

SENATE*Friday, October 02, 2026*

The Senate met at 10.30 a.m.

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

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Courtney Mc Nish, who is out of the country.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received correspondence from Her Excellency the President Christine Carla Kangaloo, O.R.T.T., advising of the following temporary appointment in accordance with section 44 of the Constitution:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

/s/Christine Kangaloo

President.

TO: MS. ZOLA PHILLIPS

WHEREAS Senator the Honourable Courtney Mc Nish is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago;

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 (1)(a) and section 44

UNREVISED

(4)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, ZOLA PHILLIPS, to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from 02nd September, 2026, and continuing during the absence of Senator Courtney Mc Nish from Trinidad and Tobago.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's,
this 02nd day of October, 2026."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Zola Philips took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

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, brought from the House of Representatives. [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time. *Motion made:* That the next stage be taken on Tuesday, October 06th, 2026 [*Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for the financial year ended September 30, 2024. [*The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The*

Hon. Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh)] Consolidated Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the year ended December 31, 2017. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh*]

2. Consolidated Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the year ended December 31, 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh*]
3. Consolidated Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the year ended December 31, 2019. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh*]

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar): Mr. President, I am pleased to announce that the Minister of Homeland Security is here with us today and he is prepared to answer Questions No.6, 7, 8 and 9 on the Order Paper.

Mr. President: Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Road Safety Regulations Across the Country

(Steps taken to enforce)

6. **Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman** asked the hon. Minister of Homeland Security:

Having regard to continued reports of serious road traffic accidents, many resulting in fatalities, can the Minister indicate what steps are being taken to actively enforce speed limits and other road safety regulations across the country?

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Good morning, Mr. President, and we thank the Member for the question. As it relates to question No. 6, according to the information provided by the Commissioner of Police, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is strengthening road traffic enforcement through targeted operations focused on speed, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, seatbelt violations and breaches of road traffic laws.

In relation to speeding, Mr. President, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is deploying new laser speed detection devices, training additional operators and procuring supporting equipment. This is intended to expand speed enforcement beyond highway patrols to divisional traffic units and strengthen enforcement along major roadways.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is also upgrading its breathalyser equipment to strengthen enforcement against driving under the influence. Additionally, the planned introduction of a highway speed limit and red-light enforcement camera system by the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation is expected to further support traffic law enforcement. These measures form part of an ongoing enforcement effort to improve compliance with road traffic laws and enhance road safety. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Roberts-Radgman?

Sen. Roberts-Radgman: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I do have two follow-up questions for the hon. Minister. Question one. The first question pertains to the breathalysers, the speed detection devices and the cameras. Can the Minister indicate when these three measures are expected to come on stream?

Mr. President: Hon. Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. R. Alexander: Thank you. We are, at this time, Member, we are operating with what we have. And we have some breathalysers. The camera system and so on, again, as I mentioned, procurement and that will be done by the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs.

Recruitment Exercise for Police Constables

(Measures to Reduce Risk of Recruiting Unsuitable Candidates)

7. **Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs** asked the hon. Minister of Homeland Security:

With respect to the recent recruitment exercise for Police Constables in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, can the Minister state:

- (i) what measures are in place to strengthen the screening of applicants and reduce the risk of recruiting persons unsuitable for police service; and
- (ii) what categories of enhanced integrity screening measures, if any, are utilised during the recruitment process?

Mr. President: Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Thank you again, Member, for the question. To answer the question, Mr. President, according to the information provided by the Commissioner of Police and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, they have strengthened their recruitment and screening arrangements for police constables to reduce the risk of appointing persons who may not be suitable for the position of police constable in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. With respect to part (i), the measures include:

- Enhanced verification and authentication of applicants' documents and

educational qualifications.

- Strengthening background investigations into applicants' character, conduct, associations, reliability and overall suitability for appointment.

10.45 a.m.

We also have background investigations, having received additional training in areas including risk assessments, cyber investigation techniques. All of this, Mr. President, includes measures which could support the increased use of electronic systems throughout the recruitment process.

With respect to part (ii), the enhanced integrity screening measures utilized by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service includes community-level background enquiry, verification and authentication of information submitted by applicants, polygraph exams, psychological assessment and drug testing.

These measures are intended to provide the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service with a more comprehensive assessment of an applicant's suitability for appointment in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Thank you, Sir.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs.

Sen. Dr. Attzs: Thank you, Mr. President. Supplemental: Minister, can you clarify whether these required integrity and background checks are completed before the applicant enters training?

Mr. President: Hon. Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. R. Alexander: Yes, they do. It must be completed in order for enrolment to start as an applicant.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs.

Sen. Dr. Attzs: Thank you, Mr. President.

Trinidad And Tobago Police Service**(Measures to Strengthen Integrity and Accountability)**

8. Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs asked the hon. Minister of Homeland Security:

With respect to measures to strengthen integrity and accountability within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, can the Minister state:

- (i) what institutional reforms have been introduced to promote professional standards and reduce the risk of misconduct among serving police officers; and
- (ii) whether an early intervention system or similar mechanism has been established to identify officers exhibiting repeated non-compliance, disciplinary infractions or other behaviours associated with misconduct; and
- (iii) if the answer to (ii) is in the affirmative, how does such a system operate?

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. President, and thank you for the question again, according to information provided by the Commissioner of Police, with respect to part (i), the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service have institutional arrangements in place to promote professional standards. Accountability and appropriate conduct must be present in the serving officers. These include the performance appraisal management system, supervisory oversight, progressive disciplinary measures, and the work of the Professional Standards Bureau and Police Complaints Authority.

Where performance or conduct concerns are identified, corrective measures may include counselling, guidance, closer supervision, defined performance objectives and continued monitoring. Where warranted, Mr. President, matters may proceed to formally discipline the officer. The action must be taken.

With respect to part (ii), while the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service does not operate a separate system formally designed as an early intervention system, it has a comparative mechanism through the combined use of performance appraisal, supervisory oversight and a disciplinary framework. These arrangements allow for the patterns of repeated non-compliance, disciplinary infractions, unsatisfactory performance or other concerning conduct to be identified and addressed.

With respect to part (iii), where a concern or pattern of conduct is identified, it is documented and brought to the officer's attention, and the appropriate correctional intervention is determined. The officer's response is then monitored and reviewed. Where the matter is not satisfactorily resolved or where the conduct warrants it, the matter may be referred for formal investigation and disciplinary action. Thank you

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs.

Strengthening the Operations of the TTPS

(Details of)

9. Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs asked the hon. Minister of Homeland Security:

With regard to strengthening the operations of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), can the Minister state:

- (i) whether any recent reforms have been introduced in the areas of recruitment, training, supervision, performance management and accountability; and
- (ii) what measurable performance indicators are used to assess whether said reforms have strengthened professional standards and public confidence in the TTPS?

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Thank you again for the question, hon. Senator. According to information provided by the

Commissioner of Police, with respect to part (i), the answer is, yes. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has introduced a number of reforms and initiatives in areas of recruitment, training, supervision, performance management and accountability. These include the digitalization and standardization of the recruitment process, the strengthening of training and professional development, enhanced supervisory oversight and performance management, and the use of training and evaluation feedback to identify development needs and support professional standards and accountability.

With respect to part (ii), the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service use a range of performance indicators to assess these initiatives. These include application processing efficiency, progression and attrition rate, and recruitment performance; in training, programme completion and pass rates, pre- and post-training results, participant feedback, and the application of competencies required; and in performance management and supervision, timely completion of appraisals, identification of development needs, and completion of improvement measures and supervisory compliance.

These indicators provide the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service with information to assess the implementation of reform and therefore, its contributions to professional performance and standards. In relation to public confidence especially, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service continues to assess its performance, and the impact of their performance as part of the broader effort to strengthen accountability and professional policing. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs.

Sen. Dr. Attzs: Thank you, Mr. President. A supplemental, Minister: Can you share how the public confidence is measured and when was the most recent

assessment done by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service?

Mr. President: Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. R. Alexander: Senator, while I would like to give you the information right away, I suggest that we send it to you in writing, if you want to request it that way.

Mr. President: Okay. Thank you. Any further?

Sen. Dr. Attzs: No, Mr. President, just agreement that I look forward to receiving it in writing. Thank you so much, Minister.

Mr. President: Okay, thank you. Let us go—Sen. Roberts-Radgman.

Sen. Roberts-Radgman: Thank you, Mr. President. If I may just ask a supplemental to the first part of the hon. Minister's response? Hon. Minister, with regard to the reforms indicated, especially and particularly with the supervision and performance management, can the Minister indicate whether ongoing psychological evaluation is part of those reforms?

Mr. President: The hon. Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. President, and again, thank you for the question, yes, it is. It plays an integral part of choosing the applicant for the purpose; ongoing.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Trinidad and Tobago's Civil Aviation Sector

(Achievements and Ongoing Developments)

The Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation (Sen. The Hon. Eli Zakour):

Mr. President, I am authorized by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago to make the following statement on the achievements and ongoing developments in Trinidad and Tobago's civil aviation sector.

Since assuming office, this Government has taken deliberate steps to expand Trinidad and Tobago's regional and international air connectivity, strengthen our bilateral aviation relationships, and create new opportunities for passengers and

Statement by Minister Trinidad and
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(Achievements and Ongoing Developments)
Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour (cont'd)

cargo services.

One of the most significant areas of progress has been the expansion of Trinidad and Tobago's air service agreements. The Government has approved seven air service agreements with the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Republic of Chile, the Republic of Colombia, the Dominican Republic, the Republic of Ghana, the Republic of Panama and the Republic of Rwanda. Of these seven agreements, five have already been signed.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: Rwanda in September 2025; the Dominican Republic in May 2026; and, Mr. President, between September 21 and September 23, 2026, alone, Ghana, Panama and Chile. That represents three air service agreements signed within just three days, and five agreements signed within the space of one year. This represents an unprecedented level of progress in expanding Trinidad and Tobago's bilateral aviation framework. These agreements provide a framework to facilitate increased air connectivity, create opportunities for passenger and cargo services, support trade and tourism, and deepen Trinidad and Tobago's aviation links with the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa.

Mr. President, importantly, our progress in aviation extends beyond the signing of agreements. We are also seeing new airlines and services entering the Trinidad and Tobago market. In February 2026, Windward Islands Airways International, commonly known as WINAIR, commenced twice-weekly service between Sint Maarten and Trinidad. In March 2026, interCaribbean Airways commenced four times weekly between Barbados and Trinidad. Contour Airlines is scheduled to commence twice-weekly service between Dominica and Trinidad

Statement by Minister Trinidad and
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on October 05, 2026. Additionally, Suriname Airways is expected to commence twice-weekly scheduled service between Suriname and Trinidad in November 2026.

Mr. President, while we continue to attract new airlines and services to Trinidad and Tobago, our national airline, Caribbean Airlines, is also expanding connectivity and creating additional opportunities for travel, tourism and trade. From October 25, 2026, Caribbean Airlines will introduce a weekly non-stop service between Tobago and Toronto, Canada, operating on Sundays.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: This will provide direct connection between Tobago and one of its key international markets, supporting family visits and tourism, while strengthening air connectivity between Tobago and Canada ahead of the peak winter travel period.

From October 31, 2026, Caribbean Airlines will also resume commercial passenger service between Trinidad and Caracas, Venezuela. This will restore direct air connectivity between our neighbouring countries and facilitate business travel and tourism. Additionally, from December 01, 2026, through February 09, 2027, Caribbean Airlines will operate a series of charter flights between Trinidad and Panama on selected Tuesdays and Fridays. These flights will provide additional travel options during the Christmas and Carnival periods, while supporting tourism and trade.

Mr. President, there is also further development within the wider aviation sector. National Helicopter Services Limited, which currently operates from its base at Camden, Couva, will expand its presence with the opening of an office at

the Piarco International Airport on October 07, 2026. This new presence at Piarco will support the continued growth and development of its operations.

Mr. President, when these developments are considered together—the signing of five air service agreements, the introduction of new airlines and services, the expansion of Caribbean Airlines' network, the continued development across the wider aviation sector—they demonstrate the progress being made in strengthening Trinidad and Tobago's regional and international connectivity. They mean more options for the travelling public, stronger links with our regional and international partners, and greater opportunities for tourism, trade, business and investment.

This Government remains committed to expanding Trinidad and Tobago's air connectivity and strengthening our country's position as a regional aviation hub. Mr. President, I thank you.

11.00 a.m.

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

The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh): Thank you, Mr. President. I beg to move the following Motion standing in the name of the Minister of Finance:

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. President, the Order before us today, the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order, 2026, is a matter that updates existing legislation on gambling in Trinidad and Tobago and seeks to create opportunities and growth through technology, regulation, consumer protection, economic activity, public accountability, and the responsibility of the State to ensure that our laws keep pace with the way people live and conduct business in a modern, global, digital economy.

The central purpose of this Bill is to establish a legal basis for permitting remote gambling under a license and regulatory framework. This is relevant because continued prohibition, as has been undertaken in the past, has not eliminated remote gambling activity. Unregulated operations continued through underground and illicit operations, which made no contribution to public revenue while not operating under any effective licensing regime. A licensing system

would give the State a means of identifying operators, collecting applicable taxes and establishing standards for lawful participation in the industry.

The proposed amendments to the Bill are measures for revenue generation, employment creation, industry development and foreign exchange generation. In addition, the international nature of the industry presents an opportunity for Trinidad and Tobago to participate in a thriving global market rather than leave potential economic activity outside the formal regulatory system. The global gaming industry, estimated by the United Nations to reach US \$7 billion in revenue by 2028, has changed significantly because of technological advancement. According to JP Morgan's "Digital Gaming Digest" for the 3rd of September 2026, aggregate gross gaming revenue (GGR) for sports betting and iGaming was approximately US \$1.8 billion as of July 2025 and increased to US \$2.3 billion as of July 2026, which amounted to a 25 per cent aggregate increase. This represents a 25 per cent increase over that sector during the period July 2025 to July 2026.

Broken down by sector, Mr. President, sports betting, the gross gaming revenue for North America, US \$963 million, increased to US \$1.3 billion from July 2025 to 2026, a 34 per cent increase over the period. Same-store betting increased to US \$1.3 billion, up 31 per cent, and iGaming, the gross revenue gaming for July 2025, to US \$872 million, and increased to US \$1.1 billion in July 2026, a 16 per cent increase. Online gaming has become an established part of the international gaming market. The Gambling Commission reports that remote casino betting and bingo generated £8.3 billion in gross gambling yield in Great Britain during April 2025 to March 2026, an increase of 6.9 per cent over the preceding year. And that is revenue retained by operators after winning; not total wages, and not government tax receipts. The shift towards online participation is

also evident in New Jersey. Its regulator reported US \$2.39 billion in Internet gaming revenue in 2024, up 24.1 per cent on 2023. These figures demonstrate the scale and growth of remote gambling revenue. They do not measure the number of individual players. They do not provide a forecast for Trinidad and Tobago. But they make one point unmistakable: Legislation cannot sensibly proceed as though this market does not exist.

Overall, the data indicates growth in this sector, Mr. President. In light of the objectives of this Order, which is to legislate remote gambling and create economic opportunity, the figures paint a picture for Trinidad and Tobago in the gambling sector. Recognizing this, this Government, by modernizing the legislation governing the sector, is ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago benefits from the global economic opportunities that this sector provides.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Swaratsingh: Mr. President, an unlicensed market leaves the State trying to collect revenue from activity it cannot adequately see. Licensing establishes who is operating, who owns the business, and what financial information must be supplied. Auditable records give the tax authorities a basis for assessing and enforcing the obligations that apply. In Trinidad and Tobago, the previous legislative framework was developed under the Gambling and Betting Act, 1963. Together with the registration of the Clubs Act and the Liquor Licence Act, these laws are unable to adequately address an expansive modern gambling industry experiencing significant technological advancement.

Mr. President, this observation is important. In 1963, there was no Internet, no smartphones, mobile applications, or online payment gateways operating at the speed and skill we know today. Social media, as we know it, did not exist, and

there was certainly no possibility of a person sitting in their home in Trinidad and Tobago using a mobile telephone, connecting to an online platform, and participating in a transaction with an operator located somewhere else in the world. This is the environment in which modern consumers now operate. The goal of this Government, therefore, is to ensure Trinidad and Tobago's regulatory framework is sufficiently equipped to deal with the current state of the global gambling industry. According to the World Bank in 2024, 82 per cent of Trinidad and Tobago's population—a little over 1.1 million people—use the Internet. This policy response is therefore created within a space where we already communicate, shop, transfer information, access entertainment, and conduct financial transactions.

We want to make it clear, Mr. President, that this updated legislation goes beyond permitting gambling to regulating its structures in Trinidad and Tobago. Through this modernized regulatory system, we are managing who is permitted to conduct gambling operations, as well as the licensing and conditions of such operations. We are also identifying customers and ensuring that vulnerable persons are protected, potentially suspicious transactions are eliminated, and regulations for rule breakers are incorporated. Another key point in this exercise is ensuring that value generated from online gaming activities becomes part of the formal economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

The economic development rationale for the Order is that it connects directly to the existing functions of the Gambling Control Commission, including collecting fees and levies, undertaking economic assessments, regulating operators, and establishing rehabilitation and development funds. Therefore, one consideration of this Order permits holders of a valid remote gambling license issued by the Gambling Control Commission to engage in remote gambling in Trinidad and

Tobago, subject to the applicable statutory regulation and specific license conditions. It is important to understand that this Order is a regulatory gateway, granted only when providers obtain the required licenses and adhere to the rules in our jurisdiction. This Government is focused on ensuring that access is not unrestricted but regulated. A local licensing framework supports this because consumers can potentially encounter operators that are outside the effective reach of the domestic regulator. While we may know if a site exists and operates, this domestic regulatory framework provides the State with the ability to impose local standards on operators.

Then, Mr. President, there is the economic dimension to this debate. Remote gambling provides an opportunity to expand public revenue, employment, industry development, and foreign exchange generation. Through a well-regulated industry, gambling-related activities can be brought into the formal economy, reducing the propensity for them to take place outside effective regulatory oversight. This adds a strategic dimension to this Government's economic transformation drive, which requires us to consider opportunities beyond our traditional sources of income. For small, open economies such as Trinidad and Tobago, potentially relevant activities include software development, information technology, cyber security, payment processing, accounting, compliance services, customer support, and other business services associated with regulated digital operations.

Through the passage of this Motion, there are opportunities to develop an industry in Trinidad and Tobago around the digital aspects related to online gaming facilitation. Proper regulation of the online gaming gambling industry also has the fiscal and economic benefits of being a facilitator of job creation, industry growth, and foreign exchange earnings. Therefore, licensing remote gambling allows

operators to become subject to corporate taxes and business levies. The *Daily Express* in September 30th, 2026, article named:

“Tancoo: Big money in online gambling.”

—outlined that when the gambling legislation was debated in 2021, the then Finance Minister described gambling as a TT \$16 billion industry, with the potential for money laundering, terrorist financing, foreign exchange leakage, and other irregularities. What this Government has recognized, that the previous administration did not, is that by building our nation’s capacity, especially through this legislation, we are creating the opportunity for potentially millions in revenue to the State.

To further the point of economic gains, my colleague, the current Minister of Finance, produced figures that highlighted revenue already being generated from regulated gaming in Trinidad and Tobago. According to the Ministry of Finance, there are currently 1,150 registered gaming-related accounts with the Board of Inland Revenue that comprise 926 gaming amusement tax accounts and 224 club gaming tax accounts. Gaming tax payments in 2025 amounted to approximately 72.6 million, comprising 15.06 million in gaming amusement tax and 57.6 million in club gaming tax.

In 2026 so far, approximately 71.3 million has been collected: 21.2 million in gaming amusement tax and 50.1 million in club gaming tax. The Ministry of Finance also disclosed that a coordinated compliance exercise involving the BIR Criminal Tax Investigation Unit, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and Customs and Excise produced approximately 15.58 million. The exercise, undertaken between October 2025 and February 2026, resulted in 247 payments across 240 gaming amusement tax accounts. This is tangible proof that regulating

and identifying gambling operators while ensuring their activities are under the scope of the tax authorities has immense benefits to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago's earnings from the sector can also be even greater with the licensing of remote gambling, which will also generate payments of licensing fees and taxes from operators.

11.15 a.m.

This is also creating opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago to earn from the global multi-billion-dollar online gaming industry.

This Government's approach is to maintain regulatory oversight through the existing competent authorities, particularly the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Commission and the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. The Central Bank has already undertaken work on licencing electronic money issuers and public consultation concerning proposed payment systems and service legislation. These developments are part of a broader regulatory environment in which remote gambling payments will operate.

Therefore, permitting remote gambling, Mr. President, does not mean allowing operators to conduct financial transactions without supervision. Instead, the relevant regulatory authorities will continue to exercise their respective responsibilities over gambling operations and payment services. As you can see from what I have stated, Mr. President, the Government is enabling the coordination between gambling regulator and the financial sector authorities, particularly where transactions involved digital payment systems.

Prohibition, which is the key focus of the previous legislation, does not necessarily eliminate the activity being prohibited. When commercial activity is prohibited without an effective means of control, some activity may move into

unregulated markets. In this view, licencing, regulation, and monitoring could provide a means of bringing that activity within the formal economy and making it subject to taxation and oversight, as I previously stated. We intend to do this through proper regulation rather than simply permitting unrestricted gambling activity.

Through this Bill, Government has boldly taken the opportunity to establish a regulated industry, which can create opportunities for economic activity while strengthening the State's ability to monitor participating operators. So, Mr. President, colleagues, the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act 2021, represents a significant legislative framework for addressing the regulation and control of gaming and betting in Trinidad and Tobago. The experience of implementing the Act, therefore, with the recent consideration of remote gambling, demonstrates the importance of legislation being accompanied by institutional capacity, clear regulatory standards, and continued public accountability.

The economic questions are important; the reported tax collections show that the existing gaming sector contributes to public revenue. The Government has also identified potential opportunities associated with regulated remote gambling, including employment, foreign exchange, and the development of supporting business services. At the same time, those potential benefits must be weighed against the practical requirement of effective supervision, financial integrity, consumer protection and the prevention of gambling-related harm.

Our national interest requires a framework that can be evaluated on evidence rather than an assumption; requires transparent reporting, capable institutions, enforceable standards, and the willingness to adjust policy when experience demonstrates that changes are necessary. As we consider the future of gaming and

betting in Trinidad and Tobago, the objective of this Government is to ensure that the law provides an effective basis for legitimate activity, protects the public interest, and establishes accountability for the positive economic and social consequences of the industry.

The measure of success for this regulation will be whether the industry grows, the collection of additional revenue, and whether the country can make the rules work by following them. This Government is also ensuring that the public is protected, that obligations are enforced fairly, and that all the benefits mentioned justify the costs and risks.

Mr. President, as a side note, this was a discussion we would have had way back when I was in a former Cabinet during the years 2007 and 2010, and the then Minister of Trade, Mariano Browne, was very vocal in trying to bring these things to the fore. So, even though we have passed legislation, we have not effectively brought a lot of these activities into the formal system, as which we are trying to do at this time, and that is why, again, I must commend the hon. Prime Minister and the Attorney General for drafting and bringing these to our—so that we can debate it today.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: This represents a significant step in potentially new revenues for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. What we have collected so far, I think, pales into comparison as to what potentially can be collected if we were to support this Motion. That is a standard against which implementation of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act 2021 should be assessed, and I am confident, as we had in the other place, that of the support of all my colleagues in this honourable House, Mr. President, I beg to move and thank

you.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Question proposed.

Mr. President: Sen. Faris Al-Rawi SC.

Hon. Senators: [Desk thumping]

Sen. Faris Al-Rawi SC: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise to contribute on behalf of the Opposition to this Motion. I would request that the hon. Minister provide specific answers to certain questions that I would like to have reflected on the record of the *Hansard*. Mr. President, we are here because this Motion says it is expedient that the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order 2026 now be affirmed.

We are here to bring into law Legal Notice issued on the 15th of September 2026. The Order that we are seeking to bring into effect by affirmative resolution, pursuant to section 76 of the parent law, is an Order called the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order 2026, and it says this:

“Notwithstanding section 76(1) and (4) of the Act, 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.”

What we are doing today is actually, in the 16 years that I have spent here, nearly 17 years, it is actually quite novel, because section 76 says, Mr. President:

“(1) 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”.

Subsection (2) says this:

“(2) The Minister may by Order, subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament amend this section for the purposes of permitting remote gambling”.

So, technically the Order is an amendment to section 76 of the Act. It is not usual to cause an amendment to parent law by way of an Order, but nonetheless, the formula was put into place. It was a novel formula recommended, which I accepted as the person who authored this law, with a specific purpose in mind.

Mr. President, the law that brought us here, this Act which we amend now, is went through a particular passage which is relevant to whether it is expedient, according to this Motion, to do this now today. The short story, Mr. President, in bullet point form is that in May of 2015, specifically under the then Peoples Partnership Government, we were invited to consider the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2015. That had its first reading on the 2nd of June 2015, and that law came to the Senate—I actually participated in that debate on the 9th of June 2015, Mr. President.

The Bill was expressed in full form; there was a large supporting gallery of persons who had attended to support the passage of this Bill. It was piloted by Sen. Larry Howai, who was the then Minister of Finance. But after four speakers, the Bill ended abruptly. It ended abruptly specifically because there were certain questions put, and the hon. Minister no doubt reflected upon them. That law lapsed on the 17th of June 2015. It was brought back in its exact form and function in 2016 on the 1st of July 2016, word for word the same Bill, requiring a

three-fifths majority support. It went into a joint select committee and stayed that 2016 Bill, in joint select committees 2016, '17, '18, '19, '20.

When that Bill emerged from the Joint Select Committee with three-fifths majority and all, it unfortunately collapsed. It did not receive the support of the Opposition, the United National Congress, for whatever reasons are set onto the *Hansard*. So, that Bill failed and in examining the Motion as to whether it is expedient, Mr. President, it had a direct impact upon our financial action task force fourth-round mutual evaluation, which this Order directly touches, Mr. President, insofar as we have just undergone a fifth-round mutual evaluation, and there will be further evaluations. So, this is the Anti-Money Laundering, Countering-Proliferation Financing, Countering the Financing of Terrorism provisions, Mr. President, as to the expediency in this Motion.

11.30 a.m.

Now, it failed, Mr. President, in its three-fifths majority. I was then tasked with the responsibility of redrafting the law so that it met with proportionality, and we dealt with the proportionality by bringing forward the Act which we now seek to amend, pursuant to this Order under section 76(2) of the Act. We eliminated all of the three-fifths majority difficulties by putting proportionality, by putting due process, by meeting with the conditions then of *Suratt*, because *Suraj* was not yet law in terms of the Privy Council decision. But when we treated with that, Mr. President, we specifically excluded, in section 76, the operation of online gaming, online gambling.

We recognized that online gaming, online gambling was a big part of the industry. If you would permit me, Mr. President, let me, at this moment, declare that extended relatives of my family are involved—this is relatives of my wife—in

gaming. Extended relatives of my family, my wife’s family, are involved in virtual asset provisions and electronic wallets, et cetera. Let me put that onto the record. But, Mr. President, the Minister has said that there is a combination between the online aspects, quite correctly, and the virtual asset service providers, the VASPs, that exist, and the electronic money and the management of revenue that is to come to the country.

But, Mr. President, the reason that the Act only mentioned online gambling, “remote gambling”, as section 76 says—because section 76 criminalizes “remote gambling”, as is defined under the Act, being:

“...in Trinidad and Tobago for the purpose of inviting or enabling a person in a prohibited territory...”

—that is any territory outside of Trinidad and Tobago:

“...to participate in remote gambling.”

The reason that we had to recognize it in law is that the Joint Select Committee, in its final report, recognized that Trinidad and Tobago needed the gaming commission, which the Act sets up, in accordance with the objectives of the Act, to be found in sections 4, 5, and 13 of the Act, to have the chance to engage in considering what the appropriate regulations would be for online gaming.

Now, Mr. President, having acted in the past for members’ clubs, et cetera, as an attorney-at-law, I can tell you that online gaming involves a website that is external to Trinidad and Tobago, providing games of chance, usually in Native American Indian reservations where there are certain tax exemptions. They offer these games of chance. You participate remotely. You pay in foreign currency through the local provider to the foreign entity. So, if the bet is US \$1,000, or if, as they say, there are “whales”, there are people that spend large amounts of money,

millions of dollars, US, that money goes, by way of transfer through the agent, to the foreign entity. There may be winnings, there may be losses, but it is an outdoor passage for foreign exchange.

Recognizing that section 76, which this Order treats with, is for the springboard in law to turn on online gaming, Mr. President, it means that we must ask ourselves some very serious questions. Number one, what law is going to regulate the issuance of a licence for online gaming? Well, we know that the Act says, in sections 30 and 30(2), that there are certain types of licences that the gaming commission can offer. So, we have established a gaming commission. In March of 2022, the first ever gaming commission was appointed, because the Act says that the President shall appoint the gaming commission. If you go to section 80 of the Constitution, the President means the Cabinet, because there are no words or qualification to the President's exercise of discretion. So, the Cabinet appoints the first gaming commission.

Under the then Minister of Finance, Colm Imbert, the gaming commission was appointed in March—I think it is the 22nd of March, 2022. That gaming commission was gazetted. Following that gaming commission's gazetting, the passage of time kicked in, '22, '23, '24, '25, '26. The periods of time for the gaming commission to exist are prescribed in law as four years, three years and two years for different members. That time would have effluxed.

When I went to the gaming commission's website, I see that there is one member, a person who is on the commission, Ms. Archie. There is an acting CEO who is in the commission. But it is, if we look at this section 76, this Order, that commission which has to give the licence under sections 30 and 30(2) of the Act.

Now, Mr. President, when you go to sections 30 and 30(2) of the Act, it is

important and relevant to the Motion before us, because it is under Part III, “The Licensing Regime”. Section 29 sets up that there is a requirement for licences, et cetera, that, basically, when you get to the “Offences” section, which is Part VIII, which is where section 76 comes in, you will see that it is an offence to not have a licence. But, Mr. President, when you get to section 30, you see what the category of licences are. For the record, the “Categories of licences” are: “Gaming Operator’s Licence”, “Betting Operator’s Licence”, “Gaming Owner’s Licence”, “Bookmaker’s Licence”, “Gaming Machine Operating Licence”, “Gaming Machine Distributor Licence”, “Technical Operator’s Licence”, “Premises Licence”, “Personal Licence”, “Gaming Machine Manufacture Licence”, none of which, of course, relate to gaming that is online. There is, in subsection (l), as in “Lima”, the ability for the commission to issue:

“...any other licence as the Commission may stipulate from time to time, as it deems necessary...”

So, one would assume that the gaming licence, referred to in this Motion, would have to flow from section 30(1)(l) of the Act.

But, Mr. President, it is material to note, section 30 of the Act, which comes under Part III, is not law in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, because it has not been proclaimed as law. The proclamation sections of the law are contained only in two Orders: Legal Notice 205, the 11th of August, 2021, and Legal Notice 700, the 15th of September, 2026, the one that we have before us.

On the 11th of August, 2021, there was a proclamation pursuant to section 2, which put on Part I, Part II and Part X. Part X is the “Miscellaneous Provisions”; Part I is the interpretation; Part II is the establishment of the commission, which is why I have gone to the commission. Part III, which deals with the issuance of

licences, is not law, because the only other law, by way of proclamation, that we have in this debate, on the 15th of September, 2026, there was a Proclamation by Her Excellency the President saying:

“I...”—the—“...President, as aforesaid, do hereby affix the 15th day of September...as the date on which the following provisions of the Act shall come into operation:

(a) section 76; and

(b) Schedule 6 in its application to section 76.”

Now, what is section 76? Section 76 is the Motion for the Order to amend section 76. The Order says that you can have online gaming not as a breach of the law, so it decriminalizes online gaming. That is what it does. When you go to Schedule 6, and you go to the Statutes Act, which allows you to qualify how you turn law on, what we are doing is we are putting on, in Schedule 6, the administrative fine for online gaming. When you go to that administrative fine, you are putting on, as a criminal penalty, \$5 million on summary conviction, or an administrative fine of \$1.250 million. So that is what we are doing.

The proclamation of section 76 has happened. The Minister says that we are now going to have online gaming. Part III, which allows you the licence to have the online gaming, is not operationalized. So, I have a question to the hon. Minister in terms of this for the record. I am asking the hon. Minister—I am prepared to give way if he has an immediate answer—when is Part III, section 30 of the Act, expected to be proclaimed? In other words then, when do we expect that the giving of a licence for online gaming will actually happen? Minister?

Sen. Dr. Swaratsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: You will reply. Thank you so much. Because, Mr.

President, that is the crux of it all.

Insofar as that will come after I speak, therefore, I must make the following observations. Having proclaimed section 76, making it a criminal offence for online gaming, it is important to note that the seventh Schedule of the gaming legislation is also not law. The seventh Schedule is the “Consequential Amendments” to the laws that actually allow gambling and betting in this country. Mr. President, the laws that allow gambling and betting in this country are, of course, the members’ clubs legislation—I am going to abbreviate the names—the betting Act, the Liquor Licences Act. There are three main laws that tell us how you can have the 1,000-odd persons registered, as the Minister said.

The Minister told us that the Board of Inland Revenue has registered persons already: 1,150 persons registered with the BIR, 926 for amusement games and 224 for clubs, but we know that that could only be under the registration via the law, which has not yet been repealed. Those laws, Mr. President, of course, I am referring to are the Liquor Licences Act; the members’ clubs—the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act, the first one; the Liquor Licences Act, the second one; and the Registration of Clubs Act. So, those 1,150 people are under those laws.

Section 76 now decriminalizes online gaming, but there is no way to have a licence for online gaming. So, anybody engaged in online gaming right now has no authorization to do so, Mr. President, as a potential reality. But there is going to be a construction issue if you have decriminalized online gaming by law, Mr. President, because that is what section 76 does. Section 76 turns off the criminality of the law, of online gaming. Section 76 says that it shall be a criminal offence to be engaged in remote gambling, but this Bill before us, this Order before

us, Mr. President, says:

“Notwithstanding the criminality...”

—meaning sections 76(1) and 76(4).

“...a person who is the holder of a valid remote gambling licence...”

—well, there is no licence yet.

“...issued under section 30(2)(l)...”

—well, that cannot happen because it is not proclaimed.

“...subject to the provisions of the Act...”

—and the regulations shall effectively not be in criminal penalty.

So that is the rationale as to why I am asking the Minister, specifically, what is—I do not see him paying attention. He is engaged in a conversation with his colleagues and I am asking him a very serious question. When do we intend for this to happen, Mr. President? Because there was a reason why remote gaming in section 76 was criminalized.

Now, Mr. President, there is a second point that is very serious. Why has the Cabinet not appointed a gaming commission? It is the President, meaning the Cabinet, who must appoint a gaming commission, so says the parent law. So, we know the Minister says it is expedient to turn on section 76. We know there is no licensing for online gaming permitted at present under section 30. We know there is no commission to decide that there shall be a licence because there is no board.

11.45 p.m.

So, Mr. President, when you get to the board, and you go to Part II, which is law, it has been proclaimed; you go to section 5, the:

“...body corporate...”—which—“... is to be known as ‘the Gambling (Gaming and Betting)...Commission’.”—has been proclaimed.

Mr. President, when you go to the website of the Commission, there is no commission. It is not quorate. It is not constituted. Therefore, Mr. President, I would like the hon. Minister to answer: When will a commission be appointed?

Because I listened to the debate in the House when I learnt that this Bill was coming. I listened to it late last night when we were told that we would be debating this Motion. I heard the Minister of Finance substantively say—I listened to it on YouTube—all sorts of things about what the PNM did or did not do. They did not do this and did not do that. But, Mr. President, the record demonstrates that between 2016, right up to 2021, we had no support from the UNC. They refused to support special majority legislation. We had to bring a simple majority Bill, bring it in in 2021 because we were undergoing fourth round mutual evaluation. We would have failed the AML/CFT/CPF requirements to have valid law. That did not matter to them. But I heard the Minister of Finance, in the House on YouTube, making all sorts of criticisms that the Government did not do anything, meaning the PNM Government. But, Mr. President, the Board was appointed March 2022, and they went to work to build the regulations which this Motion must sit upon, Mr. President. What I know for a fact is that there are no regulations in respect of the Motion before us for online gaming.

So, Mr. President, I therefore question, seriously, the Motion, which says that it is expedient to do this. Because, Mr. President, it makes no logical sense that we are turning on online gaming into law now, decriminalizing it, Mr. President. The Minister has spoken to the fact that there is going to be revenue, and it is foreign exchange, and big opportunity for a billion-dollar business. He has not explained, Mr. President, how we are going to deal with the foreign exchange transit out to online gaming, Mr. President.

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Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Because, Mr. President, if you take a comparator, and the comparator is online purchasing, for instance, Mr. President, we are not doing a Motion today for online gaming taxes. So, you are turning on section 76. You are saying it is expedient to put online gaming, but the provisional collection of taxes or other taxes, Mr. President, are not being addressed. People had a song and dance from the UNC about the 7 per cent online purchasing tax, still in existence, despite the song and dance. But, Mr. President, when you are talking about an addictive environment, which we accept is there for gaming, Mr. President, I would not anticipate, but there was a conversation about the age limit for gambling, et cetera.

Mr. President, the first question is foreign exchange. The second question is the regulations for this. The third question is who is making the regulations if you have no board? If you have no board, you have no commission. The Government has been, instead, *in situ* for nearly two years; there is no board, but today we are told it is expedient to make law today. Mr. President, I am asking why and how that happens to be here because, in all honesty, Mr. President, I am very suspicious about it, if I am frank with you, Mr. President. It does not make sense, Mr. President—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC:—to say that this is expedient, Mr. President. What would be expedient is to appoint the board. So that the board can create the regulations. So that the regulations can allow the licensing regime to be promulgated for all gaming and betting, Mr. President, under section 30/section 32. When we have that, Mr. President, we will know that the time to open the floodgates on online gaming is upon us. Mr. President, to put it quite simply, this appears to be previous,

premature and false ripe, Mr. President. It does not make any sense, respectfully, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Nothing of what I have said is to say that—I, certainly as Attorney General then, could separate myself from drafting section 76. I was a member of the Joint Select Committee, 2016, '17, '18, '19, '20, '21; six years. I was charged with the responsibility of drafting the Act in a simple majority way to pass the law so we would not fail the FATF fourth round mutual evaluation, notwithstanding the UNCs intellectual bad behaviour in not supporting it, Mr. President. But, Mr. President, when we specifically created section 76 to recognize that there was online gaming, it was with extreme caution that we sought to put that law and any amendment to section 76 by way of affirmative resolution, Mr. President. I just cannot, for the life of me, understand the confidence with which the Minister speaks about this law being expedient, Mr. President, this law being necessary, Mr. President—

Sen. Smith: Mr. President, I rise on Standing Order 53(1)(b). I think the Senator has made that point a number of times now. Thank you.

Mr. President: Yeah. I will allow him to continue. Continue.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Thank you, Mr. President. So, Mr. President, this Motion is very specific, right. Now, Mr. President, the hon. Minister spoke about growing the economy, about forex, participation. He spoke to the intellectual property jobs, Mr. President. He spoke to the IT development. It is quite interesting that The Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence does not follow the debate that is going on right now, Mr. President, because it falls in his lap. So, I am kind of doubly concerned now. If that hon. Member does not understand a word

that I am saying, well then, “we in deep trouble”, Mr. President. This is exactly in his portfolio, Mr. President. So the IT development—

Sen. Smith: Mr. President, I stand on Standing Order 46(1). I do not see how that is relevant in any form or fashion. Thank you.

Mr. President: Yeah. I uphold that Standing Order 46(1). Sen. Al-Rawi SC—

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Sure.

Mr. President:— connect a next point.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Thank you, Mr. President. So Mr. President, let me respond to the Minister, if I may. The Minister says that the indirect benefit for gaming is software development, jobs in intellectual property, and forex earnings. In terms of my relevance now, on a different point, Mr. President, I consider artificial intelligence and software development to be very relevant to this debate because it is online gaming, Mr. President, which is done by way, if you look to the definition of the Act, by gaming which is done from a software launching pad that the Minister himself has said is relevant. So, Mr. President, I am coming now to that software side as a serious point of law now, in terms of the expedience of this Motion passing because that is what we are debating, a Motion where the Order Paper says that:

“...it is expedient that the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order, 2026 now be affirmed...”

So, Mr. President, when we get to this software aspect, and we come now to the age of participation, Mr. President, we are entering into an area of something called a clickwrap license. Because when you are presented with the online aspect that this Order allows now, in the user interface, you have to confirm your age: “Are you 18 years old? Stay on the site. Are you under 18 years old? Come off

the site”. That, without anticipation, is soon to be 25 years old. In our jurisdiction, conflict of laws now participate, because, Mr. President, when you are dealing with a reservation in the United States of America that permits online gaming, the law is 18. You are establishing a contract in the United States of America to be 18 years of age. So, the extraterritoriality of that law is satisfied. Our law may go to a different age, let us say 25, Mr. President. But how are you, by way of safeguard and compliance with the law, going to verify that somebody is, in fact, 25 years old, other than by way of their click? “Yes I am”.

So, how does the policing of that happen Mr. President? How does that protect us when we are dealing with another aspect of the operationality of section 76? That is where you are putting your credit card information to do a purchase in foreign exchange, Mr. President. Even though you the cardholder, may pay in TT dollars, Mr. President, when your credit card statement comes, you still have to have bank-to-bank through a commercial bank, through the interoperation of our banking system. Our Central Bank has to pay the foreign exchange, even though you pay in TT dollars. So, Mr. President, in terms of the Motion being expedient as to the user being permitted online gaming, Mr. President, I am looking for an express undertaking of the Minister who has not listened to a word that I have said in this debate. Chatting away, chatting away, as we are going, Mr. President. I mean, I have noticed it—

Mr. President: Yeah. Please. Please. Just take a seat for me, “nah”. You are addressing the Chair and you may wish to address Trinidad and Tobago, but I do not think you have to bring in the Minister in this matter. I understand what you are saying, but you do not have to refer to the Minister in this instance. Continue, please.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Thank you, Mr. President. So Mr. President, I am asking the Minister, through you, for a direct statement on when and how this law will be operationalized.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: I want to draw an example. It is the same way that I asked those questions when we were debating another law many years ago, where I asked an hon. Minister then in the UNC to give an undertaking to explain exactly when a law will be proclaimed, Mr. President. We got that undertaking from the hon. Minister, which satisfied us, Mr. President, and which it turned out then, had to satisfy a court all the way up in the Privy Council. I am talking about the section 34 matter where we asked for direct examples, undertakings—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Allahar: Mr. President, 46(1), relevance.

Mr. President: I uphold that again, the Standing Order. Just try to—now, as you know, you finish at 12.04, so you just only have a few more minutes, right. Go on.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Sure. Thank you, Mr. President. I am seeing him shaking opposite me, Mr. President. Mr. President, so the undertaking I am asking of the Minister today, to put it completely clear, Mr. President, is we want specifics. Mr. President, today we are going to vote, right. The House spoke, Mr. President, in a particular way. That is a different place. Today, we are in this place, Mr. President. We would like to have confidence. As the drafter of that particular law, which we are now treating with today, Mr. President, I would very much like the hon. Minister to speak to specifics today. So that when we are finished with today's passage, Mr. President, that we can have more than a legitimate undertaking, and more than a legitimate expectation. Mr. President, I want an

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undertaking from—

Sen. Jeremie SC: [*Interruption*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC:—sorry?

Sen. Jeremie SC: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Sure. Of course.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Thank you, Senator. I rise only to—you posed a couple questions to the Minister who moved that we affirm the Order that was made because that is what is before the House today. The Order was affirmed unanimously in the other place with support from the Opposition. Yes. It is a different place. But I presume that those opposite knew what they were doing. The answer to your question, though, about when the other provisions of the law which are necessary—and we recognize them to be necessary—to bring online gambling fully into effect, when that will take place, is on or before 1 January, 2027. A large part of your contribution was canvassed in a conversation had by the technocrats in my office, me and the Office of the President.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Mr. President, I want to thank the hon. Attorney General for his lucid clarity on the point. I thank him sincerely because these are the things that matter when we deal with law, Mr. President. I could not have asked for a better response on that, to be frank with you. I thank him sincerely. I therefore have nothing else to say, Mr. President. I thank you for this opportunity.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Desirée Murray.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Desirée Murray: Thank you, Mr. President, for recognizing me. Mr. President, let me begin by extending sincere congratulations to you on the recent

conferment upon you of the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the ORTT.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

12.00 noon

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. D. Murray: That is our nation's highest national award, and it recognizes a life dedicated to public service. I speak from personal experience when I say that public service is very often a thankless undertaking. It requires long hours, difficult decisions, and at times criticism from all sides. So, Mr. President, I take this opportunity to congratulate you and to wish you continued strength and good health in the discharge of your constitutional responsibilities.

Mr. President, my contribution to the debate on Government Motion No. 1 to approve the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order, 2026, will be relatively brief. I believe that there are some important matters which this Senate ought to place on the record. Mr. President, the Order was made on 15th September, 2026 by the Minister of Finance under section 76 of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act, 2021. Section 76(2) of the Act provides that and I quote:

“The Minister may by Order, subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament, amend this section for the purposes of permitting remote gambling.”

That is the authority which this Parliament gave to the Minister. The Order before us provides at clause 3, the heading reads:

“Remote Gambling Permitted

Notwithstanding section 76(1) and (4) of the Act, a person who is the holder of a valid remote licence issued by the Commission under section 30(2)(l) of

the Act may engage in remote gambling...”

Mr. President, I think it is useful for us to undertake a detailed examination of the language of the Order. The Order begins clause 3 with the word “Notwithstanding.” So, in legislative drafting, “notwithstanding” is generally used to indicate that the provision which follows is to operate despite an inconsistency with

another provision identified in the legislation. So here the Order specifically refers to section 76(1) and section 76(4). I understand from the hon. Attorney General that section 30 of the Act is expected to be proclaimed on or before the 1st of January 2027, which we understand is necessary for this Order to come into effect or to be effected. Now, 76(1) provides 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 76(3) provides that:

“For the purposes of”—that—“section—

(a) ‘prohibited territory’ means any country outside of Trinidad and Tobago.”

So, Mr. President, the effect of clause (3) is that where a person holds a valid remote gambling licence issued by the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Commission, which was established under section 5(1) of the 2021 Act, that person may provide remote gambling services to persons outside of Trinidad and Tobago. So, in other words, the Order creates an exception for a person who holds the requisite licence and allows them to provide remote gambling services to

persons within, as well as outside of Trinidad and Tobago; that is the central legal effect of the Order.

But, Mr. President, the Order also refers to section 76(4), which establishes the penalty for a person who commits an offence under section 76(1). It provides for:

“...five million dollars and to imprisonment for seven years;—and summary conviction—“or...a fine of ten million dollars and to imprisonment for ten years”—on conviction on indictment.

Mr. President, if the purpose of the Order is to create an exception for the offence for a licence remote gambling operator, the reference to section 76(4) appears at the least to be non-essential because section 76(4) appears to be unnecessary in the wording, as it does not create the offence, the offence is created by section 76(1). So, I am not clear and I would be guided by the Minister as to the reason for including section 76(4) in the Order.

So, Mr. President, this is not simply about gambling as we have heard and it brings me to a broader issue. The debate is not simply about whether gambling should be permitted because the law already contemplated the possibility of remote gambling. The question before us really is whether, under what safeguards remote gambling should be permitted through a licensed and regulated framework. The licence, conditions and regulations must be sufficiently robust to protect the public.

Mr. President, we are not approaching this issue in a regulatory vacuum. The Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control (Electronic Betting) Regulations, 2024 form part of the regulatory framework developed under the 2021 Act. The Gambling Control Commission of Trinidad and Tobago consulted publicly on the electronic betting regulations together with the licensing regulations, conduct of

betting regulations, responsible gaming regulations and amusement machine control regulations.

Mr. President, this is significant because when we consider the remote gambling order before us, we must also consider how that Order interacts with the electronic betting regulations. The existence of regulations dealing with electronic betting demonstrates that Parliament and the regulatory authorities have already recognized that electronic and technology-based gambling requires specific controls. The question should therefore not simply be whether remote gambling should be permitted, the question is whether the existing electronic betting framework, together with the licensing and responsible gambling framework, is sufficiently comprehensive to govern the particular risks created by remote gambling.

Electronic betting is a growing trend with many players opting for online platforms due to their convenience and the variety of betting options available. This country's regulatory framework allows for a range of betting activities including sports betting and casino games. The electronic betting regulations and the wider licensing framework should therefore be viewed together with this Order because remote gambling takes electronic betting to another level of accessibility.

The gambling environment can potentially be brought directly into the home through a mobile phone, tablet or computer and once gambling becomes accessible through a personal device, accessibility is no longer determined primarily by the physical location of the gambling establishment. The technology becomes the point of access and that convenience is why regulatory framework matters so much. But, Mr. President, the fact that a betting website or application can be accessed from a mobile telephone does not by itself tell the consumer whether that

operator is licensed or regulated in Trinidad and Tobago.

Many online platforms accessible to persons in Trinidad and Tobago are operated internationally rather than being Trinidad and Tobago businesses. That is why the licensing regime must be visible and understandable. A consumer should be able to determine readily who is licensed, who regulates the operator, what electronic betting activities are authorized, what records must the operator maintain, what happens when the operator breaches the rules and where a complaint can be made, and, importantly, how the regulator knows who is actually using the system. These questions become particularly important when gambling is conducted remotely.

Mr. President, gambling involves risking resources for the possibility of financial gain, so we also need to consider payment systems. The convenience of electronic payment is one of the characteristics of online gambling that deserves particular regulatory attention. For some adults, gambling may remain an occasional form of entertainment. For others, however, gambling can become compulsive behaviour.

The modern technological environment makes that risk more difficult to manage because access can be continuous. A person may not have to leave their home, and there may be no physical closing time in the traditional sense, so they have access 24/7, 365. The device may be in the person's hand throughout the day and the transaction can take place within seconds. International online gambling platforms may provide various electronic payment mechanisms including credit cards and other digital payment methods. Ironically, our foreign exchange controls and the limits applicable to foreign currency transactions provide certain restrictions to accessing international online gambling platforms to the average

citizen.

However, if gambling becomes readily accessible through payment instruments denominated in local currency, a person experiencing compulsive gambling behaviour could potentially have much greater and more immediate access to funds. Responsible gambling controls should therefore include appropriate transaction monitoring, deposit limits, self-exclusion mechanisms, cooling-off periods and mechanisms to identify unusual or potentially harmful gambling patterns.

In the Bahamas, casino gambling is designed primarily for the tourism economy, with strict restrictions placed on residents. The minimum age for all legal gambling activities is 18. However, locals still cannot enter casinos despite meeting the age requirement. Casinos are legal for tourists aged 18-plus but Bahamian citizens and residents are prohibited from gambling in casinos under national law. Tourists can access casinos like Atlantis Paradise Island Bahamas and Baha Mar while locals may only participate in lotteries and sports betting.

Now, I understand the potential revenue-generating capability of the change to the Gambling Control Act that this Order seeks to make and I do see the potential for foreign exchange earnings not only for transactions originating outside of Trinidad and Tobago, but I also see it for local transactions as well. So Mr. President, I would like to respectfully recommend that all remote gambling payments, both local and foreign, be made in US dollars or some other foreign currency and that taxes also be collected in US dollars or another foreign currency. So this would be similar to when purchasing airline tickets online or online tickets to all-inclusive Carnival events, or purchasing your Carnival costumes online, where consumers are required to pay in US dollars. Importantly, foreign currency

payments would provide an automatic TT\$ 15, 000 cap on spending using credit and would also prevent the use of a debit card for gambling, so this would protect the compulsive gambler.

12.15 p.m.

With respect to tax collection, offshore gambling tax reporting and the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act, FATCA, offshore gambling tax reporting and account reporting overlap, because foreign gambling winnings tax compliance now depends on the same account level visibility that flags other foreign assets. And this is a good thing as there would be better monitoring of foreign assets and less likelihood of money laundering or funding of terrorist activity through this route. In addition, there should be very hefty penalties for tax avoidance by both the licence-holder and the punter or the consumer on their winnings. So, if the Minister could elaborate, I would be very grateful.

So, the objective of this Bill should not simply be to make gambling available. The objective should be to make the activity regulated, transparent and accountable. That is why responsible gambling measures cannot be treated as an afterthought, and they must form part of the regulatory architecture from the beginning.

With respect to age verification, Mr. President, this is an area where I believe there must be no ambiguity. It cannot simply be a tick box on the website, which says I am over 18 or I am over 25, as the case may be. This is not meaningful age verification. If the law establishes a minimum legal age for gambling, the system must have a credible mechanism capable of establishing that the person seeking to gamble actually meets the requirement. The responsibility cannot simply be transferred to the parent if the patient is a minor, and it certainly

should not be transferred to the child. It must rest substantially with the licensed operator and the regulatory framework established by the State.

We must ask: How is identity established? How is age verified? What happens when the information cannot be verified? How are attempts by minors to circumvent the system going to be detected? What sanctions apply where a licensed operator fails to maintain adequate controls? These are practical questions, not theoretical ones.

Mr. President, we must also recognize that young people are highly familiar with smartphones and applications for digital payments. The fact that gambling is online does not make the risk disappear. Indeed, technology can make gambling appear less like a traditional gambling activity and more like an ordinary digital transaction, and this is why public education is essential.

Mr. President, young people need to understand probability. They need to understand that gambling is not a guaranteed investment strategy, and they need to understand the difference between entertainment and financial dependency. They need to understand that repeated losses cannot be reliably recovered simply by placing another bet. Most importantly, they need to know where to obtain assistance if gambling becomes compulsive. Education should therefore form part of the national response; not merely advertising the availability of gambling, but educating people about the risks.

Mr. President, if we are going to permit remote gambling through a licensed framework, then responsible gambling must be more than a phrase. I would expect the framework to address, among other matters, meaningful age and identity verification, self-exclusion, deposit and spending limits. All transactions should be considered to be conducted in a foreign currency to limit or cap the amount

available to the consumer; cooling-off periods; clear disclosure of losses and expenditure; mechanisms for identifying potentially harmful gambling behaviour; restrictions on inducements directed at vulnerable persons; accessible complaint mechanisms; protection of personal and financial information, which would be online; effective enforcement against unlicensed operators; and clear pathways to assistance for persons experiencing gambling-related harm. These safeguards should be capable of operating in practise, not merely appearing on paper.

Mr. President, I want to make one final point. The fact that Parliament is being asked to approve this Order means that Parliament has an important role to play in determining the framework within which remote gambling will operate. This should not be regarded merely as an administrative exercise or rubber stamping. It is an opportunity to ensure that the transition into regulated remote gambling is accompanied by appropriate safeguards. The Order permits a person holding a valid remote gambling licence to engage in remote gambling. But the licence must mean something. It must represent compliance with a regulatory regime that protects the integrity of the gambling sector, protects consumers, protects minors and provides meaningful mechanisms to address gambling-related harm.

Mr. President, technology will continue to change the way people interact with gambling. Our legislation must therefore be capable of responding to that technology without losing sight of the human consequences. There are two sides to the gambling coin. Yes, there is revenue generation for the State, but there is also the side of personal harm and financial ruin for persons who are addicted to gambling and the impact on the fabric of society and the family, their productivity at work, and other harmful, unintended consequences. If remote gambling is to be

permitted, then regulation, enforcement, consumer protection and education must move together. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh): Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you, colleagues. Just to start on that point that hon. Sen. Dr. Murray ended on, the Gambling Control Commission will deal with a number of those things that you alluded to in your closing remarks. In terms of all the support required, the framework needed to deal with persons with—gambling anonymous and other issues, and so on, the Commission will deal with some of those things.

Also, in terms of the identity recognition, I have never gambled. I do not know a lot about online gambling. Sen. Al-Rawi and others may know more about it than I do—I mean, in terms of his involvement in working with the industry. No allusion, and so on, intended. But my understanding is that all those micro wallets, and so on, require identity recognition, credit card verification for persons to participate and so on. So, these things are not simply something that somebody can pick up and use. You require varying degrees of onboarding that will identify who it is. And, of course, you require credit cards and so on. The only part that I am not so sure of, that you would have spoken about, is the foreign currency thing. I am not so sure how that will work, especially we can only deal with what is within our jurisdiction. So that part I cannot speak to at all.

That one of the reasons why when Sen. Al-Rawi was speaking, I was

conferring with some of my colleagues because Sen. Maharaj would have been part of the initial drafting of that legislation in 2013/2014. My colleague, Sen. Smith, would have been advising me on some of the online things that we would have been talking to. And, of course, the hon. Attorney General, in his undertaking, would have been dealing with the issue of proclamation, and his commitment to what will be required in terms of getting some of these things promulgated and so on.

I think that is the only one unfortunate thing that Sen. Al-Rawi alluded to is what happened in the other place and what happened in this place are two different things as far as they are concerned. But this is a team that works as a team, here or in other places—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh:—so, I just want to congratulate and thank my colleague for the advice. Because, you know, not having been here for a number of years, I sometimes get lost in what happened when, and how, and by whom. But one of the things that became very clear in Sen. Al-Rawi's contribution is that when—oftentimes, we talk of joint select committees. Joint select committee, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, that is the reason why joint select committees are places where things go to die. And that became very, very clear in Sen. Al-Rawi's contribution.

The other thing, of course, is that—and I am very happy to have the guidance of the hon. Attorney General, because the Attorney General is somebody who, when he gives an undertaking, that undertaking is supported by very firm and concrete action. And that is the reason why this Attorney General is somebody, not only do we rely on, but on whose word things revolve.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. K. Swaratsingh: So, I want to thank the Attorney General for that.

I do not want to go into a lot of specific things that Sen. Al-Rawi would have spoken about, because I think some of that the Attorney General would have dealt with in his humble and simple submission. But one of the things that, again, has to be very, very clear is that this is an industry that will thrive with or without us. It is an industry that will take a life of its own, and, in fact, in very many ways, may already be happening in ways that we are not yet involved in.

So, one of the effects of this Motion is to bring some parts of that into a framework that will both benefit the State and come into a regulated environment. And that has to be very, very clear because when it comes to things like—and especially the way the online world is moving, there are things, especially now, within someone's purview, whether it be on a tablet or on a smartphone, there are ways in which we are connected to a global community, and that global community is and will take a life of its own. So, we have to be able to very quickly get up to speed on a number of things that have been languishing, and indeed in areas where the State is not recouping the right kinds of revenues required.

I also want, very quickly, Mr. President—and I am not going to be very, very long. I also want to, very quickly, treat with two other things. One, there is a significant opportunity available to Trinidad and Tobago in this matter that we will be remiss if we do not take advantage of it. And that is why, given what is happening—and I remember meeting recently, and it is something that Sen. Maharaj would have shared with us. Time and time again, there are opportunities

available to Trinidad and Tobago to expand its revenue base and revenue streams. And he has been very, very insistent that on this matter. This is something that, when they were drafting the initial legislation, were very conscious of the opportunities that were available then—it was about 2014—and more so, what is available to us now, given where technology has gone.

12.30 p.m.

So, the Minister of Finance would have spoken to that ad nauseam, and I just wanted to make sure that we document that here on record in this place because that is something that we can quantify in the years to come.

And, lastly, Mr. President, I hope that, unlike what was alluded to, this place is different from the other place, and that we would get the support of all our colleagues in this House today as we bring this Motion for affirmative resolution. So, Mr. President, with those few words, I beg to move.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) (Remote Gambling) Order 2026 be approved.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. President: The Leader of Government Business.

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar): Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, October06, 2026, at 1. 30p.m.

UNREVISED

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.32 p.m.