now, there seems to be a typo there. So, it is (ii) in the margin. It should be, instead of the letter “F”, it should be “G”, and then by inserting after paragraph—is that a “C” or “E”?—“F”, the following new paragraph. I am not sure if you got all of that.

Mr. Chairman: This is not a process that is undertaken—

Sen. Jeremie SC: We can do it administratively.

Mr. Chairman: Administratively.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Administratively, yes.

Mr. Chairman: This is not a process that is done. So, that does not need to trouble us throughout the committee stage.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Well, I believe the Member for Diego Martin North/East had a—

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Chairman, if we look at the preceding amendment, it

speaks to a police officer having reasonable grounds to believe that a person is under the age of 25. But this amendment has no such provision. It simply says that the person responsible for the control, supervision and management must require anybody to produce ID. Now, what is the point of that? If somebody is obviously over the age of 25, you want to tell me a 90-year-old man or 80-year-old man or 75-year-old person entering this establishment must produce ID? Why is it not tied to the reasonable belief? Every single person buying alcohol now? Every single person entering a club? Every single person gambling has to produce ID, no matter how old they are? What kind of cumbersome arrangement? Mr. Chairman, my problem is—

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair . this is—

Mr. Imbert: My problem is with the mechanics. This is extremely cumbersome and also unnecessary.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, this is the usual stipulation in law. How it is operated in practice is that owners of establishments will know. It happens everywhere in the world. I am sure the Member for Diego Martin North/East is extremely well travelled, and owners of establishments customarily will know that someone is over 25 and not ask for—

Mr. Imbert: Mr.—

Sen. Jeremie SC: They may ask for a bank card, not an ID card.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Sen. Jeremie SC: It is not Government policy, so we are [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: [*Crosstalk*] As he wants, but I am dealing with the actual words. This is strict liability. The person must require the person to produce a valid form of ID. They cannot use their discretion and say, “Look, I know you are an old

person,” and being not only well-travelled but well-versed in law, in many jurisdictions there are different forms of requirement for photo identification. In many jurisdictions, it is whether there is reasonable belief that the person is underage. It is not absolute like this, okay?

So, I just want to know why. This is not the global norm. This is not the normal form of words, and there is no discretion allowed here. So, I would like to know why it is being worded that way.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Can I just ask if the Member is on clause 3, which we passed a while ago,

Mr. Imbert: Four. Four. I said I was on four.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I heard you say—

Mr. Imbert: Well then why you ask me for?

Sen. Jeremie SC:—the words are the same.

Mr. Chairman: I think the enquiry of the Member is this, that clause 3 has a requirement that a police officer must have reasonable grounds to believe to ask for the ID, but clause 4 seems to suggest an absolute requirement, imperative requirement, for any club owner to ask for the ID.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Yeah that is it.

Mr. Chairman: I think the answer is pretty obvious.

Sen. Jeremie SC: It is Government’s policy, that is it.

Mr. Chairman: I think the answer is pretty obvious, but it is not for me to articulate. All right, so I propose to put the Port of Spain South amendments first, in the usual way.

Question, on amendment, [Mr. K. Scotland SC] put and negatived.

Question, on amendment, [Sen. J. Jeremie SC] put and agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5.

Question proposed: That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

A. Renumber subclauses (c) to (f) as subclauses (d) to (g), respectively.

B. Insert after subclause (b) the following new subclause:

“(c) by inserting after section 14 the following new section:

“Photo

identification

14A.(1) Where, in accordance with section 13 or 14, a person sells a tobacco product to another person the seller shall, before completing the sale, require the purchaser to produce a valid form of national photo identification establishing that the purchaser has attained twenty-one years of age.

(2) If the purchaser fails to produce a valid form of national photo identification upon request, the seller shall immediately refuse the sale or delivery of the tobacco product.””.

C. Renumber subclauses (g) to (j) as subclauses (h) to (k), respectively.

D. By inserting after the renumbered subclause (g) the following new subclause:

“(h) by inserting after section 32, the following new section:

“Restriction on vaping 32A.(1) A person under the age of twenty-one years shall not –

(a) use a vaping product;

- (b) purchase a vaping product; or
- (c) have a vaping product in his possession,
whether for his own use or for the use of
another person.

(2) Where a person sells a vaping product to another person the seller shall, before completing the sale, require the purchaser to produce a valid form of national photo identification establishing that the purchaser is twenty-one years of age or older.

(3) If the purchaser fails to produce a valid form of national photo identification upon request, the seller shall immediately refuse the sale or delivery of the vaping product.

(4) Subject to sections 37A to 37E, a person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of fifty thousand dollars.

(5) For the purpose of this section –
“vape” means –

(a) a device which –

(i) vaporises substances, other than tobacco, for the purpose of inhalation through a mouthpiece, whether or not the mouthpiece also vaporises tobacco; and

(ii) is not a medical device or a

medicinal product; or

(b) an item which is intended to form part of
a device within paragraph (a), including
anything intended to be attached to it with a
view to imparting flavour;

“vaping product” means –

(a) a vape; or

(b) a vaping substance;

“vaping substance” means a substance,

other than tobacco, that is

intended to be vaporised by a vape;

“vaporises” includes aerosolises.””.

E. In subclause (*h*) –

- (a) in the proposed section 37A (1), by deleting the words “section 12 or 13” and substituting the words “section 12, 13 or 32A”;
- (b) in the proposed section 37B (8), by deleting the words “section 12 or 13” and substituting the words “section 12, 13 or 32A”; and
- (c) in the proposed section 37C (7), by deleting the words “section 12 or 13” and substituting the words “section 12, 13 or 32A”.

Mr. Chairman: We will go with the amendment proposed by Port of Spain South. Clause 5, Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We find that the increases are too—it is just too much. We find it is draconian, and it just leapfrogged, and in those circumstances, we are asking the hon. Attorney General and the Government to reconsider those draconian increases and amend clause 5 by deleting the

provisions which increase the terms of imprisonment prescribed by section 37 of the Tobacco Control Act. And we have made that suggestion, Mr. Chairman. We think that it is really disproportionate.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I want to thank the Member for Port of Spain South for the suggestion. We are unable to accept it. It is not the policy of the Government.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A point of clarification I was hoping to get from the AG on his amendment. Can I ask that now, or would that be put after your—

Mr. Chairman: Whose amendment? The hon. Attorney General?

Mr. de Nobriga: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: I am going to put that now. Attorney General, you have also circulated amendments. Can I hear you—can the committee hear you on your proposed amendments?

Sen. Jeremie SC: Again, it is as circulated. It is straightforward, and it deals with the photo identification issue. And here, in 5, we are linking it to the sale of tobacco and tobacco products.

10.40 p.m.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Now, I have also in D—so that is B. I did say during the course of the debate that I will extend the reach of the legislation to treat with vaping and that is captured in 5D. That is it, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chair. Hon. Attorney General at D in clause 5, you are setting a minimum age for the possession and use of a vape, and you have

clarified in the definitions on page 3 as to what those vapes are. However, there are vapes that are marijuana-based, and the minimum age for marijuana use is 25. Is there any gap that has been created by this?

Sen. Jeremie SC: I did not know that. That is a very useful—a very, very useful suggestion, and I have to say that I did not—well, first of all, I would not think of it. I do not know what a vape is, and my public servants are similarly circumstanced. So that tells you that unlike the Member for Diego Martin Central, we perhaps are from a different demographic.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Sen. Jeremie SC: What I intend to do is to pass the legislation treating with tobacco, and I will do some research on marijuana vaping and the other types of vapes or vaping that might exist. I am not sure that it is possible to legislate now for all time, but we will see what we can do. By the time, we should probably have to go back—come back from the Senate.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Once again, I see this requirement in this amendment is that if a person sells a tobacco product, an elderly person coming into the shop with a walker bent over, obviously 65 or 70 years old, that they must produce an ID. No discretion again, and I am going to bring this up on every point because it also applies to alcohol. Why is the Government doing this? This means you are going to buy one cigarette, one, you are obviously a senior citizen, but you have to produce ID. Why? Why not a reasonable belief format?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: No, we are not taking the amendment.

Mr. Imbert: The Attorney General in his winding up—because we are getting into several amendments here—said that he would take on board a point I made about an exemption for workers. I am not seeing this here in this list of amendments. Is that something that we have not yet received?

Sen. Jeremie SC: Patience comes to those who wait.

Mr. Imbert: I am asking a question.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Well, Mister man, you cannot tell me how to answer a question you asked.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Sen. Jeremie SC: You had 10 years inside here and in dealing with the UNC.

Mr. Imbert:—I am asking the Attorney General—

Sen. Jeremie SC: I am not one of them.

Mr. Imbert:—whether in this amendment—

Sen. Jeremie SC: It is in the amendments and I will come to it in time.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. That is all you had to say.

Sen. Jeremie SC: No, I do not.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: You could behave like a child if you want.

Sen. Jeremie SC: “I do have to tell you anything.”

Mr. Imbert: You could be childish if you want.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Be quiet.

Mr. Imbert: You could be insulting and childish.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. All right, I propose to put the amendment proposed by Port of Spain South.

Question, on amendment, [Mr. K. Scotland SC] put and negatived.

Question, on amendment, [Sen. J. Jeremie SC] put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6.

Question proposed: That clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

“6 In subclause (f) -

- (a) renumber the proposed section 38A as section 38A (1); and
- (b) insert after the renumbered subsection (1), the following new subsection:

“(2) Subsection (1) shall not apply to a person over the age of eighteen but under the age of twenty-one years who handles, sells, supplies, or is in possession of alcohol or tobacco products during the course of his lawful employment.”.’

Mr. Chairman: I propose to deal with the amendment proposed by Port of Spain, South first. Member for Port of Spain, South, and I see that they are quite substantial, so perhaps for economy of time, you can just summarize them as I know you are capable of doing, perhaps one paragraph.

Mr. Scotland SC: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, the purpose of this really, these proposed amendments is to insulate a child who may, for reasons outwit his or her control, be found in possession of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and also to have reference to the Children’s Authority to, before proceeding against a child, have the stopgap measure of an individual assessment taken relative to the child. And before any decision that is taken that may stain a child for his entire life in the context of this Bill, that you have that intervention via the proposed amendments. It is really a

child we are dealing with.

Mr. Chairman, I shudder to think if, as was stated in Paul Jackman by Chief Justice Sharma, if young people, many young people, were not given opportunities in life, what would have become of them? So, I am proposing, hon. Attorney General, that you really seriously consider the position of children and the child before such draconian measures are taken against them, and that is the rationale for the proposed amendments. I think I have encapsulated it as succinctly as I could, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I think so. Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, the answer is we would not be taking the amendment. I would give a reason. A child does not commit an offence under this section solely by reason of possessing alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, cannabis resin, or another dangerous drug for the child's own consumption or use, or consuming or using a substance referred to.

Where a police officer has reasonable grounds that a child has engaged in conduct described in 4(a), the officer shall, where urgent medical attention is required, take reasonable steps to secure that attention and, (b) refer the child to the Children's Authority for an assessment of the child's circumstances and need for protection, treatment, or other assistance. And we just, we think it is not necessary. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Hon. Attorney General, you have your own proposed amendment to Clause 6. If I could invite you now. It is at page 4 of your—it starts at page 4 of your circulated proposed amendments.

Sen. Jeremie SC: It is essentially the—this is actually the clause that we, we took the idea from the Member for Diego Martin North/East. And I did say that we did

take something on board. Now, the point that the Member made was in respect of an exemption for children who were employed. And we have taken that point on board in our drafting language in this clause. So, the clause is really an exemption that protects persons, if you would like me to read it. I mean it—

Mr. Chairman: No, I suppose we could label it the employment exception.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Correct.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. In the first place, we are not dealing here with children. Someone over the age of 18 is not a child. The other question I would like to ask is, while this deals with the problem of a worker, like a delivery driver, cashier in a supermarket, whatever, what about a worker in a casino who neither handles alcohol nor tobacco, but is restricted from entering the casino or the gambling establishment because of their age? Because before that, you said you have to produce ID. So, you are 19 years old, you are working in a casino or gambling establishment, you are not handling tobacco or alcohol, but you are working inside it. It might be the cleaner, it might be the security guard. Where is the workplace exemption for that category of worker?

Mr. Chairman: The hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, in the Children Act, there are provisions for persons, limited provisions for persons under 18 to work. So, in a sense—

Mr. Imbert: *[Interruption]*

Sen. Jeremie SC: I am speaking to the Chair. Can we just have some order?

Mr. Chairman: I think we need to give the hon. Attorney General a chance to make his point.

Sen. Jeremie SC: So, it is correct that persons were at 18, 18 is the age of

majority, but this is as far as we are prepared to go. We are not prepared to make further changes.

Mr. Imbert: No, that is not the point I made, Mr. Chairman, and the Attorney General did not respond to the point I made. I am not referring to somebody under the age of 18. I am referring to somebody over the age of 18, and under the age of 21 or 25, as the case may be. Let us use the 25, who is employed in a gambling establishment but is not handling alcohol or tobacco, but is performing services such as cleaning services. Where is the workplace exemption for that category of worker? The person neither handles alcohol nor tobacco, but performs other services. They are between the ages of 18 and 25. That is my point.

Sen. Jeremie SC: That is something that I—that point is something that I would like to think about. It is not something that I am prepared to accept tonight. I am not making that change here tonight.

Mr. Imbert: I am not asking you to make that change. I am asking you whether you understand the point I am making.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I am not stupid. I do understand the point—

Mr. Imbert: You do understand. Okay, fine.

Mr. Chairman: He said he does. He said he does, and that he is not prepared to make the change tonight.

Mr. Imbert: A good point.

Mr. Chairman: Would you allow me to speak? If you would be so gracious.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I think he has an issue. I am not sure what it is—

Mr. Imbert: Look, Mr. Speaker, the Attorney General is being insulting again, and you are allowing him.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

10.55p.m.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I think what the hon. Attorney General is saying is, that is a point that he is willing to consider, but he is not prepared to make the change tonight. So, I do not know whether it serves any purpose in continuing this discussion at this stage. So, I propose to put the question for Port of Spain.

Question, on amendment, [Mr. K. Scotland SC] put and negatived.

Question, on amendment, [Sen. J. Jeremie SC] put and agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7.

Question proposed: That clause 7 stand part of the Bill.

A. In subclause (a) –

- (a) renumber paragraph (iv) as paragraph (v);
- (b) delete the word “and” at the end of paragraph (iii); and
- (c) insert after paragraph (iii) the following new paragraph:
“(iv) by inserting after subsection (5), the following new subsection:

“(5A) For the purpose of subsection (3) or (5), the holder of a licence specified under section 35(3) or (4) shall require any individual entering, or on his premises, to produce a valid form of national photo identification establishing that the individual has attained twenty-five years of age.”; and”;

B. In subclause (e) –

- (a) renumber paragraphs (iii) and (iv) as paragraphs (iv) and (v);
- (b) insert after paragraph (ii) the following new paragraph:

“(iii) by inserting after subsection (1) the following new subsections:

“(1A) A person selling intoxicating liquor in accordance with subsection (1) shall, before completing the sale, require the purchaser to produce a valid form of national photo identification establishing that the purchaser has attained twenty-one years of age.

(1B) If the purchaser fails to produce a valid form of national photo identification upon request, the seller shall immediately refuse the sale or delivery of the intoxicating liquor.”’.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Clause 7, Port of Spain South, we would take it in the batting that we have established. Clause 7, Port of Spain South, you have a proposed amendment?

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, the proposed amendment is a proposed amendment of section 48(3), and replacing section 60(1) by deleting the provision imposing terms of imprisonment of 15, 20 and 30 years. Mr. Chairman, we have gone from three years to 15, 20 and 30. I am saying that this must be disproportionate. So, in those circumstances, I am saying that maybe the conventional thinking may be that the prison terms, as they are now, are sufficient, but certainly not from three to 15, that is five times; 20, that is like six and a half times; and 30, that is 10 times. So, that is the reason why we are proposing this amendment to penalties under the Liquor Licences Act.

It will have, potentially if there is a breach, and if the breach, sometimes, is inadvertent, Mr. Chairman, a real serious effect on the conduct of business, and

that must be a legitimate consideration for the Government. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Not consistent with the Government's policy. I welcome the suggestion, but it is not accepted.

Mr. Imbert: This is clause 7 that we are discussing?

Mr. Chairman: This is clause 7 of the amendments proposed by Port of Spain South. All right. So, hon. Attorney General, you have proposed an amendment to clause 7 as well. Can we deal with the hon. Attorney General's proposed amendment to clause 7?

Sen. Jeremie SC: It is the same. This is with respect to the liquor licences.

“...produce a valid form of national photo ID establishing that the individual has attained twenty-five years of age.”

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I make the same point.

Mr. Chairman: Same point?

Mr. Imbert: Same point, that this is a strict liability. It does not matter how old the person is, who is going to play with an amusement machine, they are to produce ID. But in addition, what about a maintenance technician? Suppose the machine goes bad and the technician is 24 years old, they cannot get into that part because it is an offence. If you look at section 20A of the Liquor Licences Act, you are not allowed to be in that part of the premises where the machine is, but you are a maintenance technician, you have studied for this, you have been trained in it and you are now telling the person they cannot approach the machine to fix it.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: My amendment is as it is circulated.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: So, does this mean the Government is now restricting tradesmen, who may have legitimate work to do on an amusement machine, from doing that kind of work if they are below the age of 25?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment before the House—

Mr. Chairman: And that is as far as—

Mr. Imbert: But that is ID—

Sen. Jeremie SC: That as far as I am prepared to go.

Mr. Imbert: It requires ID to show that you are 25 and over. “So, now a whole class of workers just gone in de Bamboo now”.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Now is not the time for speeches, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: It is not a speech. It is a fact.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I should have thought so.

Question, on amendment, [Mr. K. Scotland SC] put and negatived.

Question, on amendment, [Sen. J. Jeremie SC] put and agreed to.

Clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8.

Question proposed: That clause 8 stand part of the Bill.

A. Renumber subclauses (i) to (k) as subclauses (j) to (l), respectfully.

B. Insert after subclause (h) the following new subclause:

“(i) by inserting after section 81, the following new section:

“81A. A person who is responsible for the control, supervision, management or security of licensed premises referred to in section 80 or 81 shall, before permitting any person to enter those premises, require that person to produce a valid form of national photo identification establishing that the individual has attained twenty-five years of age.””.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, the purport of the proposed amendment:

“...in the proposed section 82A, by deleting the provision which makes entering or being found on gambling premises an offence, and making the necessary consequential amendments to the numbering...and punctuation...references.”

That is really drafting. But the gravamen really of it, Mr. Chairman, is the philosophy behind someone being on a premise that has gambling on it—just per se, mere presence on a gambling premises being—subjecting you to liability, and that is the theme throughout all the proposed amendments. I do not wish to say anything else on it, subject to any issues that the Attorney General may have, but that is the proposed amendment that we have here, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I thank the Member for the suggestion. It is not our policy. Our policy is as—can I refer to my amendment now?

Mr. Chairman: Well, yes. So, let us deal with it compendiously.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Our policy is as stated in my amendment.

Mr. Chairman: Which is at page six of your circulated amendments, right?

Sen. Jeremie SC: Correct.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, I take it there are no questions concerning the Attorney General's proposed amendment.

Mr. Imbert: Of course. Of course.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Let us hear the question.

Mr. Imbert: Section 81 of the Liquor Licences Act states that

“Subject to the provisions of section 62(1), no holder of a spirit or wine retailer's licence may refuse to supply spirits, wine or beer for consumption on the licensed premises on the demand of any person at any hour at which the same may lawfully be supplied...”

But now you are adding an 81A, and you are referring to premises that are licensed under a spirit or wine retailer's licence, and you are saying that no matter how old you are, you cannot even enter the premises without producing ID. So, a 60-year-old who wants to buy one Carib, cannot enter these premises without producing ID. This is ridiculous. And I would ask the AG to reconsider this absolute requirement for identification, for persons who are obviously over the age of 21 or 25, as the case may be.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I know it is late. Is it the liquor licence or the gambling that my friend is referring to?

Mr. Chairman: Well, I distinctly heard the hon. Member read from section 81 of the Liquor Licences Act.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Okay. The answer is the same as it was before, and this is the policy of the Government.

Mr. Imbert: Go ahead. This is impractical. It will not work. You will have to amend it.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I propose to put—[*Confers with Clerk*—no, we dealt

with the hon. Attorney General's proposed amendments compendiously. I propose to put the question now.

Question, on amendment, [Mr. K. Scotland SC] put and negatived.

Question, on amendment, [Sen. J. Jeremie SC] put and agreed to.

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Clause 9.

Clerk: Clause 9.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, the proposed amendment goes towards recasting—

Mr. Chairman: All right. Procedurally, I think I have to propose the question, just so we can get the procedure correct.

Clause 9.

Question proposed: That clause 9 stand part of the Bill.

- A. In subclause (c), renumber paragraphs (a) to (c) as paragraphs (i) to (iii).
- B. Renumber paragraphs (c) to (f) as paragraphs (d) to (g), respectively;
- C. Insert after paragraph (b) the following new paragraph:
“(c) by inserting after subsection (1) the following new subsection:

“(1A) A person dispensing cannabis in accordance with subsection (1) shall, before completing the dispensation, require the person requesting the

cannabis to produce a valid form of national photo identification establishing that the person has attained twenty five years of age.

(1B) If the person requesting cannabis fails to produce a valid form of national photo identification upon request, the person dispensing shall immediately refuse to complete the dispensation.””.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are proposing a recasting that the provision to retain the amendment to define—because I understand the policy, but certainly not the increase in the term of the imprisonment, and that is the nature of our respectful proposed amendment. At least, we are asking that the term of imprisonment, recast it to only retain the fine, but not the proposed term of imprisonment. That is the proposed amendment, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, I thank the Member. It is not government policy. My amendment reflects the policy of the Government.

Mr. Chairman: So, we are dealing with both proposed amendments compendiously. I will put the question separately.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East, would you care to give us some silence, please? All right. So, there are no questions, I suppose, on the hon. Attorney General’s proposed amendments. So, I propose to put the question.

Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol,
Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and
Tobacco) Bill, 2026

Question, on amendment, [Mr. K. Scotland SC] put and negatived.

Question, on amendment, [Sen. J. Jeremie SC] put and agreed to.

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the House.

11.10 p.m.

House resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol, Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and Tobacco) Bill, 2026 was considered in a committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the committee's report.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments.

Question put: That the Bill be read a third time.

Mr. Gonzales: Division.

The House divided:

Ayes 23

Noes 12

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Lee, Hon. D.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol,
Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and
Tobacco) Bill, 2026

Alexander, Hon. R.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, W.

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.

Robinson, Ms. C.

Imbert, C.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

de Nobriga S.

Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol,
Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and
Tobacco) Bill, 2026

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*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you most kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, October 2nd at 1.30 p.m. As we had indicated to our friends opposite that this will be Private Member's Day, and we will be grateful if the hon. Member for Arouca/Lopinot, the Chief Whip, can advise which Motion we will be pursuing.

Mr. Speaker: Member.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to notify my colleague that the Motion standing in my name will be debated on Friday.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.16 p.m.