HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 16, 2026

The House met at 9.30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026

[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Pennelope Beckles-Robinson *(Arima)*: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, to paraphrase calypsonian Terri Lyons, "de country tired, de people worried and dey feeling de pain, their faith is being tested time and time again". Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, after 18 months, are tired, they are feeling the pain, their faith has been tested time and time again. And in so doing, I stand in response to this very deceptive, destructive and deceitful Budget Statement 2026/2027.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, today I stand to represent the thousands of persons who have been abandoned and damaged by this oppressive UNC Government. I stand to respond on behalf of the people who cannot stand here today and confirm that the people gave the UNC the country to run and they simply cannot run it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, as I begin my contribution, let me take the opportunity to thank my colleagues, to the entire team of Members of

Parliament, together with Senators, mayors, chairmen, aldermen and, of course, the very diligent staff at the Leader of the Opposition office and the staff at my constituency office. I also want to take the opportunity, of course, to thank the people of Arima for giving me another opportunity—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—to represent the constituency, and to thank the many members of the public who have sent emails, WhatsApp messages and suggestions and, of course, all of those who continue to pray on a daily basis for me.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance spoke for just over two hours and 25 minutes to announce an increase in electricity rates and a series of new taxes, he announced fines, he announced penalties, all designed to make doing business in Trinidad and Tobago much more difficult. It is not an investor-friendly budget; as a matter of fact, this is a budget of great disastrous proportions. Throughout his presentation, the Minister struggled to articulate anything, an economic plan or, as a matter of fact, to indicate what the way forward is for this Government. He failed in that two hours and 25 minutes to share any meaningful achievement under his inept UNC Government. The Minister spent over two hours reading the UNC's diagnosis of how they failed this country. He struggled and still failed to convince the population of anything worthwhile that the UNC did in the last 18 months or, shall I say, Mr. Speaker, will do in the next year.

This budget is bereft of vision and this budget is empty as it relates to improving the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is empty on reducing the cost of living, especially food prices, which, despite the Minister's illusionary rhetoric, have skyrocketed—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—since this Government has come into office. Mr. Speaker, this budget is empty on the projects, it is empty on programmes, it is empty on diversification, it is empty on the focus on the youth and job creation; and, of course, empty on economics or finance. Instead, the Minister scraped below the bottom of the barrel for over two hours to find some achievement that the UNC could claim to be its own, and that he could not. Mr. Speaker, this is the true record of the UNC over the last 18 months.

The UNC Government has fired tens of thousands of persons, introduced the landlord tax, increased taxes on alcoholic beverages by 100 per cent, introduced the coconut oil tax, increased passport and birth certificate fees, increased driver licence fees, increased NIS contributions by almost 50 per cent, increased electricity bills, raised traffic fines by some 200 per cent, raised student fees, conducted unfair nurses' negotiations, punitively in some cases removed overtime, forced teachers into a prolonged back pay battle, paid pan players sometimes as much as 10 months late, awarded a $3.4 billion in very questionable and suspect HDC contracts to their sympathisers. They delayed book grants, salaries, pensions, sporting grants, cultural grants, and terminated funding for many sporting and community events. And Mr. Speaker, I am sad to say, in the words of the Minister of Finance, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, "there is more to come".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, as I go through the length of Trinidad and Tobago, many people are asking, why is Trinidad and Tobago so hard? Why is this place so hard? And in the words of Mighty Sparrow, the UNC are:

"…architects of economic slavery."

And he said:

"…in a million different ways they violate the law
It's the same good, no good bastards who oppress the poor
With their false declaration, tax evasion, defrauding customs duty
These good citizens are the architects of economic slavery."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the words of legendary Mighty Sparrow ring in this Parliament today. Today we say farewell to a giant of a man, a regionalist, a nationalist, a hero, and a calypsonian, I dare say, one of the greatest of all time. In this Chamber, we thank him for his contribution. May his soul rest in peace.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, it has been a long, hard 18 months since this Government has taken office, riding a wave of pseudo-popular support amidst falsely promising to improve the lives of those whom they courted for votes. They promised that everybody would win. Mr. Speaker, some people are hopeful, they believe in the "pie in the sky" promises, as they said: 50,000 jobs, 500 houses a week, 10 per cent salary payments and arrears to be paid in cash, so many opportunities for business, manageable food prices, opportunities for young people, protection for the vulnerable and many more promises. Now, only a short time in office, one year and six months, the people of the country know that this was the greatest political scam.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the people are fed up, they are frustrated, they are angry. The people cannot wait one more day, of course, to see the backs of this vindictive Government. The people of this country feel betrayed

by a government that promised brighter days for all, but this turned out to be a blight.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

9.40 a.m.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the budget is themed: A People-Centred Approach: Investing in Communities, Transforming the Economy and Securing a Sustainable Future. But, Mr. Speaker, this Government and this budget is anti-people, anti-development, anti-business, authoritarian and anti-democratic.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And this budget comes against the backdrop of severely deteriorating economic conditions for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It has become extremely hard for the man on the ground and the poor and vulnerable. On Monday, the Minister of Finance wasted everyone's time delivering an underwhelming budget, and as I said, an empty budget and well described as a bikini budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Delivering nothing of substance, he followed his fake and fraudulent budget of 2026, with an even worse budget in 2027 that is one of deception, deceit and mamaguy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: His presentation was empty like the Member for Tunapuna's bag of hot air—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—dull, insipid and uninspiring, and contained not a single thing that would install and instil any sense of confidence in the people of

this country. Contrary to the delusional statement made by the Prime Minister, "This was an awesome budget," this, Mr. Speaker, was actually an awful budget—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—nothing to excite the depressed community. This is nothing to attract domestic and foreign investors. In fact, the changes to withholding tax and tax losses carried forward will actually chase away investors. Most of all, Mr. Speaker, it has done precious little to improve the lives of people of Trinidad and Tobago who are suffering under this Government. If there is anything lower—if I had, of course, to give a grade, my grade would be lower than F. I would have given the grade to the budget presentation of this Minister of Finance—as a matter of fact, I would give a U, which is not a grade at all.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: That, Mr. Speaker, is a grade you get when you are absent from an exam.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is best characterized by what it failed to say, rather than by what it said. The budget gave little or no reporting of the outcome from previous years, or from the performance of the projects and programmes announced in the previous 2026 documents. That is customary, to be able to come to the Parliament and say, these were your projects, these were your performances, why you were not able to perform and the way forward. Not this Government, not this Minister. Worst of all, it completely failed to identify the problems we face as a country at this time and present any type of solution.

As I said, it was short, skimpy and it avoided any discussion of our economic situation which should be at the core of all budgets. Instead, this budget covered very little of important things, as I said, a bikini budget. The budget

statement and the Minister of Finance seek to paint an absolutely fictitious and delusional picture of life in Trinidad and Tobago after 18 months under this UNC Government. When virtually every person on the ground is feeling the hardship of life under this Government, unfortunately, this Minister is trying to convince us, and this Government is trying to convince us, that things are great and everything is fine. It just tells you, of course, how this Government is out of touch. Mr. Speaker, we know that in terms of what this Government has said, that everything is great, nothing can be further from the truth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And it falls on this PNM Opposition to tell the country the truth.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the population does not trust this Government, and I say here today that they have every right not to trust this Government. This is a government that cannot even come clean with the people of this country. This is a government that will hide the reality from the people of this country, and this a government that will seek very often, if not most of the times, to deceive and to mislead.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And this Opposition will expose this Government and this budget for what it is, an empty and deceitful document presented to make a failing government look like if they are doing well.

Mr. Speaker, there is another deeply troubling development taking place in Trinidad and Tobago. It is one that goes beyond economic mismanagement and the hardships being inflicted upon our citizens, but strikes at the core of what it means to be a Trinbagonian. Mr. Speaker, history teaches us that dictatorships do

not always emerge through military coups. Democracies can be dismantled gradually, even by governments legitimately elected by the people. We are witnessing disturbing warning signs of this process under this Government, and I am here to sound the official warning in this Parliament to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, let us examine what has happened over the last 18 months against the classic signs of authoritarian regimes. First, the expansion and concentration of executive power. Mr. Speaker, we have witnessed repeated states of emergency, the expansion of extraordinary policing powers under the special operations legislation, and the further amendments to the procurement Act that significantly expand exemptions from independent oversight. We have seen controversy over the Prime Minister's purported power to veto the selection of special operations commanders, and further, the concentration of power in the hands of the Prime Minister and Cabinet without appropriate checks and balances.

Second, the diminishing authority and independence of Parliament. Mr. Speaker, this Government enjoys a substantial majority, and yes, at the end of April, they were successful. But, Mr. Speaker, a parliamentary majority does not entitle a government either to feel or to act as though they have unlimited power.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And we will continue to express our concerns about unanswered questions and our denial of certain parliamentary questions and Motions. We have witnessed an accelerated passage of controversial legislation and obscene public attacks on Independent Senators. Consider what occurred a

few days ago in September 2026. The Government could not secure a majority of votes among the Senators voting on the Special Operations Bill, 2026, and in both cases, all 15 Senators supported the legislation, while the Opposition and Independent Senators voted against it. On both occasions, with a deadlock, it was broken by the Senate President's casting vote, allowing the Government's legislation to pass. This was done in complete defiance and contradiction of what is known as long-established parliamentary tradition, which stood for 75 years, where no Presiding Officer has used his/her casting vote to make new government policy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: We are aware, it is in the public domain, that the hon. Prime Minister continues to repeatedly denigrate Independent Senators. Mr. Speaker, this Government is undermining the very seat of power in this country, railroading laws, avoiding scrutiny and accountability, and weakening our parliamentary institutions. This is a classic sign of growing autocratic rule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: May I raise with you Standing Order 48(8)—

[*Member sucks teeth*]

Whoever did that, do it once again and you are going to have to leave the Chamber for the Sitting; whoever did that. Standing Order 48(8), simply to the reference to the President of the Senate and your criticism of the conduct of the President of the Senate as being in contravention of well-established procedure. And I am just simply going to ask you if you may want to rephrase that, because it seems to me it contravenes 48(8). You can do so on a different procedure, but I think to come in the House and use these proceedings to castigate and criticize the conduct of the

President of the Senate runs afoul of 48(8). So, can I just ask you to rephrase that in your peculiar way?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

9.50 a.m.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, all I did was simply give the facts to say what the position is.

Mr. Speaker: I accept that. I do not want to take up your time. I accept that. But what you did was go on to say that that casting vote was exercised in contravention of a longstanding procedure. There is an open debate on that. I am not going to get into the merits or demerits of that argument. But I am just simply asking you to rephrase it in a neutral way, please, not to offend 48(8).

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear this is not a criticism of anyone. This is simply saying that this was a practice that was—[*Inaudible*]. That is all I am saying.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the third is, of course, the attack on institutions associated with judicial independence, and I refer to the Law Association by the hon. Prime Minister making reference to them as "eat-ah-food filth", "dunce lawyers" is extremely surprising. Fourth, the weakening of professional public service. Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has repeatedly raised concerns about widespread dismissals and non renewals across the Government programmes, Ministries and state institutions. This Government has deliberately dismantled these institutions of the State charged with the delivery of services.

Fifth, the politicization of strategic institutions. Mr. Speaker, appointments to protective services, enterprises and other critical institutions must always be

guided by competence, integrity, and independence. Security agencies must never be weaponized against opponents or perceived enemies. However, more and more, it feels like that is the case in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I also want to make reference to undermining the independent media. A free press is fundamental to a functioning democracy. Yet, we have witnessed repeated political criticism of journalists and media houses, including accusations of fake news and references to so-called "1 per cent media." When the media has held the UNC Government to account, they are described as "1 per cent media" and dismissed as bearers of fake news. Mr. Speaker, in any functioning democracy, the media must remain free to question the powerful regardless of which party occupies government. Unfortunately, under this Government is not the case. As it relates to manufacturing enemies and scapegoats, Mr. Speaker, rather than accepting responsibility for failures, this administration has repeatedly directed blame elsewhere. Of course, the easiest one for everything this Government is not able to do, blame the PNM, blame the PNM—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: —blame the critics and the latest one, lazy people. The UNC creates enemies everywhere, but when those who disagree are routinely portrayed as enemies or obstacles, we begin sliding down a dangerous road that is again typical of growing dictatorships.

The other is discrediting the institutions that can challenge executive authority and, as I said, whether it is the Opposition, Independent Senators, law associations, civil society, and other constitutional watchdogs, perform in this

country and all other countries, essential democratic functions. What we have seen is a sustained attack on these institutions by the Government, sometimes in the vilest of manners, with the aim of dismantling their influence and authority.

The other, Mr. Speaker, is that the failed, prolonged states of emergency have raised serious questions about detention without charge, due process, and more importantly, the whole issue of protection of fundamental rights. Mr. Speaker, law enforcement must remain accountable to the Constitution, the courts, and the rule of law. Now, we have entered a dangerous era of these special operation zones combined with growing Government involvement in policing and law enforcement. Mr. Speaker, the decline into what can be described as a police state has been just as shocking as it has been rapid. We now stand on dangerous ground.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I now want to speak about the changing structures of political representation. The Municipal Corporations legislation proposes major, deliberate, partisan changes to local government boundaries, including an increase in the number of corporations from 14 to 17. The Opposition raised serious concerns that these irrational boundary changes will give political advantage to the Government through the gerrymandering of boundaries. The Government, of course, has identified clusters of UNC votes throughout the country and created artificial boroughs populated primarily with UNC voters.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson-Robinson: The final step in the slide towards autocratic rule requires compromising the entire electoral process to benefit those in power. This Government is currently in the process of doing this. Mr. Speaker,

consider these 10 developments together. Mr. Speaker, this is a stark warning to the citizens of this country. This Government is exhibiting all the textbook signs of an autocratic regime. This country is sliding down a very dangerous path, and it is time for citizens not only to awaken to the reality but also to understand the highly dangerous plan of this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson-Robinson: This is a warning I place before this honourable House, and I place on record that the core principle of the PNM is based on our democratic underpinnings. We will defend our country and our democracy fervently against all threats, including the growing dictatorship of this UNC Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago this dangerous madness will end on the night of the next general election.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson-Robinson: This Government has recycled promises that it fails to deliver. They were simply space fillers for the Minister's already empty budget. Let me just go through a few examples. The PEARL project, Promoting Early Assessment for Resilient Leaders; assess early, educate fully. But the Minister announced this programme last year, committing at that time the sum of $7.89 million and promising to commence in January2026. From the Budget Statement 2027, this is what the Minister of Finance has to say:

> "The PEARL initiative, which was scoped and designed over the past year to assist students with cognitive challenges, is set to be implemented in

fiscal 2027."

A recital promised—not delivered in 2026, and kicked like a can down the road to 2026.

From last year's Budget Statement.

"NEXTCLASS.

Mr Speaker, the NEXTCLASS programme aims to create an AI-powered user interface platform that empowers teachers with the resources to enhance their teaching effectiveness and foster a more personalised learning environment."

They said at that time that the Government would invest the sum of $4.64 million in this programme and the programme was due to commence in January2026. As they said, students—when UNC wins, students do not win.

Mr. Speaker, I now quote from this year's Budget Statement.

"To bring our education system firmly into the digital age, we will allocate $6.6 million to the AI in Education Programme, NEXTCLASS TT and ELEVATE TT. In 2026, we scoped and designed these programmes, and in fiscal 2027 we will roll them out."

The same programme was due to commence in January of 2026, and we are now in October.

Mr. Speaker, here is another shameless example of a recycled promise not implemented but appearing again in the budget. I speak of the NIF Bond, with the Prime Minister in her usual clueless style, previously called a Ponzi scheme when NIF was created under the PNM. So, the Budget of 2026, this is what it said:

"Mr. Speaker, in Fiscal 2026, the National Investment Fund Holding Company Limited (NIF) will launch a $1 billion NIF Bond."

This is what the Minister of Finance had to say in the Budget in 2027, having said what he said in 2026.

> "We have resolved all of the administrative issues that deferred issuance of the bond this year and I am pleased to announce that NIF 3 will be launched in the coming months."

The same fund that was supposed to be launched earlier in 2026. Mr. Speaker, and the years, of course, at an end.

10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is abundantly clear that this Government either has a major problem with implementation or they are afraid to be in the PNM's shadow of success.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The fact is, they just cannot perform and the NIF continues to be a PNM success. The Minister has now resorted to recycling promises just to deal with some of the promises not delivered in 2026. However, there is more, more to come. More deceit, more deception.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, we heard nothing about the big promises that were made under the fake and fraudulent 2026 Budget. What happened to the much-touted employment fund of $475 million? This was supposed to contribute directly towards job creation in the country. The Minister did not make a single mention of this fund. Where are the funds? We asked in Parliament's mid-year review about this important fund. The fact is, not one cent has been spent out of this fund to employ people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The Minister simply said that legislation is needed and they refuse to give any further details. In the words of the popular local artiste Tempa, "The nation want to have funds".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The silence has been deafening, and this job-creating allocation has now, Mr. Speaker, mysteriously disappeared from the budget. The Minister of Finance stated that this fund would be used to employ over 20,000 persons through the National Recruitment Drive; 110,000 persons lined up in the hot sun in Couva to sign up, and what happened? Nothing. It seems like this drive had gone into neutral or reverse because it is not moving.

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: What a deceitful and deceptive employment scheme. It is a plan for all to see that the National Recruitment Drive has been an abject failure. This very fund to pay these jobs has clearly been silently scrapped or so said the—Of course the Prime Minister, who always reminds the population that she loves the population—So that the population that the Prime Minister loves are waiting to get some jobs and not be fired. It is on this one thing, fire tens thousands of people in the way this Government has done, but to play with the hopes and dreams of an already dejected population, Mr. Speaker, this is pure unadulterated wickedness.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and his colleagues love to say, "promise made, promise delivered". I say mamaguy announced, mamaguy delivered. More to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And what about the Innovation Incubator Programme, again, scheduled to start in January 2026? No mention in the budget. Where is the long-term target of 25,000 houses? No mention. The Member for Couva North will probably tell how many of the 500 houses per week have been built. Again, no mention. Everyone, even the UNC knew that the 500 houses per week was just a mamaguy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Billions of dollars, $3.4 billion and more in dubious, questionable contracts had to be cancelled because of a lack of transparency and, of course, clear breaches under the Transparency Act. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the housing failure hit the Government so hard that it had to gut and neuter the entire Office of Procurement Regulation through perverse amendments to the procurement legislation just to remove HDC contracts from oversight.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Again, mamaguy announced, mamaguy delivered. More mamaguy to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: But, Mr. Speaker, you know it is PNM-built houses that they have been able to give out over the last few months. Not a single of their houses built by the United National Congress. But we are awaiting patiently as I am hearing them getting excited by what I am saying, tell us how "much" houses you have built in 16 months.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, what happened to the 2.75 gigawatts of onshore and 32 gigawatts of offshore and built development projects? Again, not a

mention in the budget. Mr. Speaker, this Government has only paid lip service to renewable energy. They have taken the 92-megawatt Brechin Castle Solar Plant, built during the tenure of the last PNM Government administration, and what have they done? Taken it off grid. Again, mamaguying the people.

Mr. Speaker, I can go the entire day like this, but I will share with you one more. Do you know that last year the Government promised a new construction sector skills programme, allegedly to certify some 250 young people. Mr. Speaker, not a single mention. But, we await the programmes to be mentioned by the Minister of Youth and Youth Affairs, because after all having ended MiLAT, MYPART, Civilian Conservation Core, and all the other programmes, let us wait. The young people are waiting patiently to hear what is the programme that is in store for young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And they were aimed at enhancing their skills and providing job and business opportunities. Now, these opportunities are gone and even the promises made in 2026 for youths cannot be found in the budget. "For the young people, the UNC run in hot and sweaty." The:

> "…light on green, full steam to stop block, they coming in fast. High beam, high beam".

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mamaguy announced, mamaguy delivered. Mr. Speaker, nowhere is this dangerous incompetence of this Government more evident than its mismanagement and mishandling of the economy. And maybe out of shame, maybe in an attempt to deceive, the Minister of Finance for the first time in the 64year history of this country, did not give an economic report as part of the

budget statement. Maybe it would be given when he is winding up. But the expectation is that that would have been given during his contribution.

He did not explain or present the economic performance for 2025 or what the expectations would be as a Minister of Finance for the period 2026/2027. Mr. Speaker, that is unprecedented and should be a basic requirement of a budget presentation. But I know why the Minister did not want to present an economic report. Of course, because he knew the news is bad. But we know for the next couple of days all they will be doing is blaming the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, either unintentionally or out of dereliction of duty, failed to present the true state of the economy. Instead, he attempted to deceive. What did he think? We would really read it. Mr. Speaker, the negligence of the Minister of Finance failed to give us an economic report. Well, I will provide the country with the shocking economic data and analysis.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The Government changed in 2025, Mr. Speaker. I quote from the *International Monetary Fund*, Article IV, Consultation Report. This is dated 5th, June, 2024. This is the last article consultation under the PNM when we had a real Minister of Finance.

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I quote from the IMF, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I know that would have created an excitement. I quote from the IMF.

> "For the first time in a decade, Trinidad and Tobago is undergoing a gradual and sustained economic recovery."

Mr. Speaker, this exposes the deceit that the Minister of Finance continues to parrot about who crashed the economy. The facts are very clear, and the Minister of Finance knows it. In April 2025, he inherited a growing economy. Mr. Speaker, anyone can take a copy of their *Review of the Economy*, and what does it say? Economic growth in 2022, 1.1 per cent; economic growth in 2023, 1.4 per cent; economic growth in 2024, 2.6 per cent. In other words, three consecutive years of growth under the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And in April 2025, based on the growth trajectory established by the PNM, the IMF estimated growth for Trinidad and Tobago of a 2.4 per cent, 2025, and 1.1 per cent, 2026.

10.10 a.m.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, in April 2025, of course, they came into office with poison promises, lifted on the shoulders of a hopeful population. However, we warned the people that swallowing this poison pill could have dire consequences for the country.

The UNC came into government and immediately commenced terminating thousands of workers, attacking businesses, large and small, in calling some cartels and others worse, while killing business and investor confidence. They cancelled loan guarantee arrangements and other business support programmes for small businesses. They scrapped the access to foreign exchange for small manufacturers provided through the EXIM Bank.

They imposed high taxes, fines, surcharges, levies, and fees. They increased rates and they increased costs for businesses and consumers alike. They oversaw the shutdown of Nutrien over a disagreement about what, Mr. Speaker? Port fees,

and curtailing the operations at Methanex and Proman. They plunged this country into a perpetual state of emergency, further stymieing economic growth. Mr. Speaker, the only information the Minister of Finance gave this country on the economic performance was a 1.8 decline in real GDP in the first quarter of 2026.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: What he failed to state was that the Central Bank data shows that the previous quarter, the fourth quarter of 2025, also experienced a decline, 0.9 per cent. That marks two consecutive quarters of economic decline going into 2026. But, Mr. Speaker, it gets worse.

Recall, as I just said, that the IMF projected in April 2025, under the PNM, just as the UNC was coming into office, the real GDP growth was to forecast 2.4 per cent for 2025 and 1.1 per cent for 2026. Again, according to the Review of the Economy 2026, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, the country, what the Minister of Finance is afraid to say. Actual growth achieved in 2025, the economy declined by 0.5 per cent.

Hon. Members: "Wowww."

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I remind you that the IMF was projecting growth for 2.4 per cent under the People's National Movement. The same Review of the Economy is now forecasting the real GDP growth to be negative, and as I said, the copy is there. Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker. The Review of the Economy 2026, prepared by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Finance of this Minister, is forecasting GDP to contract for a second consecutive year by 2.2 per cent.

Hon. Member: Recession.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, as I said, IMF under the PNM was

projecting a growth of, in April 2025, to be 1.1 per cent. Mr. Speaker, only the UNC can take something good and turn it into something bad.

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: No matter how sweet condensed milk is, they can spoil that, and they can turn clean water into muddy water.

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, with two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth and two consecutive years of accelerating contraction in real GDP, I take no pleasure in saying what the Minister of Finance is afraid to say, what the Central Bank Governor may not want to admit, and what many economists are seeing, Mr. Speaker: this country is now in a recession.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: What has caused that? UNC Government, its failed policies, anti-people, anti-business and anti-investment, and we, the PNM, warned the country. We warned that firing tens of thousands of people would not only inflict hardship on people but would also cause economic decline as spending in the economy has stalled. We warned about the taxes. However, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance was so focused on fake winning that he lost sight of the fact that the entire country is losing.

The people do not need the Review of the Economy to tell them we are in an economic decline. They feel it every day when every man, especially those who have been fired, those who are juggling for more than one job. Ask the taxi drivers. Go to the market, and they would tell you that their goods are not selling. People are not there to buy. Sales are low. Go to the groceries. The prices of food are going up every week. Apparently, this Government is not aware of that, and it

is seen and felt all over, across the country. This Government is disconnected from the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And the only people who do not believe it are the delusional Minister of Finance and Members of the incompetent UNC Government, led by a Prime Minister who is clueless about the true conditions of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, here are some other shocking economic facts that show the true state of the economy. Growth in the non-energy sector is forecast to decline by 0.7 per cent in 2026, but they have not said anything. And while the energy sector is anticipated to decline by 6.6 per cent, according to the Review of the Economy, the same Review of the Economy. Mr. Speaker, the energy and non-energy sectors are in decline in the country, and the Minister of Finance knows it. What else do you expect when companies like Nutrien shut down operations and other downstream producers are cutting production? Government is destroying the downstream energy sector, and this is what we are all witnessing.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Central Bank, natural gas production is down from 2.6 billion standard cubic feet per day in the second quarter of 2025, to 2.4 billion standard cubic feet in the first quarter of 2026. Methanol production is down, and the ammonia production has declined by roughly 30 per cent from September 2025 to March 2026, and that, Mr. Speaker, is according to Central Bank data. Urea production has declined from 181,000 tonnes in September 2025, to zero by March 2026, according to the Central Bank data. Mr. Speaker, and why is that so? The closure of Nutrien. This is what the UNC has done to our energy sector, and this is what the Minister of Finance has failed to report to this country.

Absolute, absolute shame.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And, Mr. Speaker, we can, for further confirmation, from the CSO. Construction declined 3.2 per cent; trade and repairs, declined 4.0 per cent; other manufactured products declined 3.7 per cent. For 2026, the forecast is for further declines in construction, 2.7 per cent; trade and repairs, 4.3 per cent, according to the same review. But, of course, when they would come and tell you, "Promise made, promise delivered". "When UNC win, everybody win." The data is showing otherwise. The Central Bank Quarterly Index of Economic Activity fell by 3.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2026 and by a further 3.2 per cent in the second quarter.

The index shows three consecutive quarters of contraction in the energy sector ending in 2026, with a huge fall of 9.6 per cent recorded in that quarter. It is painfully clear that all sectors of this economy are contracting and have been doing so under this UNC Government. This is the information the Minister refuses to come clean about and will not tell the country. The retail sales index fell by 1.1 per cent in the first quarter of 2026. People are not buying things because the Government, of course, has fired so many people. So, even if they wanted to, they simply do not have the money.

The Central Bank has estimated that in the first quarter of 2026, sales in construction materials and hardware supplies fell by 13 per cent. But, of course, as the Minister said, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, they are going to tell us how many houses they have built. Clearly, if you have a decline by 13 per cent in the material and hardware sector, it tells you that nothing is happening in the construction sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

10.20 a.m.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, leading indicators, such as motor vehicle sales and cement sales are all down. While the Minister tried to make a case for the growth in manufacturing, I want to present some data from the Central Bank, which tracks an indicator for manufacturing exports. This is the number of containers exported from Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of 2025, this figure stood at 6,105 containers exported. By June2026, this had fallen to 2,891 containers. Container exports from Trinidad and Tobago have fallen by over 50 per cent during the period under this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: There is no doubt about the trajectory of employment. Despite the official figures rising to 5.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2026, with 6,000 persons becoming unemployed, the scale and scope are much wider. Tens of thousands more are unable to earn the incomes necessary, of course, to meet their needs. We know about the 11,000 from CEPEP, the 7,000 from URP, 4,000 from Reforestation; over 22, 000. This is the 3.7 per cent of the labour force who are mysteriously not being counted in the official unemployment statistics, which means that our real employment rate actually is not 5 per cent, Mr. Speaker. It is over 8 per cent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: This does not take into account the many thousands of other public sector employees who have lost their jobs since this wicked Government has come into being. The US National Bureau of Economic Research's definition of a recession is often cited as the accepted definition of

many central banks, and it states—the:

> "…definition emphasizes that a recession involves a significant decline in the economic activity that is spread across the economy and lasts more than a few months."

As I have just demonstrated with data from the Central Bank, with data from the CSO, with data from the *Review of the Economy 2026*, this economy has been experiencing a significant decline in economic activity. Mr. Speaker, the data is irrefutable. As I said, Trinidad and Tobago is in a recession.

It is one thing to deceive the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as this Government has done. It is normal for a Minister—it may be normal for some Ministers to mislead the Parliament, as I have proven. However, it is a whole different thing to mislead the IMF. When the Minister presented the budget of the economy, 2025, he estimated that GDP would decline by 0.8 per cent. Page 49 of that review states:

> "The Minister…"

—and I am talking about the same *Review of the Economy*:

> "The Ministry of Finance estimates that real economic activity in Trinidad and Tobago will contract by 0.8 percent..."—and that, Mr. Speaker, is for the—"... calendar"—year—"2025."

Mr. Speaker, could you believe the Minister told the IMF that the economy will grow by 0.8 per cent only a few months later? What a big difference. Maybe it was a misprint. More so, how can you mislead the international independent monitoring agencies? But the Minister will give us an explanation as to whether that was so or if it was not so. But the IMF's Article IV press release June 2026 states:

"Economic activity continued its gradual recovery in 2025, with real GDP growth moderating to 0.8 percent."

So, the Minister of Finance was guilty of providing the IMF with misleading information. How can your *Review of the Economy* say there will be contraction, and then the IMF be told there will be growth? This, Mr. Speaker, can simply be called economic fraud.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And unless the Minister is going to come and tell us how he told the IMF something totally opposite, I am sure the Prime Minister may be considering asking you for your resignation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the UNC has an abysmal record on jobs. The first vile act of this wicked Government, as we said, was to send home thousands of workers. Of course, they branded people as PNM based on how they looked. Mr. Speaker, 22,000 people, they felt, were all PNM, whether it be women, men and young people; terminations and non-renewals in all Ministries and state enterprises, and we could say whether it be WASA, MTS, East Port of Spain Development, LSA, RDC, T&TEC, TSTT, CAL, NGC, Commission for Self Help, this Government has not renewed many contracts and has been firing people at will. Earlier this year, the CSO reported that the number of employed persons fell by 6,000 between the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2026.

However, it gets worse, Mr. Speaker. From the end of June2025 to March 2026, 44,000 employees in higher economic paying industries lost their jobs. In the nine-month period, according to the CSO, construction alone lost approximately 9,100 jobs; petroleum and gas shed about 7,100 jobs; transportation,

storage and communication fell by roughly 5, 600 jobs; community, social and personal services lost approximately 14,800 jobs. Together, these figures point to an economy shedding jobs from important productive and service sectors, and confirm the recession we are in. Mr. Speaker, as I said, that data is from the CSO.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the shutdown of Nutrien has led to a severe shortage of fertilizers in Trinidad and Tobago. Immediately, farmers began complaining, of course, about the price of urea and its impact on production. The Government spoke as if it could wave a magic wand and solve the forex problem. Businesses are complaining that it is more difficult to obtain foreign exchange. In this first budget, the Government introduced its draconian list of new taxes, as I said, new fines. Poultry, a staple Trinidad and Tobago diet, has been facing severe challenges. Imagine it is now $17.70 per pound for dressed meat, a steep price to pay for working people.

While the Minister of Finance boasts about a decrease in the increase of food prices, of course, no one is fooled. His words ring hollow to single mothers and breadwinners, and those who are not employed. By way of a simple example, using everyday foodstuff, a pound of butter, Mr. Speaker, has moved from $50 to $70, right; increased, since this Government has come into play, by 40 per cent. Today, I want to ask the Prime Minister what happened to the forex cartels that she says were causing the shortage?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, you would recall the hon. Prime Minister established a three-member committee to put together a report on forex leakages. Mr. Speaker, I ask the hon. Prime Minister today, please lay that report

in Parliament. Here are the Prime Minister's own words reported in the Trinidad and Tobago *Guardian* on September15, 2025:

> "PM vows to expose forex cartels; pushes for law to make Central Bank release allocation"

Data from the Eximbank showed that from 2020 to mid-2025, it distributed some US $1.4billion in forex to 123 companies. I ask the hon. Prime Minister, does the cartel still exist? Because according to her, the forex problem is solved. They have dealt with it. Under the UNC, the forex situation, as the business community is saying, has worsened.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The limits banks have placed on forex spending continue to shrink, and many businesses and individuals alike continue to struggle to obtain US dollars in the country. What was interesting, the Governor of the Central Bank came and said that there is no forex cartel.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I turn now to foreign reserves, which the Minister reported a US $5.4billion in August this year. A year ago, in August 2025, foreign reserves reached their lowest levels since March of 2006, under this oppressive Government. It measured a US $4.6billion, representing 5.4 months of import cover. This, Mr. Speaker, should have started immediately to raise alarm bells. Since then, the Government has placed the country in an even more precarious position with the shutdown and curtailing of major forex earners. I have to ask, are we better off now than a year ago in terms of forex? And I am sure the answer to that is that we are not better off.

10.30 a.m.

How then—we have seen the apparent increase in foreign reserves from almost US $1 billion in one year. This Government can claim no credit for generating foreign exchange to grow reserves.

Within the last year, this is the Government's record: January 2026, US $1 billion borrowed; July 2026, US $800 million borrowed; July-December 2025, US $510 million withdrawn from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. The increase in reserves is not because of any great work. They will tell you that it is because of management. It is solely as a result of borrowing and withdrawals from the HSF, which are deposited into reserves. The Government's entire foreign exchange strategy rests on borrowing and withdrawing US dollars from the HSF. And I would like the hon. Minister of Finance to say I am wrong.

Since taking office, despite an unanticipated petroleum tax of at least $3 billion, and that tax, of course, is as a result of the war in Iran, there is no evidence that the Government has deposited even one cent into the HSF. I would like the hon. Minister of Finance, in his winding up, to tell us how much money this Government has deposited in the HSF. What they also need to tell us, by the actions that they have been doing, is whether or not they are breaking the law. Further, the HSF quarterly investment report, covering October to December 2025, shows that the Government withdrew over US $510 million for the period July to December. That is over US $3 billion. The hon. Minister of Finance must tell the country what he did with that US $3.5 billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: We know that the *Draft Estimates of Revenue* for 2027 show that in fiscal year 2026, there will be a total of US $2.5 billion that has been withdrawn from the HSF. If we reconcile what was withdrawn in fiscal 2026

with the information from the HSF quarterly investment report, we see that the Government has withdrawn some US $4.2 billion. Mr. Speaker, that withdrawal of US $4.2 billion has been done in 18 months.

Hon. Members: Wow!

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The question is, where has that money gone?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: This represents roughly 2.3 per cent of the estimated GDP for 2026. One would think this would result in growth. Instead, GDP is contracting by 2.2 per cent during that period.

Mr. Speaker, in fiscal 2026, the Government expected to perform financial gymnastics by borrowing TT $19 billion while reducing the debt service to TT $5 billion. We see now in the Draft Estimates that this wishful thinking was nothing more than a fraudulent fantasy used to artificially keep expenditure estimates lower in order to reduce the budget deficit. To fund even the basic expenditure, the Government has borrowed extensively, taking adjusted general government debt to TT $149.5 million from TT $146.6 million a year ago. Mr. Speaker, that is an increase of some US $2.9 million. Again, according to the review of the economy, the debt-to-GDP ratio is now 84.4 per cent, with external debt climbing to levels that are concerning. External debt now stands at $41.09 billion, increasing by TT $3.86 billion since this Government has come to office. And that $3.86 billion, as I said, is in 18 months.

As I stated, this increase in external debt is concerning because it has to be repaid, Mr. Speaker, in US dollars. This will put further strain on foreign reserves and foreign exchange availability. The borrowing continues in fiscal 2027, with an anticipated borrowing, Mr. Speaker, of some $8.4 billion. And that, of course, is

according to their Draft Estimates. Mr. Speaker, the Public Sector Investment Programme is supposed to be the Government's flagship. That drives investment, it drives economic stimulus, and, of course, that is what would be responsible for job creation, construction, and, of course, incomes. The must-touted blueprint national development plan was the only development plan announced by the UNC, and last year it did not even make its way into the budget. There was no blueprint, no print, no blue, no nothing.

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

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And the PSIP, presented in 2026, fell short of rising to the occasion. Just as the country failed to rise between 2010 and 2015, this year's PSIP is nothing more than a continuation of fiscal contraction implementation, incompetence masquerading as development planning. The performance of this Government in the past year raises serious questions about its ability to deliver what it promises. The Government has shown how lazy they are, how visionless they are, how inept they are, and, more importantly, how manipulative they are. The PSIP 2027 provides an allocation of $3.9 billion to support 1,272 projects and programmes. That represents a further reduction from the $4.1 billion allocated. Could you believe that the Government would reduce the allocation for PSIP by some $200 million, but they will come and tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago about all these great projects, and at the end of the day, there is one—you reduce the PSIP, but even when you had the money, you did not spend it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Over the two budget cycles, the Government has

reduced the critical allocation from a budgetary amount of $5.6 billion in 2025 to the PSIP to $4 billion. This is a TT $1.67 billion reduction. This, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a 30 per cent cut. Now we understand, of course, why the construction sector is in double-digit decline and why jobs are being cut left, right, and centre.

Hon. Members: Things hard.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Hard where? In the construction sector, people are saying again, "How things so hard?"

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government only utilized 69.4 per cent of their PSIP. In other words, they spent only $2.8 billion. So, when constituents from all over Trinidad and Tobago, including their own, are asking, "Why you cannot get the drains, why you cannot get the roads, why you cannot", it is because this Government did not spend the money that was allocated to them. So, on top of cutting public sector investment by 30 per cent, the Government is failing to implement another 30 per cent of the projects. The Minister himself has admitted. In fiscal 2026, we budgeted approximately $3 billion in capital expenditure, but spent only—

Mr. Imbert: Five, they budgeted $5 billion.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: They budgeted $5 billion in capital expenditure, and they spent only $3 billion, though bills are still coming. I recall here some time ago that a Minister was saying that because of the PNM, they cannot pay their bills. You have $5 billion, you only spend $3 billion, and you are still blaming the PNM for not being able to pay your bills. What did they deliver? The $2 billion in planned capital expenditure remains unaccounted for.

But, I mean, we know, Madam Deputy Speaker, they are going to get up

here and boast how much road they built, how many drains, all of that, but they would not tell us why they did not spend the $2 billion. We know all over the country, every day somebody is talking about, "Ah leak, ah pothole, ah dis," but the people of Trinidad and Tobago are listening. The PSIP 2027 allocation, TT $575.6 million, or 14.4 per cent, to the strategic pillar entitled: Unlocking Productive Investment and Jobs. This entire budget was touted as a job bonanza, an unlocking of investment, yet only a fraction of the PSIP was allocated. The people of Trinidad and Tobago understand that this Government is not serious. Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government has proven to be the most anti-business administration in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

10.40 a.m.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Deputy Speaker, with your leave, I want to read from their manifesto, page 42:

> "The UNC is committed to unlocking the full potential of Trinidad & Tobago's economy by making it easier for businesses to thrive. Together, let's create a vibrant, dynamic economic landscape that works for everyone!"

By systematically mismanaging the economy, the Government has put small and large businesses alike under immense pressure, forcing many of these operations to shut down. This has deepened the recession and created further unemployment.

What have they done? The mass firings have dealt a heavy blow to business. Fewer consumers are spending on goods and services. Business sales are falling sharply and many are experiencing significant drops in profits. This is also leading to many businesses closing their doors for good and shutting down

operations. Who would have believed that? People simply do not have the money to spend in the economy, as they once did, and businesses are suffering as a result too.

What is interesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that the closing of businesses is not only happening in PNM constituencies. It is happening all over Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, with your leave:

> "Lower Corporate Taxes for Growth.
>
> The UNC will reduce corporate tax rates to stimulate private sector expansion…"

Mr. Gonzales: What, who said that?

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:

> "...& enhance competitiveness. This reduction encourages business reinvestment and supports economic growth.
>
> "Lower corporate taxes for growth."

The UNC promised lower taxes and assured businesses would not have to worry about additional costs. What did UNC do in the budget of 2026? Bank tax, which is being passed on to customers. Landlord tax, which is effectively a property tax and will affect all businesses, just as it will affect residential rentals.

Gaming tax; 100 per cent alcohol tax, affecting local manufacturers, the entertainment industry, the tourism sector, and restaurants and bars of all sizes. Plastic tax, 100 per cent increase in handling fees, 100 per cent increase in processing fees for work permits, electricity surcharge, increase in LPG prices, increase in liquor licence, fines and fees for maxis, taxis—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Tax, tax, tax.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—every ordinary driver. A whopping increase in cost of natural gas to local manufacturers. More to come, 2027.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: More lies to come.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Now in 2027, limited carried forward losses, digital services, VAT, increased unemployment, levy, increased withholding tax, additional electricity surcharge, VAT clearance fees and penalties, and yet another 20 per cent increase in national insurance contributions to come in the next two and a half months, on top of the 22 per cent increase last year. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the most drastic attack on business we have ever seen, and I must ask whether this Government is intentionally trying to kill the businesses of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: There is no way that any responsible government can impose all these drastic taxes which have hurt businesses and caused closures on the scale that we have seen. No one on that side could have said this was a bad idea. No one in the Cabinet could have spoken up and advised that this is not the way to go.

I quote from the Trinidad and Tobago *Express*, February 3rd, 2026.

"From taxes to forex: why businesses are shutting down"

Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask your leave to quote.

'"The Chamber is concerned that significant increases of existing taxes and surcharges and the introduction of new taxes and surcharges, particularly when introduced without consultation or adequate transition periods, could

have a negative effect on entrepreneurship and investment."

This has led and continues to lead to an almost unprecedented number of businesses closing, taking place on an almost daily basis in Trinidad and Tobago. This is one of the ways that the administration has deliberately contributed to the recession that this country is now experiencing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Deputy Speaker, since this Government took office, there have been major business closures, including—Nutrien shut down its nitrogen plant at Point Lisas, January 2026, Madam Deputy Speaker, after 45 years. the Bocas restaurant closed in Independence Square, citing taxes and a move to a franchise model. MovieTowne Tobago, permanently closed its cinema, January 2026. The Home Store continued downsizing, closing in Chaguanas. Proman's melamine plant in Point Lisas announced a temporary two-year suspension. Methanex shut down its Titan plant in June 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Standard Distributors closed all physical stores in November 2025. Trotters closed in Gulf City, San Fernando. Diner closed in August 2025. Dairy Queen closed its Tunapuna branch in 2026. Papa John's shut down its operation in Debe.

Hon. Member: Debe too?

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Debe too. Imagine that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Gonzales: No man.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Deputy Speaker, whilst this upheaval—let me just go back again. Whilst I have listed these several businesses that have closed, there are several others that have also closed.

Mr. Gonzales: Wow!

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: If we go into many communities, you see many small businesses and many bars closed.

Mr. Gonzales: Correct.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: So, after a year in office, one thing is very clear. It is that the country has experienced a severe deterioration in governance at all levels.

Transparency and accountability seem to have gone out the window with this Government, and many Ministers cannot seem to get it right. And it is showing all across the Government's delivery system, which is in a mess. It is chaotic and has collapsed in some cases. Here are some examples. Passport shortages caused by lack of booklets. They can "steups" and say what they want. You go right now, Madam Deputy Speaker, you go and punch in to get a date for an appointment.

Mr. Gonzales: Exactly.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: February next year.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Jesus.

Mr. Gonzales: Exactly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Inability to pay Carnival workers and pan players. Monthly delays in payments for some groups of workers. Forex shortages, procurement issues, book grants that are not budgeted for and are late, water disruptions. Inability even to pay their own NPUPS workers.

Even now, the Government is still struggling to appoint state boards. If I were to start with the amount of State boards that have been appointed, I will finish next week. We will be here.

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: However, even the boards appointed, which are riddled, of course, with, as we know, rampant nepotism and filled with many persons who do not have the experience— What accounts for the major turnover in the rate of state enterprises across the country? I am curious. These are just some of the notable ones. NEL, director resigned. TSTT, the CEO and the two directors resigned. TPHL, director resigned. Heritage Chairman resigned, amid allegations. Self Help, CEO on administrative leave. Paria Fuel Trading Company, chairman resigned. Mr. Speaker, when we look at FCB and the significant number of resignations taking place in that financial sector, one must be worried.

The financial industry operates on the basis of confidence. With this Government, you will have absolutely no confidence.

Mr. Gonzales: None.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And while this upheaval takes place, we in the Opposition will keep a close eye, of course, on the developments and what is taking place at Republic Bank, another critical financial institution. An exodus has just begun at Republic Bank, another state-controlled financial institution.

Mr. Gonzales: Collapsing.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I say to this Government, in particular the Minister of Finance, keep your political hands off our financial sector.

Mr. Gonzales: Grubby, grubby, grubby hands.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And this is why we see profitability in all state enterprises falling and continued complaints of mismanagement and poor governance. The administration is mismanaging and mishandling all our state

enterprises across the country and some of our profitable state assets are starting to bleed because of square pegs in round holes.

Again, ReadyMix announced in February 2026 that it is due to close; numerous bars. If this does not raise concerns in the minds of all parliamentarians and citizens in this country, then something is clearly wrong. So we know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that notwithstanding the lofty promises, the Government is presiding over decimation, not on a scale we have never seen before.

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

10.50 a.m.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, nowhere in this is more than evident than in the proliferation of procurement issues we have witnessed since this Government took over. Billions of dollars in procurement had to be halted, contracts cancelled, procurement challenges filed, and state companies investigated. What is interesting about this, is that the same contractors keep reappearing. The Government clearly has preferred contractors. They are just some of the questionable procurement exercises in which this Government engages, $3.4 billion in HDC procurement halted and cancelled.

Approximately $1 billion proposed for preferred contractor in that exercise. $129.83 million awarded to a preferred contractor by LandmarkTT through selective procurement. Question over 51 police vehicles involving a company sharing similar directors with a preferred contractor. Question over 30 police/army posts established, and questions are now being asked about whether the same preferred contractor is involved. Madam Deputy Speaker, at the same point, this stops looking like isolated incidents and starts looking like a pattern that requires answers.

When the Office of Procurement Regulation became involved and contracts were being challenged, the Government did not seek to improve procurement methods. Instead, they gutted the procurement Act, changing the rules of the game, because that is what this Government believes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: So, what did they do? Expand areas of government procurement that are exempt and can now operate outside the requirements of procurement legislation. Then, legislation also permits the Minister by Order to determine additional exempt categories of procurement without the consent of the OPR. Any teeth that the Office of Procurement Regulator had, have been brutally extracted. This Government is prone to always getting the budget estimates wrong, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let me deal with some things as it relates to the fiscal analysis. When the Minister read the budget for 2026 on October 3rd last year, he estimated a revenue of $55.4 billion and an expenditure of $59.2 billion. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is a deficit of $3.8 billion. We warned that it was fake and fraudulent because the maths was not "mathsing", because it did not estimate major items of expenditure, such as promised salary increases, arrears, and other critical areas of expenditure, which did not match the policies outlined by the Minister.

There was no allocation for the ambitious 20,000 jobs under the national recruitment drive and nothing was allocated for housing projects, road programmes, the blueprint project, nor was anything allocated for the 10 per cent increase in public sector salaries in cash. As a matter of fact, not one single cent. We warned that the Minister had severely underestimated debt service. After the mid-year adjustments, revenue of 2026 actually fell below the estimate to $54.3

billion, a shortfall of roughly $1 billion. Expenditure, on the other hand, increased to $61.2 billion, leaving an increased deficit of $7 billion, twice as much as was announced by the Minister. These are preliminary figures from a deceptive government. When the accounts of 2026 are closed three months from now, the public will have sight of what is the real picture. I can confidently predict that the true deficit for 2026 would be much more than $7 billion.

The Minister must also state the details that led him to severely underestimate the debt service by some $14 million. Simply stating that the PNM made him do it can no longer suffice. An analysis of the 2026 revenue side reveals the following areas where the Minister got his estimates wrong. Excise duties on rum and spirit, estimate $600 million, Revised Estimate $290 million, shortfall $310 million. Beer duties, Revised Estimate, $640 million, Revised Estimate $400 million, shortfall $240 million. Royalties on oil, $1 billion, shortfall from revenue estimate. Profit from State Enterprises, estimate $5 billion, Revised Estimate $2.4 billion. A shortfall of $2.6 billion. How could this actually happen?

Mr. Gonzales: "Dey playing whe whe."

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Only under the UNC.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: What saved the Government revenue as I said, where they collected this $3 billion from taxes and income profits from oil. The 2.5 withdrawn from the HSF also boosted their revenue position. The Government obviously also depended on harshly taxing the business community and seeking to squeeze every possible source of revenue in the fiscal year. These contractionary fiscal policies also contributed to the contraction of the energy sector.

In contrast, look at what we in the PNM did for small businesses. Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget does absolutely nothing for small businesses. These

small, micro, medium enterprises are the heartbeat of the country. They form a substantial part of the economy because they hire people, they provide goods and services, and they are the outlet for creativity and youth entrepreneurship. The PNM Government recognized the importance of the sector, and just before the demitting office prioritized 6,000 VAT refunds for SMEs amounting to over $500 million to create a cash flow.

We created a preferential tax treatment for qualifying companies involving digital services. We accelerated entrepreneurial relief grants disbursements, especially during the COVID years. We implemented a $500 million SME loan guarantee programme to provide access to financing for development, investment, and expansion for small and medium-sized businesses. The UNC has scrapped this programme, and in doing so, denied many small businesses the necessary seed capital and startup investment needed to get off the ground. NEDCO was providing business support grants for up to $20,000 for young people engaged in training—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—to seek capital to start their businesses. These programmes have all gone, crushed by the UNC again, just pure "mamagism". The next PNM Government, led by me—

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—and the PNM—yes, Saddam, I know you like that part—will gain small and medium-sized businesses the core of the economic revival strategy.

Hon. Member: Including Al-Rawi.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The incentives scrapped by the UNC will be reinstated by the People's National Movement, and we will place even more incentives to encourage small business growth development and job creation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it seems that I have created a lot of excitement, people are awake. **Hon. Members:** [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: This will form one of the key pillars of our economic revitalization plan, which will help to implement the return of this country to growth and prosperity. Madam Deputy Speaker, I now turn to disturbing and dangerous decision by this Government—its intention to sell off some of the most valuable state assets.

The Prime Minister on Tuesday announced plans to divest National Quarries Limited, Hilton Trinidad, the Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort, and the La Brea Industrial Development Company, which is better known as LABIDCO. These assets, of course, do not belong to this Government. Do not belong to the Prime Minister. They do not belong to the UNC. They belong to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: They represent investment, sacrifices, and resources of generations of citizens who built this country and contributed to its development. Rather than demonstrate the competence to restructure, rehabilitate, and improve the performance of state enterprises, as usual, the Government is ready to take the easiest way out—sell them, collect the money, and leave the future generations to deal with consequences.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The Government simply has no plan to turn around these enterprises, just simply sell them out.

So, the question, of course, the entire country is asking: Who stands to benefit from these sales? We are waiting, and are we being asked to trust this Government to oversee the disposal of valuable state property in a fair and transparent manner? Madam Deputy Speaker, we know the answer to that.

11.00 a.m.

The Government is sacrificing tomorrow's income to pay these bills. That is a dangerous gamble with the country's future. The Government must not use the economic difficulties they inflicted as an excuse to rush into irreversible decisions. Once again, the Minister is making optimistic revenue estimates with a predicted oil price of some US $77 per barrel and a gas price of US $5 per MMBtu. Revenue in fiscal 2027 is estimated, Madam Deputy Speaker, to be $59.7 billion, and that is almost $5.5 billion than 2026. The Government is also estimating that it will extract, roughly, $5 billion in profits from state enterprises, while estimating it will collect $1.4 billion more in royalties than it did for the period 2026.

The question I must ask here, how realistic is this? In an economy that is experiencing a recession, does the Minister expect to extract $5 billion in profits from the state enterprises, especially when he collected only half of that in the previous fiscal year? Somehow the Government anticipates collecting an additional $606 million via its commercial asset tax. Does the Minister expect bank assets to grow over the period so he can tax them further, or does he anticipate increasing the rate of this tax? Expenditure is estimated to be $63.4 billion, one of the largest levels of expenditure in the country's history.

Personnel Expenditure in 2027, Madam Deputy Speaker, increased by some

$11.9 billion, reflecting, of course, the impact of salary increases and arrears. Does this fully capture the total amount of promised increases for the public service? What about the allocation for arrears? Is the 45 per cent cash payment included? Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that when we asked the question in 2026, whether the Minister of Finance had catered in the budget for the payment of arrears and salaries, they said, yes, but we see that that entire year has passed, and, of course, the public servants are still waiting.

Current Transfers and Subsidies is always the highest category of expenditure. In fiscal 2026, this amounted to $33.4 billion, according to the *Review of the Economy*. The category of expenditure covers subsidies, social programmes, and grants and other social services. It also represents funding for state enterprises.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I now turn to an analysis of some of the fiscal measures: "Revenue Raising", restriction on carried-forward business losses. This is perhaps one of the most economically damaging measures contained in the budget. Businesses that have suffered substantial financial losses will now face additional tax liabilities just as they begin the difficult process of recovering. The question is simple, how does taxing recovering businesses stimulate economic recovery? One would have thought that the Government would do the total opposite.

When in Opposition, I want to remind the hon. Prime Minister, you declared that you cannot tax a nation into prosperity. However, since coming into office, they have hypocritically unleashed an avalanche of new and oppressive taxes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: As it relates to unemployment levy on petroleum

companies, this measure must be examined against the difficulties confronting our energy sector and its estimated contraction of 6.6 per cent in 2026.

At a time when Trinidad and Tobago desperately needs to attract new energy investment, sustain production and protect existing downstream operation, this Government has decided to increase a levy on petroleum companies. This will certainly create an impediment to investment in the energy sector and make Trinidad and Tobago even less competitive. The Government speaks about attracting foreign direct investment, while simultaneously proposing measures that reduce the after-tax returns available to foreign investors.

The withholding tax on distributions to non-resident parent companies is being increased and will affect profit and the dividend distribution to foreign investors. This may have the effect of discouraging foreign investment in Trinidad and Tobago, the very opposite of what the Government said it wants to do. This is a clear admission by the Minister of Finance that he did absolute nonsense last year by increasing the excise duties on locally produced alcoholic beverages.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: It damaged and disrupted the domestic sectors, negatively impacting on the entertainment industry, the tourism sector, restaurants and bars, and led to business, as we said, closures, as well as job losses.

As it relates to VAT on digital and remote services, we know the "Netflex" tax, as it is being called, can be much broader.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Netflix. The interesting thing about it is that they are so obsessed with pronunciation. The important thing is to get the taxes right.

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The cost of this new tax on digital services will certainly result in increased costs to consumers. The question is, what are the digital services that will be impacted? Will online subscription now be taxed? As we promote AI use, will AI services now fall under this umbrella?

The Government is also seeking to tax foreign-based suppliers of expert, specialized and technical services. Many businesses depend on these services, and the question will be the impact on prices. The risk also exists that some of these service providers may simply opt out of Trinidad and Tobago. While we are not opposed to preventing abuse and the closing of loopholes, we must question whether this measure, that is the disallowance of deduction for expenses incurred in earning exempt income, whether this measure interferes with concessions previously given to incentivize investment. It seems the Government, in its rush for revenue, is about to append our delicate incentive structure which could chase away foreign investment.

As it relates to tobacco control, public health protection is always important, especially as it relates to young people. However, this Government is yet again out to generate revenue through any means necessary. The question has to be asked, is this a revenue-generating measure or is it a deterrent?

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

As it relates to increased vehicle tax on classic, antique and vintage vehicles, the Government says it wants to create a niche industry in the restoration and preservation of historic motor vehicles. It then immediately proposes substantial increases in motor vehicle tax applicable to those same vehicles. Mr. Speaker, I would really like to know what the logic is. How does doubling the tax on classic vehicles encourage enthusiasts to import, to restore and to preserve these vehicles?

If the Government wants to develop a niche sector involving mechanisms, restoration specialists, upholsters and other skilled workers, it must ensure its taxation regime supports that objective. It may be that when the hon. Minister is speaking, he could give us some data as to why they are going in this direction and how he intends to ensure that this particular new arrangement is going to be beneficial, both to the Government, as well as those who are interested in this type of sector.

As it relates to residential electric surcharge, in the 2026 Budget, the Government introduced an electricity surcharge on commercial and industrial consumers. Now, in the 2027 Budget, it is going after residential customers. No one is safe under this Government. We are witnessing a further increase in the potential cost of living of households.

The Government describes this as a conservation measure, but electricity consumption is not determined solely by wealth. Large households, extended families and homes with persons requiring medical equipment or additional cooling may have a relatively high electricity usage. The Minister must clarify whether the surcharge applies only to consumption exceeding 3,000kilowatts, or to the entire bill once the threshold is crossed. These approaches would produce substantially different charges. I would also like the hon. Minister, in his winding up, to indicate whether there was any consultation with the Regulated Industries Commission as it relates to this particular measure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

11.10 a.m.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the increase in personal allowance for pensioners, let me make it abundantly clear that we on this side

support any benefit for pensioners. However, in expanding the personal allowance, the Minister should also identify how many pensioners are benefiting. For those earning a pension of $90,000 or below, which is the vast majority of pensioners, there will be no impact on this benefit.

As it relates to the agricultural internship, the Government, after closing down the youth agriculture programme, which trained young people in farming and provided them with seed capital, land, and even equipment, has shamelessly replaced it with an expanded internship programme.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Youths are now being told, "You are not good enough to be entrepreneurs in farming", but should be workers, farmhands and hired help. This Minister should hang his head in shame for what he has done to young people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I would now like to address some matters as it relates to social assistance. The Minister of Finance is playing games with his promises and with the numbers. The Minister, very early in his presentation, was eager to announce that he was increasing the senior citizens' grant by $250, together with the Public Assistance Grant and disability grant. We on this side have no problem, as I said, as it relates to vulnerable citizens receiving an increase in their social service grants. However, increasing the benefit for the senior citizens' grant without increasing the threshold amount of $5,500 will mean that for more than 30,000 citizens receiving NIS and the grant, they would have no benefit. A lot of the senior citizens were quite shocked and surprised when they actually understood what this Government was doing.

The Minister is guilty of a grave deception with respect to the purported

increase in Senior Citizens' Pension of $250 a month. He did not admit that there is a cap of $5,500 for those persons in receipt of both NIS pension and the Senior Citizens' Pension. So, approximately, as I said, 30,000 persons are impacted and will get no increase. The Government must be transparent, and they must share with those 30,000 persons why they have not shifted the cap. They cannot benefit from an increase in the Senior Citizens' Pension because they are currently capped at a maximum of $2,500 in the Senior Citizens' Pension, in addition to the NIS of $3,000. This, Mr. Speaker, addresses and tells the people of Trinidad and Tobago about deceit and deception.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: However, there is a bigger deception. When I examined the Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for 2027, I was expecting to see an increase. Can you imagine that the Government has done the opposite? This Government has cut the allocation for the Senior Citizens' Pension by $740 million.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: No.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. They have cut the senior citizen pension by $740 million. The allocation for 2025 was $4.5 billion and for 2026, $4.6 billion. However, the Senior Citizens' Pension allocation for 2027 mysteriously falls to $3.86 billion. A 16 per cent cut. Of course, you know they will come and give us some very creative explanation. As night follows day, the Minister will have to come back to Parliament to increase the allocation for the Senior Citizens' Pension, thus increasing the budget deficit. Very skilful and creative accounting. Mr. Speaker, how can the Ministry of Finance increase the senior citizens' grant by

$250, a 7 per cent increase, yet cut the allocation by 16 per cent? How is the "maths mathsing"? Again, fake and fraudulent; deception.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The disability allocation has been reduced by $73 million while the social assistance grant allocation has received an $18 million cut. This Government, while promising a $250 increase costing $555 million, has actually cut the allocation for these social programmes by almost $1 billion collectively.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: "Wickedity".

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: While the hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly will address in detail, the issue of education, I want to say that it has been another area of failure for this Government. The Prime Minister has treated our school children like criminals, threatening suspension, expulsion and even stationing police at schools. At the same time—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Face the consequences.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—yes. As the Prime Minister said, face the consequences. At the same time, many schools have fallen into disrepair. It has repeatedly neglected to allocate any funds for the book grant and must come during the mid-year to allocate funds for the necessary expenditure. Even then, there are administrative delays in processing and distributing these grants for needy families. The mass dismissals and lay-offs caused by the recessions have taken a severe toll on parents. Many struggle to scrape together passage money to send their children to school. The reality many families face is keeping their children at home because they simply cannot afford to send them to school.

Madam Speaker, as it relates to the health sector—

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—sorry. Mr. Speaker. Well, at least, Mr. Speaker, I see you smiled a little bit. That is not too bad. My apologies. The Government allocated—

Mr. Speaker: I usually do not take offence easily, you know.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—well, I know. I know. The Government allocated $8.214 billion to health for fiscal 2026 and $8 billion in 2027. Yet, we have to ask ourselves, are we getting value for money since this Government assumed office? The simple answer, Mr. Speaker, is no. The country is now experiencing a serious drug shortage with life-saving medication no longer available through the CDAP Programmes. No cancer medication in hospitals. Early in this term the Government chose to attack a so-called "pharmaceutical cartel". Now, with a severe shortage of drugs and medicines available to vulnerable citizens, the excuse is supply chain issues. The Minister of Health continues to bury his head in the sand, and the Minister of Finance lives in Lala Land.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Citizens are suffering.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: How can we not have CDAP medication? How can we not have cancer medication? Unbelievable. This is a catastrophic failure to deliver basic services to the population. People will die if this is not fixed. I say, is anybody happy with the health sector? Not the nurses. Not the doctors. Not the patients.

As it relates to agriculture, Mr. Speaker, this Government came in with lofty

and ambitious plans for agriculture. I want to turn to its Manifesto promises again, Mr. Speaker, with your leave:

"Our 2025 Targets

- Generate $1 billion in agricultural exports
- Reduce food import bill by $2 billion
- Raise agriculture's contribution to GDP to 5%...
- 25,000Acres For Agricultural Parks…
- Sugar Industry Revival…"

As they would say, "Promise made", and we would say, "Delivery failed."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: *The Review of the Economy* 2026 shows the agricultural sector shrank by 2.1 per cent in 2025. Even in agriculture, this Government has ushered in a decline. This budget does precious little for the sector.

I turn now to a particular issue in public utilities. I know the hon. Marvin Gonzales will give details. Mr. Speaker, from no water to brown muddy water, to increasing electricity rates, this Government has fallen short on the delivering public utilities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Of course, the Minister of Finance took credit for water projects that he found either near completion or completed and proceeded to shamelessly take credit for them. Meanwhile, most of the country continues to suffer for water, whether it is from Diego Martin to Toco; from Toco to Guayaguayare; from Guayaguayare to Barrackpore; to Cedros—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Siparia.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—to Chaguanas—and the Prime Minister reminded me—Siparia.

11.20 a.m.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Prime Minister, I hope they are not treating you badly. I hope "yuh" getting "yuh" water in Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am not treated badly.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Excellent, excellent. So then you "doh" have a water problem.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Exactly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. While the Minister plays political games to avoid accountability, people cannot access clean water for basics, to cook, to clean, to wash, to drink. The "Minister of Mauby" they are now calling him—

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—is yet to drink a glass of brown water. I know he said that he is willing to drink the glass of brown water with you, you know, we are waiting patiently.

Mr. Gonzales: No, no, no. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to a few matters as it relates to Tobago.

There was a deafening silence surrounding Tobago's autonomy in this year's budget. Equally troubling is the financial flexibility and the development momentum that Tobago had lost, just as in Trinidad. Tobago, having received a cut of over $250 million in this budget, has been offered a consolation prize of two centres. The irony is that under the Tobago Island Government Bill, which was

rejected by the UNC and the TPP, Tobago would have been guaranteed a 6.8 per cent budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And that would have amounted to $4.3 billion, as distinct from the $2.7 billion we have received.

Mr. Speaker, Tobago has seen, within the last 18 months of this Government, no meaningful projects. Of course, the major project opened or announced on Tuesday, the Marriott project and the ANR Robinson International Airport, what is so unbelievable is that I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that the PNM left a sterile shell and it was left to this Government to ensure that they completed the ANR Robinson International Airport. That new billion-dollar airport terminal building. I take the opportunity today to congratulate former Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: When we achieved practical completion of that airport in 2025, we handed over an airport facility complete with loading bridges, escalators, security equipment, air conditioning, and all required electrical and mechanical systems and like everything else, Mr. Speaker, when an election is lost and a new government comes into office, it is their responsibility to take over the project and make sure that it is functioning. But do not go and take all the credit when you know very well it was never yours.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Developments in Tobago, as I said, have been sparse and I want to ask—they spoke about the development of Scarborough, about the marina, and we are waiting very patiently. And what is very interesting is—I want

to share that whilst there has been a lot to say about Tobago, I examined the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies* for Tobago, a document, of course, provided—we all got our bag, yes? And on page 103 and I hope the Members of Parliament for Tobago East and West look very closely at page 103. It provides the allocation for the Tobago Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Speaker, do you know, the allocation for the Tobago Regional Health Authority has been drastically cut? They will be more shocked to know how much it has been cut by. Mr. Speaker, the Tobago RHA received $731 million in 2025, in 2026, the RHA received $750 million. Mr. Speaker, can you believe that in 2027, this wicked UNC Government has cut the funding of Tobago health care by $510 million?

Hon. Members: Wow.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Let me repeat that, let me repeat that. I just want to remind you page 103, check it out. Let me repeat again, $510 million. But you know, it is one thing, as I said to, mamaguy, but they will tell you as it relates to the Tobago Regional Health Authority, promise made, promise delivered, a cut by 68 per cent. The people of Tobago, and I hope the Chief Secretary will pay close attention to that. Just as how, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to local government, I am demanding that the full funding be restored—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—to the Tobago Regional Health Authority, and I am also, of course, demanding equity in local government development funding and we demand equity for Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: In the last 18 months of the UNC presiding over our energy sector, it has been nothing short of a disaster. We have seen and the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West will provide details as it relates to the energy sector, I just have a few items that I would like to raise. We have seen unprecedented shutdowns and loss of jobs in the petrochemical sector. They have been in charge since May 2025. As soon as I start talking about energy, I know the Prime Minister gets very excited.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: We are going to support the Acting President of Venezuela moving the title of persona non grata once they ask us, we, the Opposition, will support that. They have been charged since May 2025 and in that time, they have done nothing meaningful. They continue to live off the excellent work of the previous Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the hon. Stuart Young—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—and the PNM Government. We secured the energy projects that are today supplying gas, as well as every single energy gas project that the Minister of Finance referred to in this budget. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance will have you believe that the PNM's entire energy sector hinged on Dragon gas, as he stated in his budget. However, this is completely untrue. The fact is that every single project that the UNC is now relying on to keep the gas sector going as a PNM project, every single one, every single one, was started by the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mento, Ginger, Mahogany B/Extension, Juniper Phase II, Angeline extension, these are all work of the previous PNM administration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: However, what they are responsible for are the shutdowns and closures of Point Lisas and the destruction of the petrochemical sector, that is the legacy of the United National Congress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The UNC decimated the energy sector, starting in 2010 to 2015, and just when you thought it was impossible to do worse, they have destroyed the sector with plant shutdowns and plenty of jobs.

I now want to speak a bit, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of trade. I have to ask the Minister to enquire from the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism what their responsibility really is? The trade industry and investment agenda is being scattered through several Ministries. Strikingly, e TecK is now under another Ministry, which has responsibility for land. A local or foreign entity seeking economic spaces for development now has to approach the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs. Is this Ministry equipped to handle the diversification strategy? I am sure the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs will tell us.

GlobalTT, which is an amalgamation of former InvesTT, ExporTT, and CreativeTT and elements of TTSCI, is now operating for 18 months without a board. Special Economic Zones Authority, no board. I fear the diversification and trade strategy of this country is non-existent and the very entities established to enable this appear not to function under this Government. I do not know if this falls into the category as described by the hon. Prime Minister of persons being

lazy.

As it relates to youth, this budget has provided nothing of substance for young people. This Government has been an absolute disaster for youth development, scrapping all the programmes. On top of that, they have provided no plan for youth employment.

11.30 a.m.

Recently, as I said, job bonanza, flower that never bloomed. Young people are told to study hard, acquire qualifications and work towards a better future, they are doing precisely that. But they are all saying again, "Why is this country so hard for young people"?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, can I just inquire how much time I have?

Mr. Speaker: Twenty-six minutes.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, can I enquire from the hon. Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, where is the National Youth Policy? And I leave the other issues in relation to sports into the competent hands of the hon. Hans de Vignes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise to me that like everything else, this Government cares very little about environmental issues. It is just something they speak about without any real interest or actionable plans or policies. Mr. Speaker, the biggest risk to our small island developing state, as we

all know, is that of climate change. As global temperature rises, weather systems and climatic phenomena become ever more unpredictable. We only have to look at our experience this year, when we endured excessive heat and dry periods, forcing water restrictions. This was followed by heavy rains and severe flooding. I have heard very little.

As a matter of fact, I do not even recall in the Minister's presentation whether he actually even used the word "environment". I have heard little about our move towards renewable energy and our commitment to increasing generation. When we look at the fact that the Brechin Castle solar power plant has been taken off the electricity grid for reasons unknown, it seems that this Government is pursuing a different agenda.

Can the Minister tell us what has become of the nationally determined contributions, commitment to the Paris Agreement? As a small island developing state, Trinidad and Tobago remains susceptible to emerging threats from rising sea levels, hurricanes, floods, droughts and earthquakes, presenting significant risk to infrastructure, growth and economic development. We must therefore simultaneously seek to accelerate efforts at material operationalizing of our climate adaption plans with a comprehensive investment agenda for flood mitigation and erosion of control programmes affecting high-risk communities across Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I now come to local government. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, that this deceptive UNC Government came into this Parliament with a Bill to blatantly gerrymander the local government boundaries. And, of course, what is their intent? They will try very hard to steal the next local government elections—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—but the people of Trinidad and Tobago are waiting, waiting and waiting. The Member of Parliament for Fyzabad and the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, and of course led by the Prime Minister, are authors of what I call an "economic apartheid perpetrated against the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The allocations of local government show the glaring prejudice of this administration. Seeking to deflect from the clear discrimination in funding for the development of these regions, the Prime Minister quoted recurrent expenditure figures. However, any increase in recurrent expenditure deals mainly with salary increases for workers and has no impact on funding for development programmes for local government, right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I realize that the Prime Minister, in her statement, is trying to create confusion, trying to distract from her government gutting of the Development Programme, particularly for PNM local government bodies, by quoting recurrent expenditure. The people of Trinidad and Tobago know the difference between "Recurrent Expenditure" and "Development Programme". The Prime Minister again sought to deceive the population, playing smart with foolishness.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: If the allocation for recurrent expenditure in local government corporation is cut, this will result in retrenchment of workers and the elimination of basic services such as garbage collection. These are historical costs which cannot be easily adjusted. Reference to recurrent expenditure figures is

therefore irrelevant.

The UNC is deliberately sabotaging PNM-controlled corporations, and the Prime Minister is well aware of this. I remember when the debate took place on the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, 2026, the Prime Minister said that she is dealing with "equity and equality". When you give a corporation like Diego Martin, which has over 100,000 residents, a mere $2 million to maintain hundreds of kilometres of roads, and drains, and numerous parks, and recreation grounds, among other facilities, that is a deliberate act of starvation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And while Diego Martin gets $2 million, UNC corporations with equal or smaller populations are being given $38 million, and I am speaking about for their *Development Programme*. Mr. Speaker of this Government who will tell you, "When UNC wins, everybody wins", the people of Diego Martin, "When UNC win, yuh loss".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: We are currently seated in the capital city, Port of Spain, and the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, aided and abetted of course by the Prime Minister, is proposing to handicap the development of the nation's capital city with an allocation of $2.6 million. It is an established fact that over 200,000 people pass through the city of Port of Spain, or more than 15 per cent of the population, and that is on a daily basis. Yet, the UNC believes that our capital city deserves $2.6 million in a budget of $63 billion to maintain and upgrade the roads. This pattern of economic discrimination is consistent with all corporations held by the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Again: Point Fortin, $2 million for the *Development Programme*; San Fernando, $3.8 million; Diego Martin, $2.2 million; Arima, $2.5 million; Tunapuna, $9 million; and San Juan Laventille, $9 million. And what is interesting, with the changes of the boundaries, it is amazing if we were to think about a constituency like Arima to become a borough, and you are getting $2.5 million for the *Development Programme*. I hope the people of Arima, San Fernando, Port of Spain, Tunapuna, Point Fortin, Diego Martin, I hope you are all listening.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at what has been given to the UNC-led corporations through the *Development Programme*; Chaguanas, $13.79 million; Penal/Debe, $38.5 million; Princes Town, $37.5 million; Siparia, $26 million. In total, the allocations to the UNC corporations have ballooned by 493 per cent, while allocations to the PNM corporations have been cut by 80 per cent. It is called providing data. Clearly, this is based on vindictiveness and hate. They do not want us to say it, but it is there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Wicked. So, they could gerrymander boundaries, they could create more boroughs, St. Augustine, Barataria, Couva, but come the next local government election, the People's National Movement will be victorious.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And just as how I spoke about the Tobago Health Authority, we are demanding justice for the PNM-led corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Reinstate the development funding to those

corporations now, to equivalent amounts as the UNC corporations, because we know that they sign agreements, and then they simply write a letter and tell Port of Spain, and tell San Fernando, "Start paying de new salaries", and not allocate to them a single cent. And as a result of that, they often have to vire money from elsewhere to make sure that workers are paid. The same government that is consistent with telling people that you are going to create 50,000 jobs, now you are putting these corporations in a position where they do not have money to pay workers, and people will be going home.

11.40 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I come now to my constituency of Arima, and there has been a gutting of project allocations through the PSIP for Arima; Arima's local government development allocation from $18million in 2025 to, as I said, $2.5 million in 2027, a reduction of some 86.3 per cent. Between 2020 and 2025, the People's National Movement executed and initiated more than 33 projects and programmes in Arima. These span health care, water security, roads and digital transformation. Yet, under this Government, these initiatives have been stopped, stalled and, of course, left without the necessary funds. The people of Arima cannot be expected to pay the price for political spite or administrative neglect. Development must never be held hostage to a change in government

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, it cannot be that the people of Arima must suffer because of the decisions of this Government. On a daily basis, whether it be Santa Rosa, Calvary, Malabar, Valencia, Wallerfield and Mount Pleasant, people are of the view that there is some kind of victimization that is taking place, that on a daily basis they have absolutely no water, sometimes for as much as three

weeks. WASA would simply say, "The pump is down, there is an electrical issue," and, of course, the new one is, "There has been insufficient rainfall," so, as a result of that, the people have to suffer for water. That is why I came back earlier to the question of the environment.

I want to, of course, in dealing with Arima, make special mention of the Heights of Aripo, because the Heights of Aripo, I know, is very dear to the heart of the hon. Member for St. Augustine. So, maybe I could seek her assistance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: As much as they love Aripo—and when anything happens, you see them demonstrating on the Eastern Main Road or on the highway, but "you eh going up in de village, demonstrating outside". Painful as it is to the people of Aripo, the project for water—to start the project, having written to the Minister of Public Utilities, the hon. Marvin Gonzales, everything—the project started with clearing of the land, everything, contract issued, and within less than a month, this Government simply cancelled the projects for the people of the Heights of Aripo.

The good thing is that WASA had meetings with the village and the people, and they told them everything, who is the contractor—they told them exactly what was going to happen. You need to do that first before you do the road. And lo and behold, the people of Heights of Aripo are being denied that water project.

So, when you go there, you saw all the trucks, you saw all the pipelines, you saw everything, today, you see absolutely nothing. This is a government that loves the people of Aripo. That is what love is about, cancellation of projects.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Therefore, I want to say to the hon. Minister of

Works and Infrastructure, who agreed and who did some work in the Heights of Aripo, it is not possible very often for them to have school, because the only way they can have school is if WASA brings water from outside the area. If the UNC had allowed the project to continue, then the people from Aripo would have had water by now. That is the very caring Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: In speaking again about Arima, I want to say to the hon. Minister of Education that the transportation that traditionally existed for the entire north coast, where the Ministry of Education provided transportation for the people of Blanchisseuse, Morne La Croix and Paria has stopped. I am asking the Minister to please, please restore transportation for the people of the north coast.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I want to say that a disaster centre was set up in the Blanchisseuse area. I filed a question here in Parliament as it relates to why they stopped certain services in that area. I was told it is because you do not have a lot of people using the facility. So, very often now, they cannot get an ambulance. Yes, you may not have thousands of people living in Blanchisseuse, but the hundreds of people who live there depend on the health sector, depend on the health centre, and citizens go to that area continuously.

So, when you decide "you doh have enough people living dey" and therefore, you reduce de services, it tells me how much they care about the people of Blanchisseuse. Again, I know the hon. Member of St. Augustine also has a great love for Blanchisseuse. She likes a lot of areas—[*Inaudible*]—so, I will seek her assistance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: So, we want to say, on behalf of the people of Arima, to ask the Ministers kindly, who are responsible for that area, to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, let me say that, in conclusion, at first glance—

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: The Member for Barataria/San Juan, I am not going to allow you to distract me, eh.

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

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I am not even calling on the Speaker. I am just telling you, do not distract me.

Mr. Speaker, at first glance, one might be tempted to say that this is an empty budget, full of nothing, deceitful, vacuous and skimpy. I agree.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Full of nothing.

The UNC continues to tax, while the people continue to suffer. They promised jobs, they dismissed workers. They promised prosperity, they burdened business. They promised relief, they raised taxes, fees, fines and electricity costs. They have failed the people. They delayed salaries, pensions and book grants. They forced teachers to fight for back pay and the nurses to fight for their fair treatment. They closed youth programmes. They stalled development and left families struggling for groceries, schoolbooks and transport. The UNC continues to tax, tax and tax. Yet, patients struggle for essential medicines, communities struggle for clean water, businesses closed down and workers lose their livelihoods. They have failed the people.

Instead of answering questions, they often attack critics. Instead of strengthening accountability, they weaken oversight. Instead of protecting our

freedom, they normalize extraordinary powers and detention without charge. This is the record. More taxes, few opportunities; more pressure, less protection; more promises, less delivery.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I want to say that citizens cannot eat excuses. Families cannot survive on slogans, and no government has the right to make people poorer, restrict their freedoms, and then blame them for their suffering and call them lazy.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC continues to tax, while people continue to suffer. They promised jobs, they dismissed workers. They promised prosperity, as I said, and they burdened businesses. They have failed the people. They delayed the payment of salaries, pensions, book grants, closed programmes. Yet, patients struggle for essential medicine. They have failed the people.

Instead of answering questions, they attack critics. Instead of strengthening accountability, they weaken oversight. Instead of protecting our freedom, they normalize extraordinary powers and detention without charge. This is the record of this Government. More taxes, fewer opportunities; more pressure—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—less protection; more promises, less delivery. Mr. Speaker, citizens cannot eat excuses, as I have said. Continue to tax, people continue to pay. It instils no confidence and cannot take us out of our recession into which the UNC has plunged this country.

Mr. Speaker, when the time comes, the People's National Movement will be required once again to save this country from the morass, the mess and chaos into which this UNC thrusted us—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

11.50 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we have been hearing songs of the Mighty Sparrow, I guess as the procession—and I want to make reference to a Calypso. Because one of the things, even though this Government feels that the Calypso art form is dying, even the Dr., Mighty Sparrow, gave advice. And he said:

"…I only hope they understand
I am only a Calypsonian
What I say may be very small
But I know that poor people ain't pleased at all
We are looking for betterment
That is why we choose a new government.
But they raise on food before we could talk
And they raise taxi fare so we bound to walk
But still, I don't want them to catch cold sweat
(No, Doctor, no)
Because the mango wood…is not a threat
…still they must remember
We support them in September"—that is when the election is.
"They better come good
I have no intention of throwing down…"—my melted—"mango wood…"

As I close, we in the PNM reject this budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Just as how the people in the country are saying that it is hard under this Government and they reject the lies and they reject all that this

Government has been misleading the population about. It is the most anti-people-centred approach ever. No real community investment, further crashing of the economy, and for sure, no sustainable future. Do better, UNC. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Hon. Members: "Yaay". [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Wilfred Morris): Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, to stand on behalf of the people of the Mayaro Constituency and to stand as a proud Member of this Government.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. W. Morris: But, Mr. Speaker, I am thrown back, I am taken aback, because not even Judas on the night he betrayed Jesus could be as hypocritical as the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, after a performance like that, it was my intention today, as a Member of Parliament and a Member of this Government to only attend one funeral today, the funeral of the great Sparrow. But it is clear, Mr. Speaker, that I have attended the funeral of the PNM, because with a performance like that—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris:—Mr. Speaker, it is clear that they will remain on that side. You see, Mr. Speaker, they quoted Sparrow galore, but let me just quote this for you, and Sparrow said:

"…After promising so much tender care

They forget me as they walk out of Woodford Square…"

And that is the reality of the PNM in the last 10 years, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, today, as a country and as a young politician, you learn the value of not letting people write your speech, because everything said there today was not factual. And the question I pose today, Mr. Speaker, is, did Port of Spain North/St Ann's West, set up Arima? Did Arouca/Lopinot write that speech, or did Diego Martin North/East? Because clearly, the Leader of the Opposition would not have written that here today to come to get into power.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, we sat here for two hours and heard the most ridiculous claims. We heard that this Government is anti-people. Please remember the PNM when they locked out their own citizens out of this country during COVID. Remember the PNM when they tear-gassed people in Port of Spain marching.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: You see, I have heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about dictatorship. But let me remind the country—and today is not about a tit-for-tat. We are here as parliamentarians. We are here as a Parliament to be responsible, to set the tone for the development of the fiscal 2027. But we cannot allow the young people listening, we cannot allow our country, to be misled.

We heard the Leader of the Opposition, who I respect as a young Member of Parliament, but I will correct her. We heard the Leader of the Opposition say—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris:—that this Government is a dictatorship. I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition, it was not this Government that had to go to the Privy Council and be told you cannot block a local government election. It was the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition, it was not the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar that sat in "PM 1", drive round the Savannah and intercepted the merit list. It was a PNM Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: It was not the brilliant John Jeremie as Attorney General that got involved in Nelsongate to witness tamper.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: It was a PNM Attorney General.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order, please.

Hon. W. Morris: And I want—

Mr. Manning: Standing Order, please, 48(1), 48(1), please.

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

Mr. Speaker: Let us not waste time with that objection. Continue.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Nelsongate was not in the budget.

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

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge and we on this side acknowledge that the only voice that San Fernando East has in the PNM is when he raises Standing Orders here today. So we respect that. He has no voice in the PNM, so let him raise his Standing Orders.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the Leader of the Opposition, when she talked about denial of questions. I want her to go back to one Bridgid Annisette-George. That is dictatorship.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: "Wickedity" at the highest order. You see, Mr. Speaker, they spoke about the UNC weaponizing state agencies. I want to remind the PNM that weaponizing agencies is in your DNA. Remember Sadiq Baksh and the missiles in his water tank. That is in your DNA.

Hon. Members: "Ohhh, ohhh." [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Now again, Mr. Speaker, I say this respectfully as a young Member of Parliament, but we cannot have on the record false information. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about Prime Ministers attacking the media. But I want to know where was the Leader of the Opposition, May 29th, 2022. And this actually made regional news. *Stabroek*:

> "Trinidad Prime Minister attacks media
>
> In what was the most vicious attack on local media by a sitting…"—PM—
>
> "Dr. Keith Rowley accused the two largest…companies of…"—having their self-interest.

That is the *Stabroek* newspaper, Mr. Speaker.

So, you come to this Parliament with your ChatGPT speech, rattle out a few words and not consider the real history. But let us go again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Let us go again. Let us go again. We come here in this Parliament to let the population see, "I is Prime Minister next election", but with false information. That is what you want us to believe. *Trinidad Guardian*, 29th,

December, 2020:

"Law association offended by PM's bottom feeder statements."

Mr. Speaker, that was not the hon. Member for Siparia. That was their Prime Minister—

Mr. Padarath: They stood by it.

Hon. W. Morris: And they stood by it. So, my advice today is, do not let the other Members on the side of you write your contribution. They will carry you down the wrong track as they have done today, Mr. Speaker.

You see they spoke about Tempa. Now, anytime an aspiring Prime Minister has to quote Tempa, tell yourself something is intellectually wrong. Tell yourself that. The country in trouble if you ever enter office. But you see I want to use your word "funds". You see, we talk about the HSF, HSF. Again, they slip in a "lil paper" and say, go and talk about the HSF, how much time the UNC take out. Mr. Speaker, let me quote something for you. The PNM, in their 10 years in office, had 11 withdrawals from the HSF, 11 withdrawals.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: But let me tell you the monetary value of that. That was worth TT $18 billion or US $2.64 billion. But let me give you a next record for the people listening. They will run, they will run, because the facts hurt. Let them run. Mayaro have them on the run and we are happy for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: We are happy for that. We are happy for that. Let me tell you something. There is a record. Those on the other side never put a single dollar in the HSF. They took out 11 times, US $2.6 billion and never put a single dollar and withdrew, but, I have to drink some water for this last thing, Mr. Speaker. Let me

tell you.

The Leader of the Opposition came here today to talk about HSF. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that between April 2025, when the hon. Member for Siparia took office and the Member for Fyzabad, as Finance Minister, the HSF grew from US $5.98 billion to US $6.58 billion? The highest in history.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: The highest in history, the highest in history.

12.00 p.m.

Hon. W. Morris: So, do not come here with cherry-picked ChatGPT facts. AI will write it wrong. It is either AI or Diego Martin North/East; somebody misled the Leader of the Opposition. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you why they had, why they had—I want the country to understand why they had to take out money from the HSF. You see—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Morris: No, not COVID. No, no, no, bro, I have it here. I have it here. Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for the strong stance she has taken on security, fighting crime at the borders, narco-trafficking, as well as the SOE, because, you see, our SOE produced real results. But there was a SOE, Mr. Speaker, that was called in the dead of the night, literally Old Year's Night, Old Year's Night, Mr. Speaker. That is the only SOE that had zero results for the people of this country.

But, Mr. Speaker, you have always heard us say, you have always heard the Members on this side say that that SOE was held in a party, was called in a party while drinks were sharing, while cocktails were passing, while caviar was being distributed. I want the country to understand that you paid for that party, and we

have the proof, and I will show you.

So, when Arima comes here to say, "Tempa say where the funds", let me tell you why it hardly has funds. Because I have in my hand, Mr. Speaker, what is a bill sent to the Office of the Prime Minister, right, sent to the Office of the Prime Minister, asking UDeCOTT, which was under the OPM, to pay money. They asked UDeCOTT, Mr. Speaker, to pay $414,000 for that party. Mr. Speaker, $414,000. And let me tell you about that party. So, while they called an SOE, they were drinking champagne and caviar. But hear what the $400—on your back, $414,000 for catering and bar, printing material, shuttle and transportation. "You could not drive; they carry yuh there. " This party was held at the Prime Minister's residence in Tobago.

Hon. Members: Ohhhhhh.

Hon. W. Morris: In Tobago.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What is the date? The date.

Hon. W. Morris: This was on December 31st, Mr. Speaker. Audio and PA system, DJ. 2024.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who was the Prime Minister?

Hon. W. Morris: The Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, former, former; $414,000 for accommodation. Now, if you have a party at the Prime Minister's residence, "what you paying accommodation for? Who you pay to stay over there?"

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Morris: **"**Who you pay for to celebrate the SOE with?"

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Morris: So, today—correct. Who was coming through the back gate?

Because I understand it had a back gate used to come back, right? And they could not come through the front, so they had to probably pay accommodation for them when they went back through the back gate. $414,000.

So, when Arima comes here today to "bawl" HSF and to say Tempa asked for the funds, this is where the funds went, Mr. Speaker. This is where the funds went.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: You see, Mr. Speaker, again, come here with generic, no achievement. We "doh" know what you do. Let me tell you something. I "doh" need this piece of paper to tell what people do. Let me just list it out for the population. The Minister of Public Utilities is solving the water crisis in rural communities with desal plants and tank farms in 18 months. What they could not do in 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: The Attorney General, the hon. John Jeremie, took us off the blacklist in 18 months. What they could not do in 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Finance—economic growth, investor confidence, and I will come to that in my contribution. In 18 months what they could not do in 10 years. The Minister of Works and Infrastructure, over 8,000 potholes repaired, a revitalization plant, first time in a decade.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Dr. Roodal Moonilal, Minister of Energy—Energy.

Mr. Manning: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, you know—hold on. You are guilty of crosstalking, and when you are speaking, you like to object and protest. So, I am just putting you on notice.

Mr. Manning: Yes, Sir, but you do not stop them when they are crosstalking when I am speaking.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: No. You are doing. The Member is speaking, and you are doing it.

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: I put up with it for the last five or 10 minutes.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: So, I am just simply putting you on notice.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, have your seat and allow the Member. The same thing you demand, give it to the Member.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: I never get it, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Ameen: "Yuh shaming yuh mother boi."

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: I sympathize with the Member of San Fernando East. I will always remember he was the Member, he was the Member that stood in this House and read the totally wrong Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: We were debating one Bill, then he debated a next Bill. So, I understand, Member for San Fernando East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: I sympathize with my colleague as he makes his final years in this House because Arouca/Lopinot will ship him out. I remember he hurt his face when he came in this House, and he had to ask the Finance Minister, when he was the Jr—if he could see the budget.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: So, we understand, we sympathize. We know, we sympathize with you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: We sympathize with you. We sympathize. I will not be distracted. You can make your contribution, but we continue. Mayor will never be distracted by San Fernando East.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am going on with the achievements. I do not need the paper, yuh know. The Minister of Energy; for the first time in a decade, oil and gas production is up, and I will talk about that later on. The Minister of Housing opened housing in Caura. What they could not do in 10 years. Doh talk for the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs. Land for the Landless. Leases to 200-plus people who were denied for 10 years. The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. Local government reform. Rural communities [*Inaudible*] to be repaired.

The Member for Tunapuna—"yuh" see, they do not want to hear the achievements. You feel you could come here and say yuh have no achievements,

but I will come to the achievements, "yuh know". Member for Tunapuna, one of not, if not the best, Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, 42 per cent reduction in crime. The Minister of Justice, and I want to speak about the Minister of Justice. You see, this is an all-Government approach to development, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: All. All. All

Hon. W. Morris: I want to point out the Rehabilitation of Offenders Bill and the Parole Bill, and the repair to rural courts, as well as the justice mobile. You see, Mr. Speaker, this Government, in 18 months, did what they could not do in a decade, and I thank the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: The Minister of the People and Social Development and Family Services, every single day giving out grants, has been reworking the means test to help give the people you blocked for 10 years. The Minister of Health did what you could not do in 10 years, open the children's hospital.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: You blocked the children of this country and people of South's children's hospital.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: And I will go on because there are many achievements. But let me give you the achievements of those on the other side. Arouca/Lopinot, no water for a decade. Diego Martin North/East, no growth, and I mean economically, no growth for a decade.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: St. Ann's East, no new schools for a decade. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, no oil and gas for a decade, and it goes on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: And the other half of the Bench, Mr. Speaker, I will simply say, no Government, because after Arima's performance, you are in Opposition for a number of years.

But, Mr. Speaker, I heard about—there was a part of the Leader of the Opposition's, and this is not my substantial—I have to respond before I go. But you see, you cannot come here and make accusations. I heard about, "You giving your friend and your contractor, your selected contractor." I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I can confirm with every ounce in my body, and on behalf of all of my colleagues, that the Member for Siparia does not have her brother or family member getting MTS and CEPEP contracts in Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: I want the Member for Arima, to tell me if she can say the same. And no accusations cast. I am just saying Siparia could proudly say that.

So, let us move on. Let us move on, we would not get sidetracked by that. You know, I want to raise something, Mr. Speaker, I have been seeing councillors from the other side, and then the Leader of the Opposition came here with a juvenile argument that the UNC has somehow cut the funding for the PNM corporations. You see, that is playing smart with stupidness, Mr. Speaker. I am going to read the paper now.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Morris: But you see, that is misleading because you have to add up the both. It is not one piece of the budget today and then a next piece. The PSIP is

added to the recurrent expenditure. You get all of the yellow books in one. You debate it as one, so do not come and do like yuh only doing piece. But let me read it for the population because Diego Martin North/East is gearing up. He coming to skew the thing. But we will deal with that.

I want to read to the Hansard and to the population, page 268. If you do not know the book, the book is called *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Every MP, Minister, got one. It is on the Ministry of Finance's website. Pull it down, check it out. But turn to page 268, Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and let me tell you. Port of Spain City Corporation, that is not UNC, they are getting $16 million more.

Hon. Members: More?

Hon. W. Morris: More, more. San Fernando City Corporation, $55 million more.

12.10 p.m.

Arima Borough Corporation, $22 million more.

Hon. Members: More.

Hon. W. Morris: Maybe if the Member for Arima had read the book, the Member would not have had to come here today and talk about projects' names. Let us go again. Point Fortin Borough Corporation, increased by $20 million.

Hon. Members: More.

Hon. Members: "But ah going again." Diego Martin—you know, my eyes, you know, this light. Diego Martin, $24 million more, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: More.

Hon. W. Morris: San Juan/Laventille.

Mr. Elder: "Yuh listening?"

Hon. W. Morris: Now, you really have to use a ruler for this, but my eyes do not

deceive me. "San Juan/Laventille, always complaining that the UNC doing dem something." This UNC gave them $43 million more.

Hon. Members: More.

Hon. W. Morris: "But let meh go again. Tunapuna/Piarco, now I saw dey was in de Chamber, dey run out. But dey get $47 million more."

Hon. Members: More.

Hon. W. Morris: "Dey get" 47—and let me tell you something, I wanted to add a personal comment here. You got $47 million more for the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, but it was a shame that when the central government of this country, led by the Prime Minister, was trying to protect our citizens by putting a police post, a local government body had to fight us.

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

Hon. W. Morris: That is shameful. That is shameful. So, when Arima asks the people of Tunapuna to listen, I want the people of the Tunapuna/Piarco Corporation to know it was your Chairman who did not want you to be safe and secure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: But thanks to your Prime Minister, thanks to Minister Alexander and Minister Ameen, we are fearless, because we have to protect you.

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

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: More, more, more. "Yuh sounding like Sparrow, boy."

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, we have plenty, plenty. "I aint even reach de contribution, you know." This is a rebuttal.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]—make the country better?

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, I came here—again, I really hope the *Hansard* does help Sando East. "Give him ah little play nah." Put in a sidebar, San'do East, said X, Y and Z, because he wants a little attention. But let me tell you, I heard the Leader of the Opposition say we treat children like prisoners because we put police. What do you want us to do when innocent, hardworking, young children are falling victims to bullies? You want them to fall victims? You want them to be injured? Why do you continue to support lawlessness?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: We do not apologize for taking this measure. As a Member of Parliament, it was one of the proudest days when I saw Rio Claro East Secondary School had two police officers to protect the students of that school.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, that was some of the rebuttal. That was some of the rebuttal, eh. But I want to tell you, the Prime Minister, you know, Mr. Speaker, for the last decade in this Parliament, there was only one leader who came with a financial fiscal plan for development, and that was the Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: You know why, Mr. Speaker? Because every single budget, the Member for Siparia ensured that her Members of Parliament undertook consultations in their constituencies, and I want the population to know that in Government it has continued. Every single Member of Parliament here today undertook a consultation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: So, when the Member of Parliament then, Leader of the

Opposition for Siparia, stood, she stood to speak on real issues, about real people, from real people. Today, I ask Arima, where are you getting these facts, these figures?

Ms. John: AI.

Hon. W. Morris: No, it is not only AI, you know, it is for your friends, your finances and your handlers, but we reject that, Mr. Speaker, because we are on the ground with our people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: You know, when the Prime Minister was being sworn in, she said:

> "For too long you have carried the heavy burden of a government that seems to have forgotten you."

Those were the words of the Prime Minister being sworn in in May 2025. And truer words have never been spoken, Mr. Speaker, because you see, when we inherited this country in April 2025, many citizens were forgotten, they were ignored, they were denied opportunity, they were denounced of the benefits from a country that their forefathers worked hard to build. For years, the people who built our refinery and toiled in the sun were forgotten. For years, people living beyond the Port of Spain lighthouse were forgotten. For years, rural constituencies and communities like Kernaham, Biche and Rio Claro were forgotten, Mr. Speaker. But on April 28th, the people of this country said, no more, no more.

You see, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2027 is a blueprint for patriotism, and I will tell you why. I will tell you why. "You see, we doh come with Chat GPT, we doh come with made-up facts." Budget 2027 is an economic pledge to the people of this country that we will not do to you what the PNM did to you. Never forget, in

2017, what was the title of their budget? Diego Martin North/East's title was: Shaping a Brighter Future, a Blueprint for Transformation and Growth. You know what that Member did in the fiscal 2017-2018? Closed down Petrotrin. So come with a budget called Shaping a Brighter Future and you shut down Petrotrin.

Dr. Moonilal: Shame.

Hon. W. Morris: In 2016, they said, "Let us do this together", we are rebuilding trust and confidence. You know what they did? They shut down THTI, the hospitality school. Let us go again in 2022. 2022 is a critical one. Budget title: Resilience in the Face of a Global Pandemic. You know what they did in 2022, right after that budget? They raised the price of fuel for a seventh time, a seventh time. That is Diego Martin North/East history, his record. "So doh let him come here today and talk about what he did, and I will reach to that."

Mr. Sturge: "Dey afraid."

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: In 2021—

Sen. Jeremie SC: "He ain't riot yet."

Hon. W. Morris: "Nah, he cah riot." Arouca/Lopinot will riot with—they rioted in April 2025. But let me give you this one. Budget 2021: Resetting the Economy for Growth and Innovation. You know what happened in 2021?

Dr. Moonilal: "Tell dem."

Hon. W. Morris: Atlantic Train 1 lost $240 million. That was the growth they know about. You see, Mr. Speaker, again, Arima came here today—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Morris: No, no, she could not even show off, you know. What they did with Arima was they gave Arima the *Review of the Economy* book and say, "Ay,

read dat". "And she come—de Member came here and read out some figures and gone off an say: 'Oh, goud! Ting crashing'." But you see, I knew the book. So, I borrowed the Parliament book. This is your book, Mr. Speaker, technically. I borrowed your book, well, your Parliament's book, The *Review of the Economy 2023*. And what this will tell you, the Member of Pointe-a-Pierre could tell you—sorry, Caroni Central, could tell you that for the last 10 years, it has been consistent, constant declines. And let me read this. This is the *Review of the Economy 2023*.

So, when Arima stands up here in this Parliament to talk about what is declining, the decline did not start in April 2025. It started in 2015 when you took office. But let me just update the Member for Arima. There are many of these books. You could borrow it, you will get the real picture. Mr. Speaker, 2023, because Diego Martin, North/East, is going to stand up and talk about how things were so brilliant despite—and I want the population to understand this, no matter he and Port of Spain/North St. Ann's West are laughing now. When Port of Spain/St. Ann's West took office as Prime Minister, 99 per cent of the Members returned to their ministerial posts. The only man not to return to his ministerial post was the Minister of Finance, Diego Martin North/East. Diego Martin North/East.

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

Hon. W. Morris: "You doh get pushed away from yuh job if yuh doing a good job. Yuh don't, yuh don't." So, whatever I say here was validated, vindicated and proven true by Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the former Prime Minister's actions.

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

Hon. W. Morris: Right, throw him out. Let me tell you why. Let me tell the country why Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West had to throw him out. Let me tell you why. So, for the Leader of the Opposition who was unaware that these books are published every single year. Page 49: the energy sector is anticipated to contract in 2023—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Hon. W. Morris: "Dais the CSO", so page 43, 2023. So, what I read here today, it did not start last year, it started—hogwash.

Ms. John: Under the PNM.

Hon. W. Morris: Let me go again. The real output in the manufacture—they come here with one thing, Nutrien, but let me read something for "allyuh". Page 15, Mr. Speaker, the real output in the manufacture of petrochemicals in 2023, the leading petroleum sector contributor to real GDP decreased by 3.5 per cent, a deeper contraction at 2.1 per cent. So, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to bore you with numbers, but I want the country to understand that the decline had started long before.

12.20 p.m.

Because, Mr. Speaker, I want to—I heard the Member of Parliament for Arima come and talk about unemployment. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, CSO, when we left office—when the Member of Parliament for Siparia left office in 2015, the unemployment rate was 3.4 per cent, but by 2024 into 2025, Member for Diego Martin North/East's last hoorah as Minister of Finance, it was 5.4 per cent? So, the rate you see today is not from 2015, it is from under his tenure.

Mr. Speaker, import cover: The Member for Siparia, in her first term, left this country with 12.5 months of import cover. By 2024, the Member for Diego

Martin North/East had carried it to five to eight months. So, they come to talk about import cover and forex, it was not the Members for Siparia or Fyzabad who crashed it, you know. We are rebuilding what the Member for Diego Martin North/East destroyed in the last 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, you know, I have heard about the cost of budgets and the value for money but you see, the budget is supposed to be a tool to uplift and empower a country, but for the last 10 budgets, Mr. Speaker, it became a tool to empower and enrich their friends and financiers. They will tell you about the allocation, but did you get any value for that? You see, Mr. Speaker, in the last 10 years, the last 10 budgets, we have spent over $516million. That is under them. And because we spent $560 million in 10 years, the people of this country never felt safe. That is why they voted for the Member for Siparia on April 28th.

The people of this country, after $560 million in 10 years, never got a single new school, Mr. Speaker. After $560million, the health care—the children's hospital remained closed. Mr. Speaker, I heard them talking about food safety or food security, and I will come to that in a bit. But I want to remind the country, before the Member for Diego Martin North/East, whom I have respect for as an elder person in this Parliament—but I want the country—before he gets up to give you the false picture, to remind the country what was said in his last budget. You see, Mr. Speaker, his last budget was read in October2024, before the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said, "Bring de PS instead, give de PS it, rather than you," before they took him out.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: The day—I would like to say

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. W. Morris: The day the Prime Minister says, "Put de PS ahead of you," I would pack up my seat and go home. That is one of the biggest insults; biggest insults.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: You see—I want to read—you see, he is coming to tell you the sky was blue, the sun was hot, but in his last budget—

Ms. John: "De PS take he wuk."

Hon. W. Morris: "Before de PS take he wuk, let me tell you why de PS take he wuk. Let me tell you why de PS take he wuk". The day after he read the budget, Trinidad *Express*, editorial September 30th—"hear wat de editorial say, eh—I feel this is when dey say, nah boy, call da man back from London":

> "Mr Imbert's persistently upbeat tone, so at odds with the national mood, would have turned off everyone hoping to get an idea of where the country was heading."

—maybe:

> "…Minister Imbert himself probably didn't believe a lot of what he was saying."

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Morris: After I read that editorial, I understood why the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West had to call London and say, "Send him down."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: "Send him down." "You see, I hear dey calling Tobago, Tobago, Tobago. It ha no divide and conquer here. You did not listen tuh Farley

good Tuesday? Farley boasted about de love from Siparia and de love from this Government. So, doh feel yuh could come with ah lil paragraph".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: "Doh do dah. De divide and conquer is fixing things with St. Ann's West. Doh come with Farley and de Prime Minister. Because I want yuh tuh remember what de THA say bout de last budget".

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Morris: Yes, I will quote that. Let me tell what Farley said about Tobago winning and everybody wins, eh. October 01, 2024:

> "THA Secretary of Finance Petal-Ann Roberts has described the budget presentation of Finance Minister…Imbert 'as empty and lengthy.'"

"Dat is why de man lose de job, right?"

So, Mr. Speaker, I set that narrative because I do not want the Member for Diego Martin North/East coming here to feel he could touch the Member for Fyzabad. He cannot. Because Fyzabad has done more in 18 months than what he could have done in 10 years—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris:—and I want to read out what.

You see—and I have it here, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you, eh, Mr. Speaker. I sat here as a parliamentary researcher, and sometimes I thought we were in a movie because every budget, the Member for Diego Martin North/East came with the most amazing things. Today, when he stands up—and he will stand to talk about the non-energy sector. You know why the non-energy sector crashed? Well, we are repairing it. Because the Member for Diego Martin North/East did nothing for 10 years, and here is the proof. In 2018, he came boasting about the six game-

changers. Member for Caroni Central, do you remember that? Six game-changers. "We go save de country". "All dead". As a matter of fact, it took the Member for Siparia to come back to rescue the Dragon deal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: It took the Member for Oropouche East to come back—sorry, the Member for Fyzabad to come with the NIF. Mr. Speaker, I want to go to something critical. We have to remind the country of the amazing stories that the Member for Diego Martin North/East told to this House. He said, in 2015:

> We are going to build capacity for a diversification of growth.

That is page 17. Then now, hear what he said, in 2015:

> "We will utilize a public/private partnership to make…investments to create a shipbuilding and ship repair industry."

They never built one pirogue in the last 10 years, but he wants to build a ship?

In 2018, the PNM promised a shark tank—hear this one. In 2018, the PNM said, a programme similar to the *Shark Tank* series to help entrepreneurs, and grants up to $100,000 will be introduced. Up to now, not even a shark; not even a shark, Mr. Speaker.

I want this last one to show you—I want to show how, when any Member of that side stands up to talk about diversification, they do not understand it. Budget 2018—the yachting industry, you know. The PNM promised to develop the yachting industry with legislation and a marina. It took the Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism today, Minister Satyakama Maharaj, to bring forth a programme to ensure that we can improve the yachting industry, and he will talk about it or the parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: But, Mr. Speaker, data: I heard the Leader of the Opposition spoke about data. I have the data here. Budget 2016 to 2025, the PNM made a total of 490 promises. When you add it up, 490 promises. And, Mr. Speaker, they broke 382 of those promises. But worse than that, Mr. Speaker, worse—

Hon. Member: Promises never materialized.

Hon. W. Morris: Promises never material. Worse than that, Mr. Speaker, worse than that, they repeated 103 of those promises in the past 10 years. So, every year, they came and repeated the same thing. So, when the Leader of the Opposition wants data, that is the data of the PNM. That is the data of all of them: 490-plus promises, you broke 380. That is why, in April2025, the people rioted against you.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Speaker, I want to point to a Standing Order. Can I just ask how much more time my colleague has, please? I know he is in full—[*Inaudible*] I do not want him to—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Seven and a half minutes of regular time, and, of course—

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, might I take my extra time one time?

Hon. Member: Take it one time.

Hon. W. Morris: Yeah. So, Mr. Speaker, let me get to the energy sector very quickly, and the Member for Oropouche East will handle that section brilliantly, as he has done in the energy sector so far. "But I hear ting bout plant close, plant close, plant close". So, I had to go and print something here. March 18, 2020—that is not Oropouche East, that is not Siparia, that is them.

"There is an understandable concern about the future of Point…"

—this is the Trinidad *Express*, Mr. Speaker:

"There is an understandable concern about the future of Point Lisas…"

—because:

> "...in the last four years,"—there have been the most—"plant closures…"—in the Point Lisas industrial estate.

That is under Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. They closed two MHTL methanol plants. They closed Yara. They closed the MHTL M1 plant. They closed the Titan plant. Mr. Speaker, and they will expand on that, but the point is—

Hon. Member: What about Petrotrin?

Hon. W. Morris: Wait, I will come to Petrotrin—do not come and repeat, "Nutrien, Nutrien, Nutrien" here. Plant closures started under you, and it is because of your failure in the energy sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

12.30 p.m.

Mr. W. Morris: You see, I do not want to go too much into the energy, you know, and I want to make three important points. When I heard the Member for Arima shamelessly speak about gas production and oil production—when we left office, Mr. Speaker, we were on almost 80,000 barrels of oil. And then in the 2015 Budget, Diego Martin North/East, page 15, stands up and says, "That level is of concern to us." Because he thought that he would have gotten more. Do you know, under St. Ann's West, in 2024 and 2025, oil production dropped to below 50,000 for the first time in this country's history since becoming a Republic. So, do not come here and talk about energy when you crashed it, alright? You will get up and talk about how you know how to run energy. You failed in the deep-water bid rounds twice, Mr. Speaker, twice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: Twice. It took—up to today, Oropouche East will tell you, it is he who is resurrecting and fixing those deeper, those deep-water bid rounds, Mr. Speaker. I want to turn to leadership. I want to turn to investor confidence, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: The big bit.

Mr. W. Morris: The big bit. [*Laughter*] You see, Arima and the disciples will come here, like Judas, to tell you the world is falling. They want to tell you, "The world—nobody is attracted to Trinidad and Tobago's economy anymore". But I want to set the record straight. Thanks to the Member of Parliament for Siparia, the Prime Minister of this country, investors are not buying the rubbish of the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: The IMF is not buying it. Moody's is not buying it. The World Bank is not buying it. Right?

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: I want to put three important things. If the economy was not booming, or on the path to recovery, the World Bank would never come to this country to set up its headquarters.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: Ask CAF. The World Bank came because of the Member for Siparia. Let us go again, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year, a $1 billion bond. The Minister of Finance did that. You know why? Because investors have confidence in this country. Now, Mr. Speaker, I was fortunate, thanks to the Member for Siparia, Prime Minister, who led the official delegation to the UN twice. This is not like Arima, "who does run up there and give herself ah medal, go in ah roti

shop, go in the subway and come back and say she went UN, eh". This is a real, real UN delegation.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: She does give herself a medal?

Mr. W. Morris: Yeah, "she does give herself a medal", go and get roti, go on the subway and say leadership. Right?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. W. Morris: When the Prime Minister went up to New York, she had a number of meetings, but I was asked to represent at one of the investors' meetings. And, Mr. Speaker, the investors asked, why must we invest in Trinidad and Tobago? Now, I heard Diego Martin North/East, in a debate previously, when he spoke about how he is angry that they are raising the age for alcohol and marijuana, because that is our culture and it will affect tourism. Investors and tourism do not care about those futile things. They care about opportunity and security, and thanks to the Member for Siparia, this country has the lowest crime rate, our borders are protected, and thanks to her work with the Member for Tabaquite, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, we have the strongest relationship with the United States.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: And that has resulted, Mr. Speaker, it was in the papers, with Santander Bank, one of the banks expressing interest to come to Trinidad in November.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: So, Mr. Speaker, the country must not take on the untruths of the Opposition. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the Office of the Prime Minister.

You see, before this Prime Minister, the OPM was just an administrative place, but now it is a delivery Ministry. And I want to talk about the Diplomatic Centre. For those who are in my age bracket, around 2006 and 2007, you would have seen the construction of the Diplomatic Centre, NAPA and SAPA, all in one. While the country was suffering, the "King" built up those things. Well, he played the election and of course, Siparia beat him.

But, Mr. Speaker, for years, the people of this country were not allowed to benefit or even see what their tax dollars have built. Under the Member for Siparia, we now have what you call the delivery centre, because the Member for Siparia, the Prime Minister, is not about a lavish life. She is about delivery. And in that delivery centre, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister launched the prosthetic limb programme. Right there, hundreds of people benefited from prosthetic limbs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: Right in that delivery centre, Minister Hosein launched his first batch of leases to over 200 Caroni farmers; denied for a decade by the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: And in that delivery centre, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South, Minister of Public Utilities, ensured over 600 Bmobile interns were employed, giving young people an opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: So, Mr. Speaker, that is the leadership of the Member of Parliament for Siparia. And I want to highlight something. Leadership is not walking all over the place and saying, "We oppose." I want to tell the Member for Arima one thing. I saw you found yourself in Mayaro recently.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. W. Morris: I want to let you know, Arima, you won your seat by 699 votes. I won Mayaro by 6,984 votes. You should walk Arima and not Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: Do not waste time in Mayaro.

Hon. Member: Brian would be happy to hear about that.

Mr. W. Morris: Brian, yeah, yeah, he might be happy for that. [*Laughter*] Right? But, Mr. Speaker, I speak about leadership, because leadership is compassion, Mr. Speaker. I heard Arima talk about chairmen of boards resigning and this and that. Tell us about Malcolm Jones. Do not ever forget Malcolm Jones, your favourite board chairman, who crushed Petrotrin.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. W. Morris: But, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Prime Minister. No other political party has come in this Parliament with so many young people. Today, that is leadership.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: I want to turn to my constituency now, Mr. Speaker, because it ties in with the budget. It ties in with the budget. On the campaign trail, the Prime Minister said to us, "It is about reversing rural neglect." And after 18 months, I thank the Prime Minister for her support for rural constituencies and communities. Because when I look at this budget, Mr. Speaker—and I heard the Minister of Finance speak about the desal plant. For decades—decades—Mayaro has been asking for a better water supply. Thanks to the Member of Siparia, we are getting a desal plant and two tank farms. That is reversing rural neglect.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, I saw St. Ann's West also found himself in Mayaro

recently. And I am happy he went there because I want him to see what Siparia and Oropouche East is doing with Manatee X. I want him to see what they have robbed Mayaro of in the last 10 years. You see, and I say robbed. The Mayaro constituency, Mr. Speaker, Guayaguayare, Biche, Rio Claro, Kernaham, has provided resources for this country: oil and gas. But yet, under them, Mr. Speaker, they robbed the young people of that constituency of that opportunity. Only yesterday, Wednesday, sorry—only Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, thanks to Minister Phillip Watts, YTEPP has returned to the Mayaro constituency for the first time in 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: In 10 years, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member of Parliament for Couva South. T&TEC trucks are in the Mayaro constituency every single week fixing lights. You might feel that is a very trivial point. But for years, when you talk about Diego Martin and Diego Martin not getting, for years, you abandoned the people of Mayaro. They were not even worth a streetlight.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: And today, thanks to Couva South and Siparia, we are getting streetlights. Security. The Prime Minister, because you see an energy renaissance, an energy revolution is coming to this country, thanks to Siparia. And the Mayaro constituency has a big role in that. And one of the first acts the Prime Minister did was to ensure security and safety for Mayaro. We were grateful that out of six fire trucks, we got one in April 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: But then the Prime Minister did not stop there. In the allocated

30 police posts, Mayaro constituency was also earmarked for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, today, I want to thank the Minister. And you see, it might seem rhetorical, by saying I want to thank, I want to thank. But when you represent a constituency that meant nothing to them because we were past the lighthouse, that meant nothing to them because we never voted for them. I feel passionate about it. Because we cannot reverse 10 years of neglect in one month, in one year or two years. But we have created that pathway. And I thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure "til" the point that I actually say, "Minister, you are paving again in Mayaro?"

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Morris: I say again, you are paving in Mayaro. The Minister of Local Government, two major landslips abandoned. There is a place called Ecclesville, Mr. Speaker. And I have to say this. Do you know that stretch of road, which will usually take you 10 minutes to drive, takes an hour because there are 19 landslips on that road, 19.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. W. Morris: Because you on that side took money and never helped rural communities.

12.40 p.m.

But Mr. Speaker, we are grateful to our Prime Minister for reversing rural neglect.

I want to speak about two entities, you know, Mr. Speaker, before I wrap under the OPM. *TTT*. You know, Mr. Speaker, and I want to put it on record here today. They almost caused *TTT* to become Petrotrin 2.0. *TTT* is a gem in this

country. For years we have grown up looking at *Mastana Bahar*, *Twelve and Under*, *Scouting for Talent*—

Mr. Lee: *Rikki Tikki*.

Hon. W. Morris: "Nah, nah, Caroni Central dat is before my time". *Rikki Tikki* is before my time. But you saw it, so that is the proof. *TTT* has crossed generations. But do you know, Mr. Speaker, *TTT* is in our financial position today not because of poor management by this Government, you know. I was shocked, Mr. Speaker, and one day I asked the *TTT* management: "Why are you not showing the World Cup scores?" They said, "Minister, *TTT* does not show any international shows or sports". "Ah say wey yuh mean international"? A decision was made for *TTT* to only show local, yes, local, right, local. I asked myself, why would *TTT* only show local stuff? You know why? Because if you do not invest in equipment for *TTT*, its production will go down, and if you take out the international show on *TTT*, its viewership goes down.

But what happens? What happens is there might be stations owned by friends and financiers that will benefit. Today I pose the question: Were you stifling *TTT* to ensure other stations owned by friends and financiers were benefiting? I put that question to you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: So, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Hon. W. Morris: Yeah. I want to conclude by saying one thing. We have heard that the Leader of the Opposition continues to say that T&T is in a recession. We are not in a recession, Mr. Speaker. The agencies have all given us a stroke of confidence, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: The IMF, Moody's, S&P; the World Bank is here. Today, I want to say thanks to Siparia, Trinidad and Tobago is back in full glory on the global stage.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: The leader of the UNC. "Ah know alyuh does get frighten when we say leader of the UNC". She is leader of the UNC, and the Prime Minister was corrected every big call. In CARICOM, she was vindicated. On the fight against narco trafficking, vindicated.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: SOE vindicated. SOB vindicated. Now that has led to be coming full glory on the international stage. I want to say that thanks to Siparia Trinidad and Tobago is open for business, and you are seeing that the steel plant is back, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Banks are coming. Ever so often, they are touring the refinery. The energy industry, they were rolling it out of ICU because it was dead. Thanks to Siparia's championing on the global stage and division of Siparia and the work of Oropouche East and Minister Kesar as well, the energy sector is back in full gear—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris:—and we also acknowledge the Chairman of the NGC because the NGC, for the first time in a while, made a very big profit. They also paid dividends, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, gone are the days of daily bloodshed. Crime is down; you are feeling safer. Mr. Speaker, people are feeling safer in their homes. Children are safe in their schools. We are probably buying less body bags; you know why? Because we have saved our citizens. Hundreds have been saved, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: It is irresponsible and reckless to accuse Minister Tancoo of misleading the IMF. We are not Diego Martin North/East.

Caroni Central remember, it had a media review when he did not like what Moody's and S&P say, so he had to go and hire Fitch. I think it was Fitch. "Dey come to"—[*Inaudible*]—"hire Fitch because he didn't like what de two say". Minister Tancoo has nothing to mislead because the economy is recovering and performing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Today the Leader of the Opposition must apologize to the IMF. The IMF is not a PNM party group, you know. It is an international agency, and how can you accuse the IMF and their professionals of being misled? You should be ashamed, and you will never be Prime Minister in this country.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. W. Morris: Yeah, it is insulting that these officials, their professional characters, come into question. Mr. Speaker, there is a lot more to be said because this Government performs every single day. But we have moved from recession to progression.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: We have moved from hopeless to hopeful.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: Mr. Speaker, I forgot the main thing I wanted to say, and I have one minute to say it. I want you to go and pull down the EY—every year EY and PriceWaterhouseCoopers, they give a review. I will just have to paraphrase. But the EY on page six, because I remember the page. Page six, their tax leader said, "promise made, promise kept".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Morris: The EY spoke about Mr. Tancoo's achievements with his—go and read it. The EY has endorsed parts of this budget. So today, when you stand with your ChatGPT speech or one that was created by Diego Martin North/East, or Arouca/Lopinot, or St Ann's West, Arima, do not tread that path. You may never be as dynamic as Siparia, but do not go down the path of poor data, poor vision, no consultation, and wasting everyone's time in this Parliament.

So, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of Mayaro, on behalf of the Government, this budget is sound, it is safe and it is going to build this country. I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Mausica/Malabar I recognize you, but having regard to the time, and I know today is the funeral of the Mighty Sparrow, I propose to suspend further sitting until 4.00 p.m., to allow all Members the time to attend the funeral.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: So, we will suspend now, we will resume at 4.00 p.m., and well we will recognize Mausica/Malaba. Thank you all very much.

12.46 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*

Mr. Speaker: I think when we took the break, I had recognized the Member for

Malabar/Mausica.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dominic Romain (*Malabar/Mausica*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me and affording me the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Mr. Speaker, permit me to begin by congratulating the Member for Arima on her excellent response today—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain:—that I think aptly captured everything that was wrong with this year's budget statement, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, two days ago I had the opportunity to have a conversation with businessman Robert Amar. He opined that perhaps the best response to this year's budget statement was no response at all. Apart from the fact that there is not much to respond to as opposed to last year—I mean, last year was rubbish, but, you know, there was at least more to respond to than this year. He also said, Mr. Speaker, that no matter what we say on this side, it is not going to change anything because the numbers are in favour of that side and the budget is going to pass anyway. Mr. Speaker, I want to agree with him a bit. But I think the best response to this year's budget statement would have been for us to move a Motion to have this House observe 45 minutes of silence for the death of the economy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: And thereafter, Mr. Speaker, just have the Minister wind up—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, the title of this year's budget statement is: A People-Centred Approach: Investing in Communities, Transforming the Economy and Securing a Sustainable Future. I think a more apt title for this budget should

have been: "Standing Order 55(1)b: Tedious Repetition".

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

Mr. D. Romain: Tedious repetition of promises that we heard last year. Promises to reopen the refinery. Promises to create thousands of jobs. Promises to bring in millions and billions of dollars in foreign direct investment, Mr. Speaker. All of which, these promises are yet to come to fruition. Also, tedious repetition of "blame de PNM". "Blame de PNM and blame de PNM."

Mr. Speaker, I recall during the election campaign the Member for Siparia, in the latter stages whenever she came to the Monday night forum meetings, used to come with a book titled: "The PNM Playbook." It used to read: Page 1, Blame the UNC. Page 2, Blame the UNC some more. Page 3, Blame Kamla. Page 4, Blame Kamla some more. Page 5, Blame the UNC. It seems they have developed their own playbook. The UNC playbook: Blame PNM. Blame PNM some more. Blame the former, former, Dr. Rowley. Blame the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Blame the PNM some more, Mr. Speaker. Not much else.

But, Mr. Speaker, before I get into my contribution with respect to the statement, permit me to respond to a few things that were mentioned by the Member for Mayaro. He is a good guy. I will call him a friend.

Mr. Manning: Misguided.

Mr. D. Romain: Yes. Misguided—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain:—you know. Poor soul. He does not get too many opportunities to speak in this Chamber. So, of course, when the opportunity does present itself, he has to seize upon it, Mr. Speaker, to impress the Member for Siparia. Of course, he attempted to do that today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yes. But apparently, he did not get the memo, you know. He talked about the office of the OPM, which is where he is based. It being a delivery Ministry, and so on. But like he did not get the memo with respect to the recent reassignments of duties, portfolios, you know. A lot of which went to the Member for Barataria/San Juan. So, it seems that "he probably trying to get back in de good graces nah".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: Whatever caused him to lose some of those responsibilities. But he said quite a bit, Mr. Speaker. One of the things he said was, "We do not come with ChatGPT and made-up facts".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: "He say dat, boy?"

Mr. D. Romain: "Man say dat, yes. With ah straight face, you know." Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage the Member for Mayaro. Perhaps he should acquaint himself with ChatGPT—

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

Mr. D. Romain:—as I did. Had he done so, he would not have made the statement that in the decade that the last administration was in office, that there were no deposits to the HSF. So, I will tell him what ChatGPT said—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain:—in 2022, US $342.6 million—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain:—or TT $2.3 billion was deposited into HSF. The deposits were September 2022, US $164 million; December 2022, US $182 million; total

deposited, US $346.2 million or approximately TT $2.3 billion.

Mr. Birchwood: "Dat sounding like money."

Mr. D. Romain: Yes. That was also the year, Mr. Speaker, the country would have experienced a budget surplus. The first and only in the last, I think, 14 years or so. Thanks to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, and the war between Ukraine and Russia too.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yes. Yes. But you see, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Lee: [*Interruption*]

Mr. D. Romain:—anyway. The Member indicated there were no deposits. But we have established—this is not the first time that the Member opposite has made this statement, and it is not the first time that I have had the privilege to correct that piece of misinformation. Every time it is raised, we will do so on this side. Every single time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: The Member spoke about the current HSF balance. That it grew from $5.9 billion when they came into office in May of 2025, to now, I believe, $6.5 billion. Also, the Minister of Finance would have made a similar statement in the budget statement, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, come on. "Playing smart with foolishness." The Government knows full well that they had absolutely nothing to do with that increase, right. Nothing. All of that increase that they are seeking to take credit for, Mr. Speaker, is essentially interest on investment income. They know that. I wish the Member could have attempted to fool us into believing that they somehow had something to do with that. But we know better.

He sought to pour scorn, Mr. Speaker, on NAPA and SAPA, the Diplomatic Centre and the PNM's construction of same. "Well, is ah good thing" that we built the Diplomatic Centre, Mr. Speaker, that they have a place every week to hold Cabinet meetings. It is a good thing we built NAPA, Mr. Speaker, where many of us just came from, so that we had a facility that could provide the late Slinger Francisco with the send-off that he so richly and truly deserved.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, the Member also said that the PNM gave nothing and did nothing for Mayaro because they never voted for them. Meaning, they never voted for the PNM. Mr. Speaker, clearly, the Member for Mayaro is not familiar with the history of his constituency because if he was, he would know that for the period of 2002 to 2007, the constituency of Mayaro was represented by Franklin Khan, PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Khan could not have represented Mayaro unless the people voted for the PNM.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yes. He also made mention, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Siparia would have resurrected the Dragon gas deal, after declaring it dead, Mr. Speaker, on the 3rd of May, 2025, when she was being interviewed by members of the media after the swearing in of the Cabinet. I want to tell the Member for Mayaro, the only resurrection the Member for Siparia would have engaged in or achieved in the last 18 months was the corpses that were resurrected from the political cemetery and given high office in the Cabinet.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: He spoke about TTT Limited—well, the work that TTT Limited is doing. TTT Limited, Mr. Speaker, under this Government, has become an echo chamber for UNC propaganda. In particular, 91.1 radio station, which is populated by persons who were previously social media activists who assisted this Government in getting into office by spreading misinformation and disinformation throughout the election campaign. It seems, in reward for the work that they did, many of them now find themselves as radio talk show hosts from 6.00 every morning until 8.00 at night, Mr. Speaker. I do not know. I think TTT Limited might fall under the Member. As I said, the Member is a good guy but, as we said, just misguided, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I intend to spend most of my contribution focusing on the credibility issues in this particular budget statement. Because there was a lot said, Mr. Speaker, that I believe requires some level of clarity. The budget statement, Mr. Speaker, hit a crescendo very, very early on, page 17—or was it—page 10, I believe, in the budget statement, when the Minister would have announced an increase in social grants of $250 per month. Now, as the Member for Arima would have indicated and I want to endorse that, Mr. Speaker, that we on this side, we support any increase in the social safety net to assist those citizens who are less fortunate. Because, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that "out dey hard". "De place hard." We keep hearing people saying that.

The characterization of this increase, Mr. Speaker—so, again, it is perhaps the one thing I can commend the Government for doing. But the characterization of this increase, Mr. Speaker, by many of the intended beneficiaries has been, you know: "Thank God for small mercies". "It will fill ah hole. It better dan nothing." So, they would see how it could help. But when we look at, Mr. Speaker, the cost

of living in Trinidad and Tobago today, you may ask the question is that enough? Well, we understand the financial constraints under which the Government is operating, so it is perhaps the best that they could do right now, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know, the budget is not good when the President General of the OWTU bolted out of the Parliament immediately after the budget statement was read.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: As if he was being chased by a warrant officer for nonpayment of child maintenance, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. D. Romain: "Pass de media like ah full bus." Mr. Speaker, you know the budget was bad when you have recent National Award recipient Dr. Indira Rampersad, sitting on a panel, on a post-budget analysis on the evening news, if you want to call it that, who, when a question was put to her for her views or her opinion of the budget, immediately pivoted to next year's mid-year review, as if to say the shortcomings in this year's budget statement could be buffered in 9 months' time with the mid-year review. Acknowledging that there are a lot of shortcomings here, Mr. Speaker, and it would need to be supported by the mid-year review.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, the final way that you know the budget was bad is when you had two Ministers in the Ministry of Finance and neither one of them showed up at, what I consider to be, a time-honoured tradition, the TTMA's post-budget breakfast meeting, which is the first stop after the reading of the budget, where the Minister of Finance would visit, Mr. Speaker, to promote, to defend and to provide clarity with measures in the budget and to speak to and to get the support of what is perhaps, the largest business association in the country. Both gentlemen

were mysteriously absent, Mr. Speaker. I think the only place I have seen the Minister of Finance so far—

Mr. Manning: "Not answering their phone when de media calling."

Mr. D. Romain:—yeah. Not answering their phone. I think the only place I have seen the Minister of Finance, so far—I might be wrong—was on TTT.

Hon. Member: TTT.

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah. The only television station that they give interviews to, Members of the Government.

Mr. Marcelle: He sent them the questions.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: That is sounding like the Sunday morning press conferences they used to have. You know, you give Kirk Meighoo some questions to pretend he is a journalist.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, the budget statement was read against a backdrop or against a background of an economy that is struggling, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I recall last year in the budget presentation, the Member for Fyzabad used the term "crashed economy" several times. I thought he would have repeated it again this year. I know he did not use it while I was awake.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: But maybe the couple times that I dozed off, I do not know if he used it but—

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

Mr. D. Romain:—you know. I consulted, again, ChatGPT to get an idea of what constitutes a crashed economy. What are some of the characteristics of a crashed

economy, Mr. Speaker? Here is what ChatGPT said:

> "Widespread Business Failures…Rising Unemployment and Underemployment…Failing Purchasing Power…Currency Instability…Banking and Credit Difficulties…Collapse in Investment…Severe Government Financial Pressure…Rising Poverty and Inequality..."

Several of these characteristics, Mr. Speaker, apply to the Trinidad and Tobago economy today. But, of course, the Member for Fyzabad would not say that the economy is crashed.

Let me just give you some of the headlines, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, characterize the economy that we live in today:

"World Bank report: T&T economy to decline in 2026"

This was October 7th. T&T *Guardian*:

> "Contractors complain about delays in payment, slow work from State bodies"—six days ago—
>
> "Economists warn of slowing growth, rising pressures"—six days ago—"Proman Issues Retrenchment Notices To About 100 Workers In Nine Per Cent Trinidad Workforce Reduction"—Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago—

"Courts: T&T slower than usual, but chain confident of turnaround"

There is nothing in this year's budget statement, Mr. Speaker, that seeks to adequately address any of those headlines that I just read there. In fact, what we could look forward to is more of that. So, as the Minister said, "Promise made, promise kept, more to come". More to come indeed. But these are not the type of headlines that we want to see going forward, Mr. Speaker. We hoped that this

year's budget would have been able to treat with that. In fact, on Sunday night, I heard on the news that the Minister said the PNM was going to hate this budget. Knowing that we are heading into an election year, I thought, "Well, right"! "You know. Dey coming with something good. Goodies." I was sorely disappointed, Mr. Speaker. Sorely, sorely disappointed. But, then again, what can we expect from this Government?

Mr. Speaker, permit me to refer to page 10 of the budget statement. It reads: "We saved the National Insurance Fund from collapse: The former Administration brought the National Insurance Fund to the point of collapse, having to sell off its assets to meet monthly bills. This means that the NIB would have been able to pay retirement, maternity, sickness, survivors' benefits and funeral grants. We have extended the life of the Fund by more than a decade. We promised. We delivered. More to come!"

Mr. Speaker, permit me to interrogate that bold claim for a bit. Because the Minister of Finance made heavy weather of the situation at the NIS, which prompted or warranted, you know, urgent intervention; otherwise, the sky would have fallen, and the National Insurance Fund would have collapsed.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote from the 9th Actuarial Review for the NIB Fund. I will just speak to:

"The main Short and Long-term Recommendations

- Increase the Maximum Insurable Earnings...limit from $12,000 to $13,600
- Contribution rate should be increased to 13.2 % in 2016, from 12%.
- Maintain the present level of minimum pension at $3,000 and be indexed at a rate slower than the other parameter no earlier than 2017

- System parameters (MIE, minimum pension and contribution rate) should be automatically adjusted."

The:

"Long-term Measure

- The retirement age for an unreduced pension should be gradually increased from age 60 to…65 over the period 2025 to 2060."

Over a 36-year period, Mr. Speaker. This is the 9th Actuarial Review of the NIB. It does not paint, you know, the dire picture that the Minister would have sought to paint. While it advocated an increase in the retirement age from 60 to 65 over a 36- year period, apparently the Minister misread the memo and thought that they said to do it by 2036. So, over the course of the next nine years, Mr. Speaker, because one has already done, we bear in mind the fact that the minimum pension at age 60 for NIS is going to be reduced by $100 every two years until 2036.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the $250 increase in the senior citizens' grant that the Minister has provided, we see that going forward, from 2028 onward, that $250 really is just going to supplement for those persons who will qualify for the NIS pension and the senior citizens' grant, simply to make up for what they will lose as they retire from 2028 onward and the minimum pension is reduced by $100, Mr. Speaker. So, really and truly, there is not going to be any improvement for those persons who are looking forward to their retirement and with inflation and the cost of living, it is likely to be even worse then, than it is now.

4.20 p.m.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Minister indicated, in the face of this, that the last administration did absolutely nothing. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr.

Speaker, because the long-term measure in this Ninth Actuarial Review states:

This recommendation—

—and that is the recommendation to increase the retirement age from 60 to 65:

—will require extensive consultation with all stakeholders.

And they put it in bold, Mr. Speaker. We take note of the fact that this administration did no consultation, Mr. Speaker, before implementing this particular measure. Perhaps they had no reason to because the PNM did it.

In 2022, the Member for San Fernando East, as Minister in the Ministry of Finance, conducted several consultations, Mr. Speaker, with major stakeholders, such as unions and the like, and different bodies, to be able to, as this recommended, get their views on this to determine the best way forward. But the claim, Mr. Speaker, that they rescued the NIB from collapse, that they had to sell off assets to meet monthly bills—Mr. Speaker, let me speak to that, to one of those assets that was sold in 2022, I believe it was—2023.

Mr. Speaker, a restaurant by the name of Tamnak Thai, Apsara, why was that sold? Not to get money to pay bills, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell the national population. The National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago purchased the Queen's Park East property housing Tamnak Thai, Apsara and Siam Nightclub in May 2014, for $37 million. That was under them.

The valuation discrepancies: An independent audit later revealed that the NIB ignored internal guidelines and severe overvaluation warnings.

Independent market valuation: An independent valuation conducted by Linden Scott & Associates Limited placed the actual open market value of the property at just $16.5 million.

The overpayment: The NIB paid $20.5 million premium over the market

value. The independent valuator assigned zero value to the existing buildings, noting that they were over 60 years old and had outlived their economic usefulness.

Square footage premium: NIB paid an unprecedented $2,014 per square foot, which was significantly higher than any other property transactions taking place around the Queen's Park Savannah at that time. Mr. Speaker, this is information that was borne out of a joint select committee of the Parliament.

Flawed deal structure: The deal was heavily criticized as it was executed without independent valuation by the NIB prior to purchase, taking the seller's asking price from RM Holdings entirely at the face value. On top of the $37 million purchase price, NIB spent an additional $5 million of taxpayers' contributions on repairs before immediately leasing the property back to the original owners. This is after paying them $37 million.

The aftermath: The transaction ultimately resulted in heavy losses for the state provider.

Eviction: The tenants fell into severe rental arrears, accumulating roughly $4 million in debt, leading the NIB to seize the property and permanently close the restaurants in March of 2021.

Resale at a loss: After sitting vacant for over two years, the property was sold to the petrochemical company, Proman—the same Proman that just had to send home over 100 workers—in September 2023, for $20.5 million, effectively crystallizing a massive loss on the original $37 million investment. Mr. Speaker, that is what the PNM inherited from the People's Partnership Government. So, when they make the claim—when the Minister makes the claim that they rescued the NIB from collapse, it is collapse that was initiated under their regime, Mr.

Speaker. We see now, Mr. Speaker, that a similar rescue might be required very soon based on what is currently taking place at the National Insurance Board.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if you rescue a man from a burning house and throw him into raging floods, is that really a rescue?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, I am reading here from a *Guardian* newspaper article just about a month ago—I will not read everything. I will just quote the more salient points:

> "On Monday, September 14, two things happened that have given this commentator pause. Firstly, the top two executives of NIB—executive director Niala Persad-Poliah and deputy executive director Andy Edwards—announced that they would be proceeding on early retirement as at December 13, 2026."

So, they gave the requisite notice.

> "The fact that both of them are in their early fifties and they both submitted letters to NIB chair, Judy Kalloo, announcing a desire to retire early strikes…as being a strange coincidence."

One is 52, the other one is 50, Mr. Speaker, and they choose to retire; the prime of their professional lives. Coincidence? Okay. Who does that?

> "Stranger yet…also on September 14, was what can only be described as a whistleblower letter from someone who describes themselves as a concerned NIB insider. The NIB whistleblower raised nine areas of concern, including: board composition and suitability; alleged compliance irregularity; procurement and potential conflicts of interest and the use of personal email accounts for NIB business. 'There are concerns that the board's investment

committee has not been convened since the appointment of the current board.'"

Mr. Speaker, this article is just a month old. The current Board of the NIB was appointed in August last year. So, for over a year, the investment committee has not met, and this Government was so concerned about the financial state of the NIB? What is happening with the moneys that they would have collected over the past year, or the past nine months, or so, Mr. Speaker, with the increase in contribution rates, which is supposed to be increased again in January? It goes on to say, Mr. Speaker:

"'This is particularly concerning given the statutory responsibilities assigned to the committee under section 24(1) of the National Insurance Act, which states an investment committee shall be convened comprising the chairman, executive director, chief financial officer and three other Board members nominated by the Minister, Business and Labour respectively.

'Given the size and importance of the…'"—NIB—"'…the absence of a functioning investment committee would raise significant questions regarding investment governance, oversight and compliance with the statutory framework,' according to the whistleblower."

Mr. Speaker, it is to be noted that since this article was published, we have heard nothing from the line Minister in respect of this. We have heard nothing from the leadership of NIBTT, whether it is that they seek to debunk this, Mr. Speaker, or indicate what action is going to be taken to address this. So, if this is not fixed very soon, Mr. Speaker, the Government may need to perform another rescue, as stated on page 10 of the—

Hon. Member: What about the toilet paper factory.

Mr. D. Romain: Toilet paper factory?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. D. Romain: I will touch on it briefly because the toilet paper factory is in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. The toilet paper factory, you know what it is called? Grand Bay Paper, one of my proud corporate constituents that has been hiring a lot, Mr. Speaker, of my constituents who would have lost their jobs since this Government came into office.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: They boast about how they care about—"This is a people's budget," and they care about the people. Let me tell you about that, Mr. Speaker. The last administration provided not a loan, as the Member for Barataria/San Juan would have stated in this Chamber some time ago. They provided a loan guarantee of $5 million for this company, Mr. Speaker, because you know why? They were facing closure. Well, the new entity that had purchased that business, Mr. Speaker, when they came in, they would have inherited some debts, and they needed some sort of assistance to treat with that, to operate the business. They got a loan guarantee from the Exim Bank, Mr. Speaker, of $5 million.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of that, they were able to save over 400 jobs. Today, every time I pass along the dual carriageway, Mr. Speaker, and I look inside there, I see 20-foot and 40-foot containers, ready to leave with product; employment, GDP, contribution to GDP. But the Member—the Minister for Trade, Investment and Tourism came and did a tour of that business just a few weeks ago, in case the Member for Barataria/San Juan does not know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: He did not even have the courtesy to invite me as the—

[*Inaudible*] He was there, so let him tell you. If there are any issues there, let him tell you why he saw it fit to go there and to sing their praises. There is a video.

Mr. Birchwood: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. D. Romain: Right. Let me continue.

Mr. Speaker, page 17, "Labour Market Developments and Demand": We have heard the dangerous claims repeated from the other side that 60,000 people have lost their jobs under this Government. The facts tell a different story. Here is what the facts are, Mr. Speaker:

> "In the first quarter of 2026, 5,100 more persons were employed compared to the first quarter of 2025, bringing the total employed to 564,000.
>
> …the Labour Force Participation Rate also increased to 55.1 per cent, compared to 54.3 percent under the PNM.
>
> This Budget will create an explosion of economic activities, hyper-growth, and a boom in job opportunities."

Mr. Speaker, you know, every time that issue of how many persons have lost their jobs since this administration came in, every time that issue comes up, they always seek to play semantics with CSO data, telling you about the labour force participation rate and comparing year on year.

4.30 p.m.

But you know what they never do, Mr. Speaker? Not one of them on that side, not one of them have ever gotten up and said it is not 60,000, it is 40, or it is not 40, it is 50. They will never give you an exact figure, you know why? Because whatever the figure is, even if what we proffer or what we put on the record is an

overestimation, which we do not believe it is, but even if it is, whatever the actual figure is, it is an indictment and an embarrassment for this Government, that is why they will never put it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: We are still early in the debate. I challenge any one of them who is going to come after to get up and tell us the exact figure. Mr. Speaker, the Minister quoted for the second time, last year, he introduced that figure into the budget debate, that under the PNM, 70,600 persons were fired. Since then, Mr. Speaker, two of his Cabinet colleagues, the Member for Couva South, the Minister of Public Utilities and the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, came here on the 18th of June, "CSO say," this is not the UNC, "CSO say, 64,200". You know, the Minister comes back and "say 70,600 again"? Clearly, he needs to have some sort of conversation with his colleagues, so you all could decide, is it 70,600 or 64,200? Because, as they say, 10,000 Frenchmen cannot be wrong and right now, he is outnumbered, so he needs to fix that, Mr. Speaker. But again, it speaks to the issue of credibility, this Government has a serious credibility problem when it comes to quoting statistics and data, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker.

But there was something that I was hoping the Minister would have addressed under that heading:

"Labour Market Developments and Demand"—which he did not. So I will introduce it for him, Mr. Speaker, permit me:

"CSO records nearly 6,000 job losses in the first quarter of 2026."

This, Mr. Speaker, after several Members opposite were singing loudly in here and outside, 8,000 jobs were created in the last quarter of 2025, 8,000 jobs, the "CSO

say so. One quarter later, eh":

"CSO records nearly 6,000 job losses in the first quarter of 2026."

They have been uncharacteristically silent on that, Mr. Speaker, save and except for two people. The Minister of Planning, when he was approached by the media for comment on that:

"Swaratsingh: First quarter job losses reflect seasonal trend"

"Leh meh read it for dem", Mr. Speaker, in case they did not see it.

> "Planning Minister Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh says, the nearly 6,000 jobs lost during the first three months of 2026 should not be viewed in isolation, arguing that the decline reflects a recurring post-Christmas employment pattern and does not by itself signal a weakening labour market.
>
> While not disputing the CSO figures, Swaratsingh said the more appropriate comparison was between the first quarter of 2025 and the corresponding period in 2026.
>
> Swaratsingh was responding to"—the—"Guardian Media reporting on the Central Statistical Office's (CSO) latest Labour Force Survey, which showed that the number of employed people fell by almost 6,000 between the fourth quarter of 2025...first quarter of 2026."

So while they were boasting about these 8,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker, it seems that it was just seasonal employment between Christmas and Carnival. Yeah, but that is not the impression they were giving, you know, creating so many jobs. But that is what the Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development said, it was just seasonal job losses.

But the Prime Minister had a different take. Because when the media interviewed her, Mr. Speaker, it was reported that the Prime Minister said, no, no,

the cause for those job losses is because it reflects our success in the fight against drug trafficking. And that all those jobs were lost because the companies that they were working for, Mr. Speaker, were fronts for the drug cartel, and now that "dey" not getting the drugs, these businesses are forced to close, and, of course, people are out of work. I am confused. Should I listen to the Prime Minister, or should I listen to the Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development/Minister in the Ministry of Finance?

Mr. de Nobriga: What is option C?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: None.

Mr. D. Romain: None of the above. But he goes on to talk about, again, this comparison, as I said, they are playing semantics with CSO data, Mr. Speaker. Because he cautioned that comparing the final quarter of one year with the opening quarter of the next without accounting for seasonal employment could give an incomplete assessment of the labour market. But here is what the CSO said. It says here, Mr. Speaker, that:

> "Apart from the 5,100 year-on-year increase in employment, the national labour force expanded"—so it is saying—"by approximately 8,200, indicating"

More people are seeking to re-enter the job market. But Swaratsingh said:

> "Businesses typically recruit additional workers to meet increased consumer demand during Christmas"—and—"he said many of those temporary positions are coming to an end in the early New Year."

Okay. So we will leave that there. Mr. Speaker, page 25 of the budget speech, *Public Sector Investment Programme*. In fiscal 2020—no, before I go there:

"The asset levy on banks and insurance companies generated $397 million." And that is all the Minister tells us about that. Last year's budget statement projected an annual take of some $575 million, so, of course, there is a shortfall. But it is interesting, Mr. Speaker, that even matched with that shortfall, that this asset levy on the banks and insurance companies, which the Minister said was in part motivated by how the banks operate, that they take in deposits of their customers and, you know, they pay very little to no interest. It suggests it might have been a measure to, as they say, because nothing is to raise revenue, no, it is about fixing the system. Suggests that it is meant to punish the banks, but I do not know. But even, Mr. Speaker, with this reduced take, it has had consequences on the profits of the banks. State-owned First Citizens:

> "First Citizens' profits dipped 10.2 %.
>
> Majority State-owned First Citizens Group financial Holdings yesterday reported after-tax profit..."—$649 million—"39 months ended June 30, 2026, a 10.2 per cent decline compared...to the same period last year.
>
> First Citizens chairman, Shankar Bidaisee, said the group continued to demonstrate its financial strength and resilience during the period despite a more challenging operating environment."

Hear this:

> "He explained: 'While higher credit impairment charges, rising funding costs, tightening liquidity conditions and the introduction of the commercial asset levy applicable to licensed financial institutions weighed on"—the—"earnings during the period"—though—"the group remained well capitalised,'"

So the Chairman of the FCB, UNC-appointed, is telling us that this asset levy is

negatively impacting the returns of the bank, Mr. Speaker, negatively impacting it.

So we know that the Minister indicated that he is going to be bringing out NIF 3 very soon, that was promised last year too, so we wait to see if it will be fulfilled this year. And I think I saw somewhere where it was mentioned that they will probably put some more FCB shares into that. But persons need to be mindful who are considering investing in that, Mr. Speaker and this one is not a Ponzi scheme, I guess, as they were told the other two, Mr. Speaker. That this asset levy, of course, is going to have a negative impact on the returns and the dividend payments that persons who invest in this NIF 3 are going to be getting. But it is not just FCB, Scotiabank:

> "Scotiabank Trinidad and Tobago Limited has reported an after-tax income of $449 million for the nine months ended July 2026, representing a 15 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2025.
>
> According to the financial institution's latest disclosures, the $82 million reduction in profitability for the period is primarily attributed to the newly introduced regulatory Total Asset Tax, which took effect in January 2026 as part of the national budget measures."

And I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that the other banks, have probably not reported yet, would be facing similar circumstances. Republic Bank, which the large majority is owned by the state, Mr. Speaker, and is also in, I think, NIF 1 or NIF 2, I "cyah remember" which one, Mr. Speaker. That too is going to have an impact on the returns of those funds. So we should be concerned about that, Mr. Speaker. But, again, all the Ministers sought to put in here is that:

> "The asset levy of the banks and insurance companies generated $397 million."

I have not been able to locate any reporting from the insurance companies, but again, I suppose that they too would be facing similar circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, the "Public Sector Investment Programme":

"In fiscal 2026, we budgeted approximately $5 billion in capital expenditure, but spent approximately $3 billion, though bills are still coming in.

Of course, this is concerning:

"Early in the year we realised that the PSIP was constrained by significant impediments that compromised execution. This is a legacy problem. Early in the year, we realised that the PSIP was constrained by significant impediments that compromised execution.

This is a legacy problem.

We undertook a review of the PSIP to determine the factors constraining its implementation."

We expected that, Mr. Speaker, that they would blame procurement, and we accept that. Because, contrary to what the Minister said, that the PNM faced the same challenges but did absolutely nothing to treat the problem, again, credibility issues.

4.40 p.m.

We debated the procurement Act just a couple of weeks ago, and it was borne out by Members opposite that the PNM did make amendments to the procurement legislation to treat things like this. And they used it, Mr. Speaker, as leverage to support their decision to make similar exemptions in the legislation and so on. But again, the Minister came here and said we did absolutely nothing.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record that it is not just because of procurement. As it says here, there were a number of issues, and one of them I would be able to identify has been the relatively slow pace at which this

Government has been appointing state boards, Mr. Speaker. In the absence of boards to be able to approve significant spending, a lot of these state enterprises have basically been handcuffed.

Mr. Speaker, I will give you an example. The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago, 18 months later, is still without a full council. No members appointed by Cabinet. So right now, they have been operating in a limp mode for the last 18 months with just four elected members because that council is a hybrid one where you have six appointed members, five by the Cabinet, one on the recommendation of the THA, and four elected from the membership, the over 3,000 membership.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of serving on that council from 2019 to 2025 in the capacity of treasurer. I can tell you we had a very robust, very ambitious PSIP agenda. We did significant work in those six years to transform Nelson Island, which Members of the Government have visited on two occasions since coming into office, and they seem to like what they have there. We turned that into a self-sustaining ecosystem, Mr. Speaker. We were spending a lot of money on bringing water to the island by barge. To be able to treat with that, we outfitted the island with its own desalination plant. We also installed, Mr. Speaker, a tank farm to be able to harness rainwater.

We would have done significant renovations, Mr. Speaker, to the mess hall as well as to the cell block where the prisons are that were used to detain persons during the 1970 uprising. Mr. Speaker, we would have done work with respect to Butler's Cottage where he would have stayed when he was detained on that island, and we turned it into, Mr. Speaker, a studio apartment of sorts that it could be used as an Airbnb for persons who may wish to come and overnight on the island.

There were other projects that we planned to do. I recall every year we used

to ask for anywhere between $2.5 to $6 million under the Member for Trinity/Maloney and also the Member for Arima when they served as Ministers of Planning and Development. Mr. Speaker, I am told that the National Trust has not been receiving PSIP money, so a lot of these projects have been stalled.

In fact, we had an ongoing project in what was the former constituency of the Member for Fyzabad, Oropouche West, Banwari Trace, where we installed a benab, and we had a lot of other plans to do with that, and we invited the Member, Mr. Speaker, to the smoke ceremony that was conducted by members of the First Peoples. He came, and I recall he had a very lengthy discussion with the then chairman, Margaret McDowell, bringing her up to speed on what we were doing.

In fact, I recall the Member, while he was still MP for Oropouche West, raising questions during the Standing Finance Committee phase of the budget with respect to that particular project, Banwari Trace, where a 5,000-year-old skeleton was found some years ago, Mr. Speaker, one of the oldest ever to be found. All of these projects are on hold because they are not receiving PSIP moneys. Even if they do, they are faced with the challenge that there is no council in place to be able to approve the expenditure.

So, maybe they need to look at that, Mr. Speaker, to do an audit of how many other—and I suppose they already know how many other state enterprises are still without a board after so long, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if it is a challenge, you just cannot find competent, qualified people to be able to fill these positions. Mr. Speaker, you can tell me how much more time I have, please?

Mr. Speaker: A minute and a half.

Mr. D. Romain: How much?

Mr. Speaker: A minute and a half.

Mr. D. Romain: Regular time?

Mr. Speaker: Regular time, yes.

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Speaker: So, is it that you want—

Mr. D. Romain: I will take the 15 minutes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: It is 10.

Mr. D. Romain: Ten? Oh, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: I will take it. Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Forty-five minutes and an additional 10.

Mr. D. Romain: Oh, thank you. Appreciated.

Mr. Speaker: There is a distinction in the Standing Orders.

Mr. D. Romain: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, thank you for your guidance. Page 85.

Mr. Hosein: Ask ChatGPT.

Mr. D. Romain: Maybe you should try doing that a few times.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: **"**Yeah, well, you are de super Minister, so you doh need dat." "Building the Next Generation of Agricultural Entrepreneurs and Professionals", Mr. Speaker. It says here we will:

> "To strengthen our agricultural ecosystem, we must equip more young people with the skills and opportunities to build successful futures in agriculture.
>
> I therefore propose to expand the Agricultural Internship Programme from 30 interns to 100….
>
> The Programme will connect young people with opportunities across the

agricultural value chain..."

And—

"We will also explore appropriate support for those interns who wish to establish agricultural enterprises of their own."

Mr. Speaker, the PNM had that in place. The Youth in Agriculture Homestead Programme.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: The Shade House Programme. And I am certain, Mr. Speaker, we had far more than 30 interns, or 30 participants, Mr. Speaker, because we were catering for hundreds of persons. But that programme is no longer around, and I suppose when Members opposite get up, they will probably tell us about all the issues, as is the norm. The fact of the matter is that those young persons, Mr. Speaker, who would have enrolled in that programme and who were at various stages, they have been left in the lurch and are asking the questions. What is going to be the fate of this? Those who would have studied for the two years and would have gotten their accreditation and so on in agriculture and are really looking forward to the other benefits that the programme offered, Mr. Speaker, really in a state of bewilderment. But I hope that the Government will come to its good senses and see what can be done with respect to that.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to page 94 of the budget presentation:

"Strengthening the National Insurance System.

27. Increase in Penalty for non-payment of National Insurance Contributions:"

The Minister says:

"I therefore propose to strengthen the penalties for employers who fail or

neglect to pay the required National Insurance contributions.

The maximum fine on summary conviction will increase from $4,000 to $8,000."

A laudable initiative, Mr. Speaker, but again, national insurance contributions.

I referenced a letter just now, Mr. Speaker, from a whistleblower who also raised concerns about a board member—allegedly a board member who would have given instructions to issue a compliance certificate to a security company, albeit that they were not in compliance. So how can we have the entity that is supposed to be, Mr. Speaker, regulating this thing and ensuring that those who have a responsibility to pay, pay, and then we have now a whistleblower. We recall when the last administration sought to bring the whistleblower legislation, they did not get support from Members opposite. I wonder why.

But Mr. Speaker, here we are faced with a situation that the Minister is seeking to treat with this issue of non-compliance with respect to the payment, significant issue facing a lot of people. Pensioners or potential pensioners, Mr. Speaker, who, when they have reached that retirement age and are expecting to get their retirement pension, go to NIS and are told, "Well, you are short on contributions. You need to go back to your company and find out." Only to learn that the company was withdrawing money from their salaries and not remitting same.

So, I think if it is the Minister is really serious about implementing this new measure, you need to do some housecleaning first and check into that whistleblower letter to enquire, because I have not seen or read anywhere where any NIB director in the wake of this report having resigned or anybody having been replaced, Mr. Speaker. So, certainly that is of concern to us on this side, Mr.

Speaker.

So, in the few minutes that I have left, as I said before, we were really, really hoping that this would have really been a people's budget, as the Government would have promised, and it is far from. In fact, the quip that is currently going around now on social media is that people are saying, "Dey still waiting for de budget". When the Minister would have read the budget that he was winding up, I was hoping to hear him say, "Meggie, April fools"—

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

Mr. D. Romain:—permit me to now read the real budget statement. Some persons have said, "Perhaps the Minister was in such a haste to leave his office that he picked up version one." Yeah, the first draft instead of the 10th, Mr. Speaker, and that is what was delivered.

But this budget statement, Mr. Speaker, as I said, if I had to do a comparative between last year and this year, even though last year was not all that great, it was still a little better than what it is we have before us here today. I fail to see how it is going to improve the country's economic circumstances unless, of course, there is, you know, these promises that were made, at least if some of them could be able to come to reality.

I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, I saw where when I was looking through the *Draft Estimates* that there is an increase in the allocation for the NPUPS Programme. Good. The Minister mentioned in here—and you see again, paying semantics with numbers, because in here he mentioned that 2,900 real jobs were created under the NPUPS Programme.

4.50 p.m.

But, Mr. Speaker, again, that is duplicitous, because that 2,900 comprises the 1,000

persons who were hired in December for the pilot programme, plus the 300 who were hired for carnival, and then the 1,600 for the last cycle, Mr. Speaker. We know that a lot of the persons, that 2,900, will repeat.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Persons who worked in the first phase, and they came back. We do not even know if it is that the Government has satisfied payments for all of these fortnights, Mr. Speaker. These people come to us every week, not just us, but on that side as well, because every constituency had former CEPEP workers who come looking for employment. They come, you take their names, you tell them, we will see what we can do, and then they follow up because they are desperate for work. You know when the people are calling me to ask me, "So you think they are bringing back the NPUPS programme"? I said, well, "The Minister indicated she will see what happens based on budgetary allocations".

But when we look at the increased figure, Mr. Speaker, clearly, the number of persons who are going to be hired, and we do not know what methodology they will use, if they are going to break it up in the same way, or if it is going to run for a whole year, or what. But it is still not going to, the number of persons who they will hire, unless they reduce, Mr. Speaker, the amount of money that they pay each person, the numbers are not going to be much more significant than this 2,900 quoted here, which, as I said, is duplicitous because it is actually less than that. The Minister described it as real jobs. I will ask him, where are those jobs today? How many of those 2,900 persons are still employed?

Mr. Marcelle: In WASA.

Mr. D. Romain: WASA. How many persons sat down before their televisions on Monday, Mr. Speaker, biting their nails, hoping to hear the Minister say

something? For those persons, because this is supposed to be a people's budget, those persons who are waiting to hear, who are desperately looking for—

Mr. Birchwood: Direct impact.

Mr. D. Romain:—employment. Direct impact, Mr. Speaker.

So those who are on social welfare and who will get the $250 increase, I am happy for them, Mr. Speaker; it will fill a hole. But I do not know that it is going to do much more than that. So, this Government really and truly needs to do a little bit better going forward, especially for those persons, the most economically vulnerable among us who are struggling, because I know they get the calls too as well, Mr. Speaker. They are human beings, so I do not think that they are so cold-hearted that they do not care about what is happening.

But you all said it was corruption. You shut down the programmes of corruption, corruption. I see there is an allocation of some $10 million or so for URP. I wait to hear the Minister tell us what that allocation is for and what it is going to be spent on. I am happy to see that after we would have allocated some $19 million last year for the wind-up of CEPEP, there seems to be no allocation this year, so it appears that that has been dealt with. But, you know, the former workers and so on, and contractors are saying that there is still an outstanding liability, so we will see how that plays out, Mr. Speaker.

But, as my leader would have said, if she had to give this a grade, she would give it a "U".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: I endorse that. I endorse that wholeheartedly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Do over. Here. Wheel and come again, Mr. Speaker, because

this cannot be it. This cannot be it, Mr. Speaker. So, like government apologist Indira Rampersad, I too will look forward to the mid-year review.

Mr. Speaker, hopefully, better days, because they said brighter days. But you heard those headlines I read there, Mr. Speaker, but that is supposed to be brighter days, announced since June of this year. Blighter days, as the leader said, is what it actually is, Mr. Speaker. Dim days. Dim days. But do not worry, 2030 will soon come, but 2027 comes before 2030. And do not mind all the gerrymandering that you all did with the boundaries, and will do. The people are waiting for you, and all of you know that.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture and Community Development (Dr. Narindra Roopnarine): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2027) Bill, 2026. Mr. Speaker, let me first respond to the Member for Arima that on this side, we have a Minister of Finance who is the real deal, the real McCoy, and the genuine article. One who does not heap scorn on the population as some of its predecessors.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I should not be surprised, but I was a bit perturbed by the Opposition Leader's attempt to politicize this nation's tribute to the Mighty Sparrow. I want to extend my deep condolences to his family, friends, and loved ones, and place on the record that his legacy endures, his voice lives on,

and continues to bring joy and happiness to many that are blessed by his melodies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Malabar/Mausica just mentioned most of us came from NAPA, where we had the honour in the Ministry of Culture and Community Development in working with the Mighty Sparrow's family, in paying tribute to him. And where the hon. Prime Minister took a guiding role in that process. The hon. Member for Siparia also just proudly announced the renaming of the Grandstand after the Mighty Sparrow, to a hearty round of applause.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We might have heard it from NAPA, right here at the Red House. Mr. Speaker, I also sat and listened carefully to the Member for Malabar/Mausica, and I must say, Mr. Speaker, that the PNM has perfected the art of making noise while saying absolutely nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I heard him boast about building NAPA and SAPA, but it is one thing to build infrastructure and quite another thing to maintain it and safeguard it. Our administration is doing just that. They never put their money where their mouth is, you know, Mr. Speaker. That is what we do.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind them, just about over a year ago, the people of Trinidad and Tobago did something very, very powerful. They looked at 10 years of PNM mismanagement, 10 years of broken promises, 10 years of excuses, and 10 years of a government that seemed to have more answers for why things could not be done, than solutions in getting the job done. Enough was enough. The people fired the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, they did not fire them just to bring them back for a sabbatical, to come back into this Parliament and lecture us on how to govern. They fired them because they had seen enough and heard enough of their nonsense, their utter nonsense.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Now, Mr. Speaker, we are here a little more than one year. The people who they spent 10 years disappointing—they suddenly want to behave as though they were the gold standard, the gold standard of governance. Really, Mr. Speaker? I have to ask myself—the nation asks itself, was it really gold? No. I say no, or was it pyrite? Glittering in the sunlight, but crumbling under the weight of reality.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Because let us be honest in this House, Mr. Speaker, that gold that they exhibit has long since faded.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Yes, it is rolled gold. Brass gold. Whatever shine they claimed to have is nothing more than just a mere memory of a failed administration. They boast that they were the best the region has to offer? I find that very hard to believe, Mr. Speaker. Well, the people of Trinidad and Tobago were not fooled. They saw through their empty promises and hollow rhetoric. They voted resoundingly to remove them from office, and they will stay removed for many years to come, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I turn my attention now to the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, in which I have the distinct privilege to serve alongside my sister from Moruga/Tableland. Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing we should not

and must not underestimate, it is the power of culture and the creativity of our people, and the potential that exists in every single community across this nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we promised the people a vibrant carnival, seasoned under the theme, "Yuh Go Love Dis".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, the people loved it. They loved it. They never saw anything like it. But we will show them again for Carnival 2027. More to come. More to come, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.00 p.m.

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We saw that in Flava Village, yes, we saw our food, our music, our arts, our crafts and our traditions brought to the forefront, giving our cultural practitioners and local entrepreneurs an opportunity, a space to showcase their talent and earn from their creativity. That is what real leadership, Mr. Speaker, is about. It is about creating opportunities, opening doors and ensuring that the talents of our people do not remain hidden in their communities waiting for somebody to recognize their worth. Because, Mr. Speaker, talent is everywhere in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: What has too often been missing is the opportunity to turn that talent into a livelihood. And while the Opposition, they want to spend its time looking backwards, this Government is looking at what we can build, what we can develop and how we can create opportunities for the people of our country. We remain committed to the strengthening initiatives like Best Village and other

community based-cultural programmes that preserve our heritage, develop our talent and bring our communities together. Mr. Speaker, we intend on building what is known as the orange economy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that the PNM may be accustomed to squeezing the people, but the orange economy is about something entirely different.

Hon. Member: Tell them, tell them.

Dr. N. Roopnarine: It is about squeezing economic value out of our creativity, our culture and our talent. Mr. Speaker, the orange economy refers to the creative economy, the industries and activities that generate economic value from creativity, culture, talent, ideas and intellectual property. It includes music, film, fashion, visual arts, theatre, dance, Carnival, festival, crafts, design, cultural tourism and so much more. In simple terms, Mr. Speaker, it is about turning our creativity into opportunity, our talent into employment and our culture into an economic asset, without losing the very traditions that make us who we are.

Mr. Speaker, in the fiscal year 2027, $32.7million will be allocated to the culture sector to advance heritage preservation, enhance cultural infrastructure and deepen community engagement. Mr. Speaker, imagine a young person in a community who has a natural gift for fashion design, but lacks the resources to develop that talent. Imagine a talented musician who can create the next big hit, but needs access to training, production and marketing. Imagine a small entrepreneur making traditional foods or handicraft products who simply needs the right platform to reach a wider market. Are we going to tell these people that their talents do not matter? Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker; absolutely not. That is why we have initiated over 80 short-skills training and handicraft training courses throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, free of charge.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, this Government recognizes that culture is not merely entertainment. It is an industry, it is an opportunity, it is a source of employment, entrepreneurship, community pride and, yes, national development. Mr. Speaker, here is the beauty of the orange economy. We do not have to abandon who we are to create wealth. We can build economic opportunities from the very things that make Trinidad and Tobago unique. Authenticity, Mr. Speaker, that is what we on this side have, and those opposite masquerade, pun intended. We can celebrate our culture, preserve our traditions and create jobs at the same time. That is how you turn heritage into opportunity, creativity into income and culture into economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, if we look around the world, we can see what happens when a country invests in its creative industries. Take South Korea, for example, with K-Cinema or Hallyuwood. Today, Korean music, films, television dramas, food and

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: K-pop, yes—food and fashion have captured the attention of audiences across the globe. Korean culture has become a powerful part of the country's international identity, whilst creating opportunities for artists, producers, businesses and other industries. Similarly, Bollywood in India and Nollywood in Nigeria have established footprints on a global scale.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am not suggesting that we need to become another South Korea, India or Nigeria. We have our own authentic identity, our own history, our own flavour, but there is a lesson to be learnt. When you invest in our culture, when we promote our talent and give our people the tools to succeed, culture can

become an asset that reaches far beyond our borders. And I ask, Mr. Speaker, if these nations can make the world pay attention, celebrate and promote their customs, why should T&T underestimate the extraordinary cultural wealth that we possess due to our diverse heritage.

We have Carnival, calypso, soca, steel pan, chutney, tassa, our rich culinary traditions, our festivals, our fashion, our visual arts and the incredible creativity of our people. We have a cultural identity that is colourful, dynamic and unmistakably Trinbagonian. Mr. Speaker, we have the talent, yes, and we have the creativity, yes, but what we have to do is continue to build the machinery that allows our people to benefit from it.

Let me make another point, Mr. Speaker. The orange economy is not only about what we can export to the rest of the world, it is also about what we can preserve and strengthen right here at home.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: It is about the village that keeps this tradition alive. It is about the community group that teaches young people traditional dance. It is about elders who pass down their stories, recipes, songs and customs that cannot be replaced once it is lost. It is about the young people who need positive spaces in which to express themselves, develop their talents and discover what they are capable of achieving. When we invest in cultural activities, we give our young people opportunities to participate, learn, develop discipline and build confidence. We create platforms for local creators, we bring communities together and strengthen the sense of belonging that makes a society resilient. Because when our cultural practitioners succeed, our communities benefit. When our communities benefit, our economy grows, and when our culture thrives, Trinidad and Tobago

stand stronger.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the wider purpose of this budget. We on this side of the House believe that citizens must come first.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We believe that economic development must create opportunities for ordinary citizens, ordinary people, not simply look impressive on paper. We believe that every community, every entrepreneur, every young person and every hard-working citizen deserves the opportunity to participate in the development of our nation. That is what the theme of this budget captures: A People-Centred Approach: Investing in Communities, Transforming the Economy and Securing a Sustainable Future.

5.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this represents the direction in which this Government intends to take Trinidad and Tobago. Again, it means investing in our communities. It means creating opportunities and, Mr. Speaker, this budget is about Trinidad and Tobago first.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: That is the vision, that is the commitment, and that is the work this Government intends to continue delivering. Mr. Speaker, I take this time to place on record my profound appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, for her leadership and her dedication in serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We are so privileged to serve under a Prime Minister who is deeply involved in every aspect of national development. As the Member of

Parliament for Siparia once said, and I quote:

> "One republic, two islands, one people moving forward together in trust, in dignity, in purpose, towards a common, prosperous future."

Her guidance has helped shape the policies of this Government, while a close attention to our programmes and expenditure ensures that we remain focused on meeting the needs of our people.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the strong foundation laid by last year's budget, and our intention is to build a better Trinidad and Tobago under this year's budget. We have become accustomed to false promises by the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Or should I say, promises never materialized, in the past tense. But this budget establishes real priorities, directs resources where they are most needed, and provides a roadmap for sustainable growth that touches the lives of every citizen.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to take a moment to acknowledge my colleagues on this side of the House. Their contributions to this debate would come in the near future, and for the few that gave their contribution so far, kudos to them. Very well—a job well done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: And that, each Member presents here a clear vision, concrete plans and real solutions for the people of our country. And that, Mr. Speaker, is what happens when you actually, actually listen to people, as we all would have done during our pre-budget consultations. I want to also commend the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and their respective teams of public servants for their hard work and

dedication in producing a budget that is more than just numbers, as Malabar/Mausica, the Member would have said. It is a clear plan for progress and for improving the lives of our people.

Mr. Speaker, this Government understands that real leadership begins with listening, and that is exactly what we did. Again, in our respective constituencies, not only did we listen during our pre-budget consultations, but we listen every single week in our meetings with the public, in our walkabouts, in every interaction that we have with Members of our communities. In our respective constituencies, we listened to their ideas, their concerns and their solutions, and that, Mr. Speaker, is the essence of meaningful participation in governance.

I would like to sincerely thank all those citizens from Barrackpore to Reform, from St. Croix to Mt. Stewart, and by extension, the whole constituency of Naparima, who shared, engaged and contributed to these consultations. Their input helped shape a budget that promotes accountable fiscal policies and, more importantly, reflects the priorities and aspirations of the people we were elected to serve.

Mr. Speaker, as I reflect on the first year of this Government, I am particularly proud of the work we undertook through the Ministry of Culture and Community Development to empower our people. And, Mr. Speaker, I say this not merely as a Member of the Government, but as someone who has personally been involved in this work. I had the privilege of serving as a mentor and facilitator, engaging directly with participants, listening to their experiences and seeing the potential that exists within our communities. Through several programmes, we provided opportunities for young people, young women, our men and women and our wider communities to develop their skills, build their

confidence and work towards a better future.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, there was the Trailblazers Programme, which targeted young people between the ages of 15 and 25, particularly those at risk and underserved communities. The programme provided mentorship, life skills, professional exposure and apprenticeship opportunities to help participants prepare for the world of work. Again, "dey just talk on the other side, yuh know, but we deliver".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: It is one thing about—I will tell the Member for Diego Martin West, it is one thing to put a programme on paper, but it is quite another, to actually delivers on it. Again, we like to say in Latin, Mr. Speaker, *acta non verba*.

Hon. Member: "Aye yi yi".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Or we like to say, action, not talk. I was personally, again—I was personally involved as a facilitator, a mentor, and I saw how important it was to give our young people not just advice, but a genuine opportunity to grow. In September 2026, 200 young persons completed this programme. That was 200 young people who took another step towards building a brighter future.

We also delivered the Community Education Programme, which gave citizens opportunities to develop practical and vocational skills, including handicraft, personal development, technical training and entrepreneurship. Mr. Speaker, not everybody follows the same education path. Not everyone could be lawyers, doctors, engineers and, dare I say, politicians. Not everybody follows the same educational path, and that is perfectly fine. What matters is that people are

given the opportunity to learn, earn and improve their circumstances. I heard directly from constituents and participants how meaningful it was to access these opportunities closer to home, and that feedback has reinforced why this programme is so important.

Another initiative was the National Empowerment Virtual Programme, which helped participants strengthen the personal and professional skills they use in their everyday lives. Through courses in communication, emotional intelligence, stress management, anger management, leadership and conflict resolutions, participants gained tools to better manage challenges in their work places, homes and in their communities. Mr. Speaker, the programme reminded us that stronger communities require more than just infrastructure. I do not know if my friend from Malabar/Mausica is listening, it needs more than just infrastructure. They also require people who can communicate, resolve disagreements and work together.

You know, Mr. Speaker, Simon Sinek says, a good team is someone or persons who not only can work together, but they can trust each other, and that is exactly what we on this side emulate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.20 p.m.

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We also advanced the leadership legacy initiative which focused on equipping women with the skills, confidence, mentorship and experience needed to take on leadership roles. Mr. Speaker, we recognized that women must have opportunities to lead, influence and shape the very future of our country. Through this initiative, we helped women strengthen their leadership abilities and recognized the contribution they could make in their communities,

workplaces and the general society. I am proud of the women who participated and took that step towards developing their leadership potential.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: And, Mr. Speaker, we did not forget about our men. Through the ManUp programme, we promoted positive masculinity, mentorship, accountability, employability, entrepreneurship and community leadership amongst men from rural and underserved communities.

Mr. Birchwood: [*Interruption*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Again, I had the privilege of sitting with a lot of these young men, and when I sat with them, I listened, something those on the other side could take a little, you know, example of and note of, thank you. We listened to them; we challenged them at times and saw firsthand the potential that each and every one of them possessed.

In June 2026, 111 participants graduated from this programme. Mr. Speaker, each of these programmes served a different purpose, but they shared one clear objective: to give people the support, skills and opportunities they needed to move forward. Not just move on, but more importantly, to move forward. For me, the value of this work was not measured only in the certificates that these participants achieved or got, but—or even in the graduation figures. It was measured in a young person who gained confidence, the woman who began to see herself as a leader, the man who found a positive direction and the citizen who acquired a skill that could help support a family. That is why this work meant so much personally to me.

Mr. Speaker, we do not write people off because of their circumstances. We create opportunities, strengthen their communities and help people realize their

potential. And Mr. Speaker, I will tell you, I saw the direct benefits of these programmes on individuals, even in my constituency of Naparima. And again, Mr. Speaker, that is what we on this side do. We fulfil our promises. Promises made, promises kept and more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to turn to this Government's commitment to upgrading, rehabilitating and modernizing our cultural facilities across the nation. Culture is not just an afterthought. These are the spaces where our children learn, our artists perform, our communities gather and our national identity comes alive.

Mr. Speaker, in a country as culturally rich and diverse as Trinidad and Tobago, our culture helps us understand where we came from, appreciate traditions that make us unique and respect the many influences that have shaped our national identity. We inherited cultural facilities that, in many instances, had been allowed to deteriorate and remain in need of serious attention. But this Government is not prepared to allow that neglect to continue. Mr. Speaker, we are ensuring that our cultural infrastructure is fit for purpose and capable of supporting the development of our creative industries.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot ask our culture to flourish while the very spaces that support it are allowed to fall behind. We are backing that commitment with real, real investment. For the National Academy for the Performing Arts, NAPA, $4 million has been allocated for security upgrades, including CCTV surveillance and electronic access control, alongside a further $1 million for power quality improvements and the protection of critical equipment. At the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts, SAPA, $5 million has been allocated for facility upgrades,

with another $4 million for power quality improvements and safeguarding equipment. That is not only maintaining it; that is also safeguarding it, Malabar/Mausica.

Queen's Hall will receive $1.5 million for exterior rehabilitation, multimedia and lighting upgrades, and restoration of its water fountain. And Mr. Speaker, $11 million has been allocated to continue upgrading the Naparima Bowl, including improvements to lighting, stage and audio equipment, refurbishment of the stage, and other important works. Mr. Speaker, promises made, promises kept, and more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, just as we are investing in our cultural infrastructure, we are also investing in the spaces that hold our communities together, our community centres. This Government is putting resources behind the refurbishment and construction of 19 community centres and facilities across the country to the tune of $10 million. These community centres will feature amenities, including training kitchens, computer rooms, auditoriums with stages, dressing rooms, classrooms, offices, washrooms, and in some cases, gyms. Mr. Speaker, for far too long, communities have had to make do with facilities that were deteriorating, outdated, and no longer fit for purpose. But we did not come into Government to complain about what we inherited. We came into government to fix it, and fix it we shall, and that is precisely what we are doing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me turn to my constituency of Naparima. We remain committed to improving the lives of the great people of Naparima, through meaningful development—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—better infrastructure, and greater opportunities for every community, ensuring that none are left behind.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We are tackling infrastructure problems that have plagued communities for years with dredging and flood mitigation works along the Oropouche, Jaipaulsingh, and Lapai rivers, and in communities including Harmony Hall and Cunjal. There have been multiple road repair and drainage works at multiple areas throughout my constituency, just to name a few, including Suzanna Trace, Mooliesingh Trace, Solomon Street, Ramlal Trace, Arjoon Trace, Temple Street, Matabar Trace, Anand Circular Drive, Corial Road, Malgretoute Road, and Moonan 3rd Avenue, just to name a few. There is still work to be done, and yes, I will be the first to acknowledge that. But, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to doing the work, addressing the challenges, and delivering for the people of Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: I would also like to extend gratitude on behalf of Naparima to the hon. Minister of Public Utilities. T&TEC has been undertaking works across the constituency, including replacing aged electricity poles and restoring street lighting.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Recreational spaces that were left in darkness are receiving attention, including the Ste. Madeleine Recreation Ground. I heard my colleague just a little while ago, San Fernando East, mutter something, but I would not be distracted, Mr. Speaker. But, you know, Ste. Madeleine Recreation Ground, his constituents would also benefit from the lighting that the hon. Minister from Couva

South just provided for us in Ste. Madeleine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, the schools in my constituency have also benefited through the school repair programme. For example, both Jordan Hill Presbyterian Primary School and Inverness Presbyterian Primary School benefited from important repairs. Jordan Hill received electrical works, including repairs to wiring, distribution boards, lighting, and associated installations, whilst Inverness received plumbing works, including the installation of a water pump, pressure tank, control panel, and associated plumbing infrastructure.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing in the future of our young people. Our students continue to demonstrate excellence, as we saw in the latest SEA results. But academic achievement must lead to opportunity. I would also like to make mention of the UWI South Campus at Debe, which can bring tertiary education closer to the people of Naparima, reducing the burden of transportation and, for some families, accommodation costs. Because you see, Mr. Speaker, not everyone is fortunate enough to receive a scholarship that was made just for them, and I shall call no names. That money that they save stays in the household. It can go towards food, books, and other necessities.

The economic benefit extends beyond students, Mr. Speaker. A functioning campus means opportunity for transportation providers, vendors, and security personnel. Education, therefore, is not only an investment in our children, but it is an investment in our economy. Mr. Speaker, we have seen firsthand the value of the community education programme in Naparima, giving people practical skills that can help them earn an income. We are also seeing the benefits of programmes

such as NATI—Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have again?

Mr. Speaker: Just around eight minutes again of regular time.

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: So, Mr. Speaker, we are also seeing the benefits of programmes such as NATI, where people can gain useful skills in areas such as agriculture, agro-processing, and modern farming. Through SporTT, programmes like the JAVA Cricket initiative—I have to thank the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine:—for his stellar contribution and work that he has done in the Ministry over the last year and something. He gave our young people opportunities to learn, stay active, and develop important values such as discipline, confidence, and teamwork. I thank all the Ministers and their teams for bringing these opportunities to my constituency, because, as I said before, and I will say it again, I represent the great people of Naparima with enormous pride.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, we are also investing in skills training closer to home. The NESC skills and technology centre at Ste. Madeleine has been allocated $1 million for upgrades, including automotive and refrigeration training equipment, improvements to the student entrance, car park, paving, and drainage. Mr. Speaker, this academy features the only active drilling rig used for training students in the Western Hemisphere. With NESC reporting more than 4,000 graduates since its establishment, we are talking about an institution that has made a substantial contribution to technical education and workforce development in

Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the NESC Drilling Academy was officially launched in December 2013, and let me remind those opposite who were in Government in 2013: Well, it was those on this side, led by our hon. Prime Minister Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. That investment reflected a vision of equipping our people with practical, industry-relevant skills and creating opportunities for them to build better futures. That, Mr. Speaker, is the vision of our hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: The budget also includes $1.6 million for upgrades across four MIC Technology centres, including Ste. Madeleine. That is a shared allocation, and I look forward to seeing the continued development of skills training opportunities for our people. Mr. Speaker, we are looking beyond training facilities. Construction works are scheduled to commence at the Valley Line Community Centre in Barrackpore, giving another community a space for development training and community activities, and when we look at investment in skills training, community development, education, and infrastructure, we see a government that is not simply making announcements. We are putting plans in place and working to bring real improvements to our communities. Promises made, promises kept, and more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge the hon. Minister of Homeland Security, the Member for Tunapuna, for his continued efforts to strengthen public safety and emergency response services which benefit my constituency of Naparima and communities throughout southern Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, one such development is the newly established police post in Tarouba, and I am confident that my constituents will welcome this development and look forward to further improvements that will enhance their safety and peace of mind. Mr. Speaker, I must also recognize the reopening of the Princes Town Fire Station at its new location on King Street on August the 26th, 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: I had the privilege to attend that ceremony. That service, Mr. Speaker, will benefit my constituents in Naparima by improving access to fire and emergency response services. For more than two years, residents had to rely on fire stations outside the area for emergency assistance. This reopening restores a vital public service and strengthens emergency coverage across 56 surrounding communities. Mr. Speaker, these developments demonstrate the importance of strengthening our emergency services and local security infrastructure. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, our people deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities knowing that help is better positioned to reach them when they need itmost.

Mr. Speaker: You have a minute and a half of regular time. You have an additional 10 minutes.

Hon. Member: Yes, an additional 10 minutes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: I will take my full time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I would also like to recognize the efforts made to advance the Brechin Castle Agro-Processing Facility, as well as the establishment of an alternative flour processing facility. I acknowledge the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for his efforts to advance agro-processing and create greater market opportunities for our

local farmers. These initiatives have the potential to create additional market opportunities for locally produced cassava, including those in my constituency; my farmers in the constituency of Naparima that produce cassava.

Mr. Speaker, we know that cassava production has declined due to mismanagement of those on the other side for years and years, reflecting a reduction in the estimated area under cultivation, delays in land preparation associated with increased rainfall, limited market opportunities for fresh cassava, and also value-added products. By expanding our agro-processing capacity and creating alternative uses for locally grown cassava, we can help address some of these challenges, encourage greater production, and provide our farmers with more avenues to earn from their hard work.

Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of investment that can make a real difference to agricultural communities. It is about giving our farmers more opportunities, strengthening food security, reducing waste, and ensuring that locally produced crops can contribute more meaningfully to our national economy. Mr. Speaker, this is what effective governance looks like. And this is what the UNC Government is about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.30 p.m.

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We are about creating opportunities, empowering our people, and building a stronger, more productive Trinidad and Tobago. So, Mr. Speaker, when we put all of this together, we see one clear, translucent picture. We are rebuilding the foundations of Naparima. We are moving from neglect to action, from waiting to delivery and from promises to work on the ground. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the difference to the people of Naparima, and throughout the country,

that they can see. Mr. Speaker, this is what leadership for the people looks like. It is about listening, responding, and most importantly, delivering.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: For too long under the PNM, the people of this country were told to wait; wait for opportunities, wait for the communities to receive attention and wait for problems to be addressed. But, Mr. Speaker, we are changing that. We are listening to the mother who wants better for her children, the farmer who wants to produce, the worker who wants an opportunity, the small business owner trying to survive, and the young person simply asking for a chance. We hear you, we see you, and we are working for you. Under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, this Government is turning promises into action and putting people first. We are fixing what was neglected, investing in our communities and creating opportunities for our citizens. Mr. Speaker, the difference is simple. The PNM had its time, and the people waited. The UNC has come to do the work. And when the UNC works, the people win. And when the people win, Trinidad and Tobago wins.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: And, Mr. Speaker, I know they will sit there on the other side and criticize everything that has been laid out in this budget. However, I am reminded of what Theodore Roosevelt declared in his famous speech: "Citizenship in a Republic":

> "It is not the critic who counts…"

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is easy to criticize from the sidelines. It is easy to find fault with every initiative and every attempt to move this country forward. But the real measure of leadership is not the noise of the critic, it is the work being done,

the lives being improved and the communities being transformed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: So, I am here to say this: This Government will remain focused on the work, focused on the people and focused on delivering results. As William Shakespeare wrote in King John, Act V, Scene 1:

"Be great in act, as you have been in thought;"

And, Mr. Speaker, this budget is about moving beyond promises and turning vision into action. It is about delivering for our people, investing in our communities and building a stronger future for Trinidad and Tobago. Promises made, promises kept, and more to come. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (*Trincity/Maloney*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on her response to the budget statement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying from the outset that, like the Member for Naparima, who obviously practised his contribution before a mirror—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—this budget is deceptive. Like the Member for Naparima, it is dressed up in political rhetoric and promises, but offers far too little substance to justify—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. On a point of order, 48(4) and 48(6), please.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. I think the Member was careful enough to describe it and circumscribe the language, so I am going to overrule that this time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the budget offers far too little substance to justify the confidence that this Government wants the people of Trinidad and Tobago to place in it. And, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Naparima, I am amazed by the confidence he now has in the Member for Siparia, because some years ago when he was on the slate of Oropouche East—

Hon. Members: "Ohhh!" [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: He was the one who told all of us in Trinidad and Tobago that the Member for Oropouche East, unlike the Member for Siparia—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—stands up for the underdog.

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

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: He was the one who said to all of us in Trinidad and Tobago that the Member for Siparia, whom he now touts as the greatest leader, left the party to flounder.

Hon. Members: "Ohhh!" [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: He was the one who said of the UNC that the party was in a slump and left to slumber.

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

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: He was the one who said, he is supporting the Member for Oropouche East for the love of his party.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: I am amazed, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Manning: That is an about-face.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—at the about-face that now the Member for Siparia is the greatest thing since sliced bread.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: So, Mr. Speaker, I am left—

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker—

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

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, please. Mr. Speaker, 48(1). What part of the budget is that?

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

Dr. Moonilal: Could they please address themselves to the fiscal measures?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Now, I can stand here, and you all can laugh and pound the table all day, but it is the Member's time that is going, you know. So, just to be aware of that.

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: And you could pick up the Standing Orders how much you like, but the Member's time that is going unless you get me to address it. All right, I think you have gilded the lily enough. We could skip along with that.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, come on. You have made your point. You have gilded the lily enough. No need to engage in this kind of extending schadenfreude.

Mr. Gonzales: But, Mr. Speaker, can I get—just a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member spoke for about 15 minutes on the virtues of Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: And the Member, my colleague—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: You understand? He spoke on the virtues of Siparia and how great a leader that she is. The Member is entitled to respond to him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Well, yes. So—all right. Just so that we understand the purport of what you are saying, right? So, the Member spoke for 15 minutes on the virtues of the Member for Siparia. All right? So, let us take this to its logical conclusion of where you want it to go.

Hon. Member: You invited this, eh.

Mr. Speaker: No, you invited this. Yes, to mirror the words of the honourable leader, you invited this.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Well, yes, I warned the Members.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I know I am taking up time. But if you want a lecture, I am going to give you a lecture.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: No, you invited the time. You invited this.

Mr. Gonzales: Because they have no—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Because I stood up and I said, the Member gilded the lily enough, let us move on. Everyone wants to ignore it. The Chief Whip wants to raise a Standing Order. I am going to address the Standing Order. You have gilded the lily enough. Let us move on. If we are going to allocate time on 15 minutes and say this one has 15 minutes to respond, then nothing is going to get done, you know. All right? So, let us be careful about that. Member, I think, come on, you have made your point. Let us move on now.

Hon. Member: What a point too.

5.50 p.m.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: So, Mr. Speaker, mamaguy announced, mamaguy delivered and more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, this Government has run short on achievements, but it has certainly not run short on how to burden the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is pressure, pressure and more pressure for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Tax after tax, burden after burden, and Mr. Speaker, it is only people struggling in this country. Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that when the Member for Siparia talks to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, she gives two speeches. One for the general populace and then one for the UNC population.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, if that is patriotism, I call that scumbag behaviour.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gosine: Mr. Speaker, 48—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Diego Martin Central, I am happy to see you have adopted the mannerism which you sometimes take great exception to. Alright, no, Trincity/Maloney, you are going to have to absolutely withdraw the reference to a Member of this House by that—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]—an example.

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain North, listen, I do not require, nor do I seek your help. All right. I do not require you to retort. I do not require you to retort. I am addressing the Member for Trincity/Maloney, and I am asking you to unequivocally, withdraw and apologize for that particular word that you have used.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I thought that was a word that could be used to describe parliamentarians.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Trincity/Maloney, for the second time, I am very politely asking you to withdraw and apologize for the use of that term.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, if you are saying that that is behaviour unbecoming of a Member of Parliament—

Mr. Speaker: Trincity/Maloney, I simply requiring you—I do not require you, hold on. I do not require you to circumscribe the limits of what I am asking you to do. I am making a simple, polite, and extremely civilized request of you.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, as I said, if that is not parliamentary language, then I apologize.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: It is either you accept it unparliamentary, or you do not accept it. There cannot be some sort of precondition or self-perceived precondition. I am telling you, it is unparliamentary language to use that particular word to describe a Member of this House. I have allowed a healthy degree of banter, because I think it is healthy, okay, but I am not going to allow you to refer to any Member of this House by that despicable term.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

Mr. Speaker: And you withdraw it.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Sorry?

Mr. Speaker: And you withdraw the reference.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Oh yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: It is withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, you know it is remarkable that a—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—parliamentary?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Alexander: Wow, we in school here.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, you know, it is really remarkable that a government so confident in its performance, appears to need to bring busloads of

supporters here in order for them to feel that they are doing something for the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Young SC: They fooled the WASA workers too.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—but and I am being told yes, they fooled the WASA workers, they fooled the public servants because, Mr. Speaker, in the budget documents, I am not seeing the money allocated for the 100 per cent of public servants being paid, so they still have to go through this horror of 40 per cent cash and 60 per cent of non-cash, as it is being called—either food cards—

Hon. Member: Party card.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—or I am hearing party cards, I am not sure. But, Mr. Speaker, you know you could bring—"yuh like what ah saying"?

Mr. Alexander: Yeah.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Good. You could bring people to make noise outside, Mr. Speaker, but you cannot fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, you cannot manufacture applause, which is what this Government did when they brought those people outside of the Parliament. So, Mr. Speaker, after 18 months in office, the UNC's picture is one of pretense, no achievement in any of the areas of governance. And indeed, in the Ministry of Housing, there has been no achievement at all.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: All we have seen is questionable decisions, political spite and an attempt to give one of their financiers over $1 billion, Mr. Speaker. So, whilst young people and other members of our society are waiting patiently to go into the realm of home ownership, we have three Ministers who have become a monument to confusion because they are doing absolutely nothing in that Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has spoken about the fact that she will not fund lazy people, perhaps she should look in the Ministry of Housing first—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—because they are doing absolutely nothing for the salary that they are getting. We have Ministers who are missing in action, policies that are reported that they know nothing about. Three Ministers, but not one of them is willing to take responsibility for the mess that now pervades the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall, as I just mentioned, the Trinidad and Tobago $3.4 billion HDC procurement controversy that befell this country, and the HDC itself stopped that whole process where it was supposed to yield a certain number of houses. But, Mr. Speaker, the HDC never came to the country and indicated why it stopped the process. However, Mr. Speaker, through the work of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and Mr. Randall Mitchell and Mr. Wendell Eversley, the office where they ask for a freedom of information report from the Office of Procurement Regulation. There is a report dated the 1st of July, 2026, which has documented serious failures in the procurement process involving the 11 packages.

Mr. Speaker, this report, OPR Section 41(1) Inquiry Report makes some very interesting and damning details regarding the due diligence of the HDC.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I will quote some of the findings from this report. Regarding the issue of pre-qualification, due diligence, Mr. Speaker, the OPR said that:

There was no evidence existing to satisfy the OPR that the HDC conducted

its due diligence in a manner consistent with the applicable legislative framework.

It said:

One supplier's profile indicated insolvency, receivership, winding up, yet it was pre-qualified.

I notice the Member for Barataria/San Juan is no longer here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: The OPR said:

Thirty approvals were granted on the same day the supplier requested pre-qualification. A reasonably robust assessment would likely have resulted in a different pre-qualification outcome if the HDC had followed proper rules and regulations.

The OPR also indicated that:

The documentation associated with this particular project was devoid of any evidence that a substantive due diligence assessment was undertaken. The absence of a financial capacity framework suggests that the HDC did not intend to assess financial capacity. Under mandatory requirements, the line of credit requirement was mandatory, with a minimum of TT $100 million, and the RFP stated that proponents who could not meet this requirement would not advance.

However, eight of the 10 letters from financial institutions regarding various proponents carried disclaimers, such as these financial requirements were non-binding, and, consequently, eight of these 10 did not meet the financial requirements, but they still went forward.

The test for moving forward with these projects was that the proponents had

to demonstrate the ability to achieve what was required, and it was changed to demonstrating a commitment to achieve.

Ten of the 11 recommended bidders had no human resources submission for the requirement that 90 per cent of labour must be local.

Under technical evaluation, the RFP required proponents to score no less than 75 points and not fail any of the sub-attributes, but no passing score for the sub-attributes was defined.

The OPR said:

The HDC's failure to apply that condition constitutes a breach of Regulation 3(1) of the Act, and a 50 per cent sub-attribute threshold would have affected six of the packages. One awardee's technical score rose from 36.93 to 76.03 on re-evaluation, and the report did not adequately explain the variance. All 41 submissions across 11 packages were evaluated between March 23rd and April 1st, the fastest evaluation ever.

The OPR observed that the HDC adhered only to the minimum time frame prescribed for limited bidding. Inadequate time frames constrained bidders' ability to properly assess risk.

The OPR also indicated that:

HDC never gave extra time to any of the bidders.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that with $3.4 billion at stake, the HDC was playing fast and loose with public money.

The HDC—

—the OPR went on to say:

—did not do a proper assessment. The proponents did not give proper information, and, clearly, although these procurement rules existed, the HDC

did not adequately follow the rules of the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, we see now why it was imperative for this administration to gut the procurement legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: In addition to these, Mr. Speaker, the report also identified concerns about oversight and conflict of interest. It even pointed out that some of the companies had shared personnel. What did this mean, Mr. Speaker, that there could have been bid rigging.

It also pointed out the absence of a formal memorandum of understanding with the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Bank. It also pointed out that, whereas the HDC was saying that there would have been no involvement of public money, that was not possible based on the information that came to the OPR. It was clear that apart from the land, which was state land, that there would be some involvement of finance from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, when the regulator, which is the OPR, documents these many failures in a $3.4 billion exercise, weakening oversight is not protecting taxpayers. It is putting taxpayers at risk.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: You know what is so amazing, Mr. Speaker? The hypocrisy is so astounding, because when we were implementing the OPR legislation, those who now form the Government were loud in stating that, "We need to have certain regulations. We need to make sure that we strengthen the OPR." Mr. Speaker, there was not one instance where they could say that we ever did something like this to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I remind those who form the Government that the people's money is not a political war chest to be given to whom they so desire. Mr. Speaker, public procurement must never become a pipeline for political favouritism.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, you may recall that, recently, there was the allocation of houses, or townhouses, to persons in the Caura area, and we saw that distribution.

6.10 p.m.

And you would also recall, Mr. Speaker, that this Government touted that they would be producing 20,000 housing units each year. Mr. Speaker, they have not produced one housing unit. The distribution in Caura were housing units that had been completed by the PNM. But what is interesting with this Government is that they wait until they think people have forgotten that it was the PNM who produced the houses and then give it out as though they produced the houses.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: But, you know, Mr. Speaker, what is sad is that those housing units had been allocated already and when Caroni Central came into the Ministry, they removed every single person who had been allocated and put new people, new names for those allocations, Mr. Speaker, and a number of people have been left disappointed and wanting because of that activity, but Mr. Speaker, as some of us say, "time longer than twine".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, applicants who had already signed mortgage agreements for units at the price of $575,000 have received letters

increasing the price of units to $750,000.

Hon. Members: Wow.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: So in many cases, those applicants no longer qualify. And Mr. Speaker, we also have the situation at Edinburgh Towers where those towers were being completed for applicants for rentals, but now we are being told that those towers will form the new office of the Ministry of Housing and the new office of the HDC. Mr. Speaker, why? When people are looking for housing accommodation, why use units for accommodation for the Ministry? Mr. Speaker, we on this side wonder if that is just a spiteful act.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, if you add to that the movement to regularize unlawful occupation of housing units, if you add to that citizens who have followed the rules and continue to wait and now people who occupied units illegally are going to be regularised, that could never be fair to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Mr. Speaker, you may recall that we had a situation where members of the public were told that there would be a 5 per cent or 10 per cent fee for transferring housing units, either on the death of the original owner or when someone got permission to sell their unit and Mr. Speaker, you may also recall that this Government, as a matter of fact, the Member for Siparia had spoken about an inheritance tax, that the PNM was going to bring an inheritance tax, that was not true Mr. Speaker. However, through that mechanism, the UNC has brought an inheritance tax on the people who have HDC housing units. And Mr. Speaker, we heard that it was not true but, Mr. Speaker, I am told that it is very true because persons who want to make those transfers have to pay that 5 per cent or 10 per cent

on the current value of the unit. Not what they bought it for, the current value and, of course, like any property, the value has appreciated. So in many instances, Mr. Speaker, this is putting a burden on HDC homeowners. And Mr. Speaker, it is really a situation of moving the goalposts on people who could least afford it.

But, Mr. Speaker, as we talk about goalposts, I am moved to ask the Member for Caroni Central what has happened to the distribution of the Petrotrin lands. Mr. Speaker, you would recall that when Petrotrin was restructured, apart from the funds that were given to the workers, one of the agreements was that they would get land in certain areas that belonged to Petrotrin and, Mr. Speaker, several, I think it was over 200 workers had already been given these deeds for Petrotrin land, but since we have left office not one word is being said about the Petrotrin land, except that LandmarkTT had instituted a 100-million project on the Allamby land which were Petrotrin land. We are not hearing anything about that project, but we are also not hearing anything about that land being given to Petrotrin workers and Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Minister to let us know the status of the land for Petrotrin workers because they are being denied that land, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, an area of deep concern for us on this side is the fact that the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited, also called EPOS, since we demitted office, no board has been appointed for the company. Over the last 18 months, no board and it falls under the Ministry of Housing. Mr. Speaker, the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited is the only company in Trinidad and Tobago under the State that was set up specifically for a particular area of Trinidad and Tobago that needs specific attention and so the East Port of Spain Company Limited was set up to ensure the development of that part of our country.

It is a company that deals with issues of infrastructure, that deals with

making sure that the contractors from the area do the work in the area. Mr. Speaker, it is a company that ensures that jobs are assured for the people in that area and Mr. Speaker, its objective is to uplift that part of Trinidad and Tobago, the east Port of Spain area. And Mr. Speaker, they have had no board for the last 18 months and it means they have had no allocations sent to them and they have done absolutely no work for the people of east Port of Spain and Mr. Speaker, that is a travesty. Especially, in circumstances where many of the people of east Port of Spain depend on the East Port of Spain Company Limited for a livelihood and also depend on that company to ensure that the infrastructure in that area is maintained and improved.

6.20 p.m.

But, of course, Mr. Speaker, in the same way that this Government has only allocated a few million dollars to the City of Port of Spain, they have done nothing as it relates to east Port of Spain, perhaps because they feel that the people of east Port of Spain do not vote for them. But, Mr. Speaker, if they go back to their oath, they are supposed to work for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I also ask a similar question about the Port of Spain Shopping Complex Limited. Nothing. There has been no board appointed for that company, and even though there is a budget allocation of $3 million for the development and management of No. 43 Independence Square, the construction on that site has stalled. Nothing. That mall is no longer a consideration. I ask the question, what has happened to the Housing and Village Improvement Programme, that is the HVIP, which was a flagship initiative—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—an initiative recognized by the IDB and given a President's Award? That programme, Mr. Speaker, produced houses for squatters, it produced houses for those least able to either purchase a house or build their own home. Mr. Speaker, nothing.

In the time that we were in the Government, Mr. Speaker, we built hundreds of homes across the country for free, for people in dire need, and now that programme has been totally shut down. Why, Mr. Speaker? I ask the question, why? They say they care so much about Trinidad and Tobago, but it is clear that they do not care at all.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, there were over 5,000 housing units under construction across 20 sites nationwide, including: Edinburgh 500, Malabar, Corinth, Buen Intento, Moruga, Caura, Mount Hope, Woodstar in Trinity/Maloney, St. Augustine, Bon Air, Mahogany Court and Citrus Growers. And, Mr. Speaker, all of those have been stopped, but I know they will probably be resumed so that Caroni Central could pretend that they built something during their term of office. Mr. Speaker, it would be not one new house, not one groundbreaking for a new housing development, just handing out PNM houses when they think that everybody forgot that PNM is really the ones who built the houses.

And, Mr. Speaker, I implore the Member for Caroni Central and his colleagues in the Ministry, and the Chairman of the HDC, and the PNM CEO of HDC to please start housing construction and give houses to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, as the people of Trinidad and Tobago

suffer under this Government, I ask the Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services why it seems as though this Government has been so deceptive and cruel when it comes to our most vulnerable citizens.

Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services, my information is that the National Family Services Division, which provides counselling, parenting education and psychosocial support, has no staff or very little staff. Because persons who were on contract, many of them, their contracts came to an end in June 2025, and the contracts have not been renewed, and no new persons have been contracted to work.

So, the entire National Family Services Division has been shut down. Even though there is still a telephone number, even though there might be one person answering the telephone, the Division has been shut down completely. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Minister that a telephone number is not counselling. A pretence at family services is not what people who are in dire straits and need attention are supposed to get.

Mr. Speaker, when a mother faces domestic violence, or a child that is unruly, or a child that is in crisis, a family is overwhelmed by grief, or some mishap, or some hardship, a press release, a telephone number is not an intervention. And, Mr. Speaker, the Government cannot claim to desire to strengthen families, while failing to demonstrate that the services designed to support them are adequately staffed and accessible. I will repeat, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the National Family Services Division has been gutted. And, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Member for Trincity/Maloney, I think now is a good time to remind you that you have just over a minute of your regular time, and you have the

option, of course, of the 10 minutes.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Yeah, I will take the extra time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, we have a similar situation existing with the Children's Authority. Mr. Speaker, the Children's Authority is currently being managed on a subvention of $8.1 million, when its usual budgetary allocation was $14.7 million, $6 million less than it was accustomed to having. And, Mr. Speaker, the current administration, I understand, has failed to understand the true cost of child protection and the simple fact that there were some debts prior to April 2025.

Mr. Speaker, there has been no strategic direction from the line Minister, no formal meetings to discuss the way forward with the Authority. There has been a lack of communication and a lack of synergy between the Ministry and the Board. And Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that because the Board was a PNM-appointed board that had a certain length of time before their time in office ended, and their time in office ends on the 20th of October, which is Tuesday, there has been no communication between the Minister and the Board, because I guess the Minister is of the view that this is a PNM board, so she does not have to talk to them.

6.30 p.m.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue is that it is children that we are speaking about. If the Minister does give strategic direction, what is the state of what is happening with the children who are under the care and authority of the Children's Authority? Mr. Speaker, the Act clearly defines the roles of the Minister, who is there to give strategic direction, and the Board, who is there to actually do the work of the

Authority.

Mr. Speaker, my information is that the Board has been held at the mercy of the Ministry in making decisions. Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that working conditions and facilities, including reports of case workers managing exceptionally high numbers of cases and offices affected by mould and leaks, are the order of the day.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Authority was set up for the protection of children and to protect them from abuse, to protect them from neglect, to protect them from harm. But it is clear that if workers of the Authority are not being properly treated, they cannot do their job effectively.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have got reports concerning residential care, emergency placements, allegations of misconduct. Madam Deputy Speaker, what I understand and what I have been informed is that the Minister has had meetings with some of the homes. At one meeting in particular, there were open negative racial comments being made by the manager of the home regarding the children under her supervision.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have the actual words. As a matter of fact, what I am told is that that particular home said that, "They are bringing too many N-word children and that home is a home for C-children." The Prime Minister is one who talks about that word regularly. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am told that at no time during the meetings did the Minister indicate the inappropriateness of the comment, and interestingly, a number of the staff at that home are predominantly Afro-Trinidadian.

My further information, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that there is one particular

home where this has been occurring, but the persons who run the home are friends of the Minister. When a suggestion was made that the home be closed and children be removed, the Minister would not adhere to that suggestion. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is extremely concerning because, apart from this happening, it is clear that when nobody may be looking, these children are also being abused by the persons who are supposed to take good care of them.

I have also been told that there have been allegations of sexual interference with children at these homes. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister, I understand, is aware, but nothing has been done. Madam Deputy Speaker, as a mother myself, this is very painful for all of us on this side, because that should never be occurring regarding the children of Trinidad and Tobago, especially those most vulnerable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have also been informed that children are also being moved between institutions, so they have no sense of comfort, and children are also being moved from these residential homes to state institutions. Some of them have even been placed in homes for senior citizens. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a sad state of affairs for children under the care of the State at this time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you will recall that there was the Judith Jones Report and 43 policies were approved by the Board in relation to that report between 2024 and 2026. Indeed, a few of those are the delegation of financial authority, the caregiver-to-child ratio, the critical incidents reporting, the child and family engagement and interaction spaces, the kinship foster care, a whistleblowing system, and a child justice support system.

Eighty-five per cent of what was recommended by the Judith Jones Report

was put in place between the time of the report and the time we demitted office. But Madam Deputy Speaker, my understanding is that these recommendations have not been followed up, and the funding that is needed for these recommendations to become permanent has not been put in place.

Additionally, some of the projects that required funding were not allowed. And funding from UNICEF, which normally funded quite a number of these projects—so, UNICEF and other global entities have significantly reduced their funding because there is a recognition that under this administration there is no real interest in safeguarding these children. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask the Minister to ensure that the social protection that is needed is in fact given to the children of this nation who are most in need.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you may also recall that there are two development projects that were taking place under the last administration. One was the development of a new building for the Ministry of Social Development and the other—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, your time has ended.

Hon. Member: Nah man.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. 15 minutes have ended, Ma'am?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, Ma'am, if you recall the Standing Orders during the Appropriation Bill—

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Ten minutes have ended?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, it has.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Alright, well, I beg to move.

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

VISITOR

HON. CHARLES S. RAMSON JR

(Member of Parliament, Guyana)

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the next speaker, I would like to welcome to the House the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, the hon. Charles S. Ramson Jr., MP.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

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

The Minister of Housing (Hon. David Lee): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate this afternoon. I welcome my colleague from Guyana. Welcome to the Chamber.

6.40 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, where can I start after listening to my—I call her my friend from Trincity/Maloney. I know she has another engagement to take part in White Hall, I think—

Hon. Members: White Hall. **"**You sure right."

Hon. D. Lee: Not White Hall.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Not White Hall. A few steps away from here. So I know she is on her way there and she has been practising her speech for later. I know she does not normally stay late in the Chamber, so I was very surprised that she is here at this hour of the evening, Madam Deputy Speaker. And she drew me out. I really was

not prepared to come—

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

Hon. D. Lee: I really was not prepared to come to speak this afternoon. But after listening to what she had to say and a lot of misinformation she has put out there, I will get to her in due course, Madam Deputy Speaker. But I just want to say, it is a pleasure rising to debate and give my contribution this afternoon. I want to compliment the Minister of Finance for an awesome budget that he delivered-

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee:—on Monday, an awesome budget, led by the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia and her team. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is 6.41 p.m., presently, and we started at 9.30 this morning. And the Leader of the Opposition spoke for about two hours and half an hour, 30 minutes, and I cannot remember what she spoke about so far. It was very mundane. I do not think the country understood what she spoke about this morning.

Ms. Ameen: Sparrow funeral was more exciting.

Hon. D. Lee: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I also would like to compliment my good friend, my colleague from Naparima for a dynamic contribution—

Hon. Members: Yes, yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: And I listened; I was not in the Chamber, but I listened to my colleague, my friend from Trincity/Maloney making some remarks about the Member for Naparima. You know sometimes we forget, we tend to forget what we say in the public domain, Madam Deputy Speaker. We tend to forget. And I was able to quickly do, not AI, not ChatGPT, but proper facts that the PNM had back in their internal elections. And I think it was around '96 or '97 in their PNM internal elections.

Hon. Members: "Wooo."

Hon. D. Lee: I just want to quote, I am quoting. It is not ChatGPT or AI from Maloney, right? So, I want to quote it, because, you know, the Member for Trincity/Maloney spoke certain things about my colleague of Naparima in our internal election. So, I just want share some of the things that the PNM internal elections—and I quote, from at the time and I want to say, Camille Robinson-Regis during the PNM internal elections. And I quote, Madam Deputy Speaker:

Rowley is unfit to lead.

Hon. Members: "Ohhh."

Hon. D. Lee: He is too arrogant. He does not entertain views different from his.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: Right.

He does not entertain views different from his. The central theme of our attack should be Rowley and his acknowledged arrogance.

Hon. Member: Yuck.

Hon. D. Lee: These are not our words.

He is temperamental and he is unfit to be Prime Minister.

Hon. Member: Who said that.

Hon. D. Lee: The Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Members: Yuck, yuck, yuck.

Hon. D. Lee: Keith—and I quote, I go on.

Keith Rowley in the internal election has articulated no policy for health, escalating crime and rising poverty. Keith Rowley has shown himself unable to be a team player and in a party historical—

Mr. Des Vignes: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(1). What does this have to do with

any figure in the appropriation? The Member he is mentioning is retired.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just as the Member for Trincity/Maloney brought up certain things, this is a response to that. Overruled. Member for Caroni Central, please continue.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you.

Hon. Members: "Yaay!" [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Madam Deputy Speaker, I sat in silence when my colleague was speaking from Trincity/Maloney, and I have a lot to say here this afternoon, and I am hoping, I am asking my Leader of Government Business to protect me from now, all right, because I have a lot to say here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Say it, say it.

Hon. D. Lee: Let me finish the quote from the hon. Member for Trincity/Maloney.

> Keith Rowley has shown himself unable to be a team player and in a party historically characterized by strict and internal discipline, he has led a mutiny.

So if—I know my colleague from Trincity/Maloney is on her way to a PNM meeting, if she wants me to lend her this quote so that when speaks tonight you can start off your speaking with this, Madam Deputy Speaker, all right.

Mr. Hosein: She is not coming back to the—

Hon. D. Lee: No, no. Madam Deputy Speaker, no, I am not giving way.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Deputy Speaker, I apologize, I apologize to Dr. Rowley.

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

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I apologize.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please continue, Member.

Hon. D. Lee: "What dey say? He doh like so?"

Hon. Members: He what? "Do so, doh like so."

Hon. D. Lee: "Do so, doh like so", all right. The truth hurts, the truth hurts, the truth hurts. Madam Deputy Speaker, now I know you have to talk on behalf of Arima tonight, so, you know. Madam Deputy Speaker, I listened to my colleague Trincity/Maloney talking about, they have three Ministers in the Ministry of Housing. For the last 10 years under their tenureship, they had eight Ministers, eight Ministers.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: Let me remind the public who those eight Ministers were. A former Member of Port of Spain South, God rest her soul, Marlene Mc Donald; a former Member for San Fernando East, he is now the biggest blogger they have in Trinidad and Tobago, called Randall Mitchell; a former Member for Diego Martin West, Dr. Keith Rowley; a former Member for Point Fortin, retired Major Edmund Dillon; the Member for Arima, the Leader of the Opposition, Pennelope Beckles. Where my friend gone? She gone.

Hon. Member: She gone to the meeting.

Hon. D. Lee: And the Member presently for Trincity/Maloney, the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, and then for a one-month stint, the Member for Laventille East/Movant, the past Minister Adrian Leonce. So, over the 10 years, they had eight Ministers and they only produced in those 10 years approximately 4,500 homes; approximately 450 homes per year, Madam Deputy Speaker. And the Member, my colleague, wants to talk about delivery. I will tell her about delivery

just now.

Hon. Member: "Go ahead man."

Hon. D. Lee: I will tell her. So they built over 4,500 homes in 10 years, Madam Deputy Speaker. One of their hallmarks was that when they used to cut ribbons for homes, they had a track record of cutting ribbons, they love to cut ribbons to deliver homes, and as they give out the keys, Madam Deputy Speaker, they give on the left, they take it back on their right.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: So, as they are leaving the proceedings, they used to ask back the family for the keys.

Hon. Members: "Oh nooo."

Hon. D. Lee: They did it at Edinburgh Towers that the Member talked about, and I will get there. They did it all over, in Caura. They gave it out in Trestrail that was not even built.

Hon. Members: Mamaguy.

Hon. D. Lee: So they are about mamaguying, just like how the Leader of the Opposition talk about mamaguy, they are the biggest mamaguy they have around in this country.

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

Hon. D. Lee: Their politics is based on mamaguy. Our politics is based on delivery, delivery, Madam Deputy Speaker. So that is their track record with homes, and I will get more into that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague talked a lot, and I hope I can remember certain things that she had said. She talked about the Petrotrin workers and the land.

Hon. Member: "Oh Lord."

Hon. D. Lee: They do not even have the moral authority to talk about those Petrotrin workers.

Hon. Members: None, none.

Hon. D. Lee: None at all. Not so Point Fortin? None at all. They shut down Petrotrin and sent home the workers under the pretence of giving them lands that Petrotrin had.

Hon. Member: Correct. OWTU agreement.

Hon. D. Lee: The lands that Petrotrin had.

6.50 p.m.

And my colleague here from Trincity/Maloney very well knows that the lands that they had promised the Petrotrin workers were not the lands they were trying to give them.

Mr. Hosein: Correct.

Hon. D. Lee: They were not the same lands.

Mr. Hosein: Correct. They were misleading.

Hon. D. Lee: They were misleading, and my colleague wants to talk like she cares about the workers of Petrotrin.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: "I mean, I like yuh inno", but you must be factual and honest. Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague talked about, on the other side, about raising prices that the HDC is doing. Madam Deputy Speaker, you see, they do not remember what they do, you know. "They doh remember what they does do."

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: They do not remember. I have a letter here under their tenureship

that Oasis Gardens Apartments, Madam Deputy Speaker, in November 2023, they were increasing the prices of Oasis Gardens. So, a one-bedroom that they had promised the people went from four—I want to get the right. Because I do not want to make up things like my colleague, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: The old price underneath them for a one-bedroom apartment was $280,000, Madam Deputy Speaker. In 2023, they increased it to $400,000 underneath them—I have a letter. A two-bedroom was $400,000, the old price. Underneath them, in 2023, they increased it to $550,000, Madam Deputy Speaker. A three-bedroom Oasis, $500,000 was the old price. They increased it to $650,000. So, I do not know if my colleague forgot, but I have the letter. I can show her the letter that you increased it, all right. Signed by, at the time, their PNM CEO, one Jayselle McFarlane.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hosein: Jayselle McFarlane.

Hon. D. Lee: Jayselle McFarlane.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: Well, I do not know who is PNM, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: The gentleman applied for the job. He got the job based on merit. That is how we operate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: That is how we operate. That is how we operate. We operate on merit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: We operate on merit, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I do not—we do not ask the people at HDC, the new board, we do not ask about political party cards, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are not into that.

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Lee: What?

Mr. Scotland SC: Give him his 30 pieces of silver.

Hon. D. Lee: Relax yourself. Relax yourself. Madam Deputy Speaker, Madam Deputy Speaker, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will get more in-depth into what my colleague said about EPOS just now. But I want to ask my colleague, does she know the boundaries of where east Port of Spain lies?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Hon. D. Lee: Tell me the boundaries. Right. When she was there as the Minister, they did not nothing for east Port of Spain, Madam Deputy Speaker. East Port of Spain was a slush fund for them, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: What East Port of Spain used to do, Madam Deputy Speaker, what they used to do was latrine eradication in east Port of Spain. The same thing that Port of Spain City Corporation does, Madam Deputy Speaker. Let me tell you the boundaries of east Port of Spain, to remind my colleague. I mean, she does not know, and I do not even think my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West understands these boundaries.

Mr. Scotland SC: Aye. Ask me.

Hon. D. Lee: Not even you.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: East Port of Spain boundaries start from South Quay up to the

Eastern Main Road to Morvant, up Laventille Main Road. Come down, all parts of Belmont back into Port of Spain, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is the same landmarks that fall under the Port of Spain Corporation.

Hon. Members: No. Barataria/San Juan

Hon. D. Lee: And some of Barataria/San Juan. They do the same work, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the last 10 years, they had a board that did nothing for east Port of Spain. Based on what my colleague was talking about, they have to do projects and plans, and the people of east Port of Spain, and the people of that area depend on East Port of Spain, it is the furthest from the truth. All they used to do is give out hampers, hampers, Madam Deputy Speaker, right, and jobs for the boys and girls, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So really—we are under the Ministry of Housing. We have taken the thing to analyse what went on in East Port of Spain and whether or not we can improve what really and truly the remit of what East Port of Spain is supposed to be, Madam Deputy Speaker. Because East Port of Spain, under the PNM, has lost its moorings, Madam Deputy Speaker. All right, and we have to bring it back in line.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: We would bring it back in line under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague talked about the malls, the mall city company, Madam Deputy Speaker. They started to build a mall at, I think, 41 Independence Square. They gave out a contract to one Yorke Structures, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have a report, and I will get to it later on and it is riddled, riddled with issues, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the contractor. And NIPDEC, who is the project arm, had to literally send a report shutting it down because of the

issues of the contractor, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, we are also doing an evaluation of New City Limited, the malls, to see how best we can get it back. But really, what it was designed to be for, for the craftsmen—

Sen. Jeremie SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Lee: "Uh?"

Sen. Jeremie SC: Do not use Yorke.

Hon. D. Lee: No. No. I think the recommendation is not to use Yorke. These malls were designed for our small businesses, craftsmen and women of this country. They were supposed to go into these malls for a period of time, a peppercorn rate, until they can get their footing and then move on to somewhere better, Madam Deputy Speaker. Some of those individuals have been there for years, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the rates that they pay leave much to be desired, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to get into HDC and, given the history of HDC underneath their tenureship and under the leadership under this Prime Minister, what we are going to do with HDC, Madam Deputy Speaker.

When we came in, Madam Deputy Speaker, HDC had over $700 million annually in losses, $700 million annually in losses, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was a drain on the taxpayers of this country, and the country cannot afford to continue that, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have over $600 million owing to contractors and suppliers that we inherited underneath them, $600 million. That is not a small amount, $600 million, and a lot of those contractors and suppliers are friends and family, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I would say much more on that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just before elections last year, I think

Trincity/Maloney was, for the majority of time before election, the sitting Minister of Housing. They ran up the overdraft at HDC from $60 million, when we came in, to $160 million, Madam Deputy Speaker. Unapproved, unapproved from the then Minister of Finance. So, they took the overdraft at HDC, unapproved, from $60 million to $160 million, Madam Deputy Speaker, $100 million more than the approved limit and with no approvals, as I said, from the Minister of Finance. And what did they do with that extra $100 million, Madam Deputy Speaker? And I would—a lot of the election gimmicks. They started to pay off financiers that had contracts with the HDC, Madam Deputy Speaker, right.

What we also inherited, and I will tell you where the overdraft is today, of the hard work this new Board has done to HDC, Madam Deputy Speaker. This new Board moved that overdraft from $160 million back to what it is supposed to be, under $60 million, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is performance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: That is the performance, and at the same time moved HDC in housing, and I will show that.

7.00 p.m.

So, they were able—HDC's new Board, the Chairman, new management was able to bring back that overdraft in line, underneath $60 million. That is no small achievement. That took hard work; hard work. Madam Deputy Speaker, when we took over HDC, the employees' pension fund was in deficit by $400 million.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: We are not talking $40 million, $4 million. Their pension fund was in deficit by over $400 million, and my colleague knows that. These things would have been coming on her desk. She was fully aware of it.

Mr. Hosein: She never used to go to work.

Hon. D. Lee: She was fully aware. All eight past Ministers would have been aware of it. But they were kicking the can along the road. They were kicking the can along the road.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "Ah cyah kick".

Hon. D. Lee: "Yuh cyah kick? All right, well, yuh go learn". All right? You were kicking it down the road. So, the pension fund of employees, who work hard for HDC, that they say they cared about, just like the Petrotrin workers, their pension plan is in deficit of over—just like the pension plan in Petrotrin.

Mr. Kesar: That is right. That is right.

Hon. D. Lee: So, we, as the new Government, have to take corrective measures to make the employees of HDC feel safe that their pension fund is there for them to be able to get their monthly pension on a continual basis. And we would do that with no drain on the Treasury, Madam Deputy Speaker, because we have a plan. We have a plan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, HDC had over hundreds—and my colleague knows that, you know—of HDC homes illegally occupied. To be fair to her, she tried to do something, my colleague, but it is—what they did over the last 10 years with giving out free homes, free rental, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Free rental?

Hon. D. Lee: Of course, you want me to—free rent—you were giving people—I have—"doh leh meh call no name, yuh know".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: "Doh leh meh call no name on that side, yuh know, okay?'

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: "Doh leh meh call no name".

Mr. Hosein: "Call de names, nah".

Hon. D. Lee: "Ah doh want to do dat. Ah doh want to do dat. Doh push meh. Doh push meh".

Mr. Hosein: "Ah want to hear dem names".

Hon. D. Lee: "Doh push meh. Yuh wouldn't like de names. Yuh woudn't like meh to—how people on your side does be calling me"—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: For houses?

Hon. D. Lee: "No, to see how ah could ease up the people who illegally occupying de homes".

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: Who could be—who have not paid their rents for years Madam Deputy Speaker. "So, I really doh know if she"—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: I would not do that to your colleagues. I would not do it. I would not do it because the Attorney General "tell meh doh do it. Doh do it. He tell meh doh do it". And I would not do it. I would not do it tonight. I might do it some other time, "but I eh go to do it tonight".

Ms. Ameen: Not tonight.

Hon. D. Lee: Not tonight.

Hon. Member: "It too early".

Hon. D. Lee: And I would not do it.

Hon. Member: "If it was later, yuh might ah do it".

Hon. D. Lee: I would not do it because I treat everybody fair.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are going start calling names?

Hon. D. Lee: "You calling names?"

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, you.

Hon. D. Lee: All right. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me tell you what they also did with the $100 million and running up the overdraft. Just before elections, Deputy Speaker, they created a $14 million fake employment programme for 2,000 persons. And she is aware of that, eh, because my colleague was there at the time. They started to create these work programmes for votes just before elections, because Trincity/Maloney would have been aware when my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was going to call elections. So, they started to prepare.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]—Attorney General, eh.

Hon. D. Lee: Well, worse yet. It took two of you all to form a Cabinet.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Hon. D. Lee: "And you all coulda do yuh own ting".

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And we did.

Hon. D. Lee: All right? And you did. According to you, you did. You did, all right? So, the point I am saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that they created these vote work banks and my—well, he lost his seat in San Fernando West, beaten by a great educator, Michael Dowlath.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: That individual, the former, former, former Attorney General—he is so much former, "all kinda former"—

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. D. Lee:—he wanted the biggest chunk.

Mr. Hosein: He never became AG.

Hon. DD. Lee:—the biggest chunk of this vote bank of hiring these young men and women for votes. My other colleague from San Fernando East was not too far behind my colleague from San Fernando West, right, with these employment programmes. So, they spent $14 million. Elections came—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: How much?

Hon. D. Lee:—they lost—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: How much?

Hon. D. Lee:—$14 million—they lost, and they did not pay the workers. We had to end up paying the employees, right?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: Because these are young men and women who signed a contract for some sort of employment for votes, and that is our responsibility. Because these are the same young men and women that we take care of, not like Arima; what she said this morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. But we are fixing it. We are fixing it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to give what we have done, coming into government over the last—in HDC with homes. I am proud, last week, to give out homes in the Caura, over 100 townhouses.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: I am proud of that. It took us 18 months to finish what they could not do.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "Oh gosh, doh say dat".

Hon. D. Lee: All right. "Now yuh pushing meh to say something".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: "Yuh pushing me to say something about de Caura".

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: "Yuh pushing meh to say something about de Caura. And ah go say it".

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. D. Lee: "Ah go say it".

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

Hon. D. Lee: That same Cuara development—and it is a good development—just before the elections, HDC went and asked the contractor to do a variation of over $2.3 million—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: $2.3 million?

Hon. Dr. D. Lee:—$2.3 million, right, just before the elections. Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg for protection.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Trincity/Maloney, we need to remember this is not a conversation, this is the Member's contribution, right? So, let us let the Member for Caroni Central continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Madam Deputy, the truth hurts, you know. The truth hurts, you know. The truth hurts. I sat in silence when my colleague was talking. I did not disturb you. "Why yuh disturbing me?"

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "Because ah missing yuh".

Hon. D. Lee: "Yuh missing meh?"

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

Hon. D. Lee: Madam Deputy Speaker, that contract, that variation was over $2.3 million extra just before the elections; just before the elections, and I will say more on that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, their track record—let me tell you about their track record, and I want to read it out, and I do not want to mislead the population. They did a project in Bon Air North Housing Development, and my colleague would know about it. That housing project was done underneath them. It has structural instability, serious safety concerns, 50 housing units there are experiencing significant wrong movements towards an adjacent river, rendering them unsafe, Madam Deputy Speaker, necessitating maybe demolition. That is their legacy. The situation raises serious concerns, Madam Deputy Speaker, about the geotechnical assessment. Somehow, geotechnical is not their friend, and I will talk about Trestrail. Geotechnical is not their friend. It has construction quality issues, poor engineering oversight, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that construction was done by one of their good friends. I know the AG knows that company, good. He might not like it. I think my colleague from Diego Martin North/East does not like that company, right? I think he does not really like that company.

Mr. Gonzales: What is the name?

Hon. D. Lee: It is called NH International.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: Right?

Mr. Young SC: "I win de case for him, yuh know".

Hon. D. Lee: Well, Diego Martin North/East must be hate you.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Lee: Anyway, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am being disturbed. "I doh know why dey doh want me to talk".

There is another project in my colleague's area called—my good friend, the Chief Whip—Bon Air Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade, underneath them, a

project initially valued at $3.6 million, eh, in 2017. Who was in charge? That administration; $3.6 million. It escalated, climbed, jumped up, Madam Deputy Speaker, to a staggering $34 million in 2022.

Hon. Members: What?

Hon. D. Lee: "AG, I doh have court clothes. I leave dat for you to tell dem".

7.10 p.m.

So, it went from 3.6, Madam Deputy Speaker, to $34million in about five years, an increase of over 844 per cent without any evidence of transparent competitive tendering, without any transparent competitive tendering. I listened to my friend, Trincity, about OPR, and I will get to OPR. I will get to OPR, right? My colleague talked about Mahogany Court Housing Development. They delivered that development, not UNC. They delivered it. She forgot. Like a lot of things, you did forget.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, I did not forget.

Hon. D. Lee: You did not forget it? But you said that thing—we did not give out Mahogany, you did. Now, Mahogany Court Housing Development, Madam Deputy Speaker, again, is something like Bon Air: Construction deficiencies, electrical safety concerns, persistent water leaks, molding—you know who the contractor is, again? He does not like it, Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Member: NH?

Hon. D. Lee: NH International. Carlton Lane in San Fernando Housing Development; their project, substandard construction, persistent water intrusion, mold infestation; they loved mold. "All of their projects we now have to correct, all de mold. Thank God we get rid ah de mold on April de 28th. Thank God we get rid ah de mold on April de 28th".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: "Thank God we get rid ah de mold."

Hon. Member: "Pick ah mold. Pick ah mold."

Hon. D. Lee: Well, mold.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mold is a persistent problem there, you know [*inaudible*].

Hon. D. Lee: I do not know about your mold, but we correct mold, right? Carlsen Field Housing Development, it is in my constituency of Caroni Central, and it hurts me to see the condition my community is living in, in Carlsen Field, and that is their project, "eh." That started underneath them, Madam Deputy Speaker, right? Let me give you a little bit about that. It was supposed to be 701 housing units. A project that had produced only 537 units by 2025, some 17-plus years later, with serious concerns, again, workmanship. Despite this, an additional $104 million was paid to the contractor prior to the termination of the contract. You know who was the contractor? A good one of their people, H. Lewis Construction.

Hon. Member: Hmmm.

Ms. John: "He doh finish nothing."

Hon. D. Lee: "Ah?"

Ms. John: "He doh finish nothing."

Hon. D. Lee: "He doh finish nothing. Yuh hear my colleague? He doh finish nothing"—H. Lewis Construction. It hurts me when I walk through that community of Carlsen Field of what has been done to them and the infrastructure. Madam Deputy Speaker, Trestrail.

Hon. Members: "Ohhhhh"

Hon. D. Lee: Trestrail was their infamous PPP, but they had a little PPP problem,

Madam Deputy Speaker. The contractor was Ricky Raghuganan, and I think, somehow, my friend, Trincity/Maloney, made that or exposed that, not so?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Hon. D. Lee: You exposed it. I do not know what your Prime Minister at the time, who you talked about very glowingly, right?—I want to repeat that before I end, "glowingly," right? I do not know what was the fallback for you when you exposed Ricky Raghunanan and the Trestrail project, right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He was happy.

Hon. D. Lee: He was happy?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah.

Hon. D. Lee: "Well dat is he boy, I hear. I hear dat is his boy. I hear dat is his boy", right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Deputy Speaker, you see, he is having a conversation with me.

Hon. D. Lee: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am being disturbed. We all know that Trestrail Development done by Ricky Raghunanan and what is going to happen there. A whole commission of enquiry was done on it. The gentleman, the contractor, is not taking ownership, and at the end of the day, based on what I have seen, that project might have to be demolished. And who is going to pay, Madam Deputy Speaker? That is their PPP model, "eh."

Their PPP model with Ricky Raghunanan was twofold. HDC paid for the infrastructure, the roads, and so forth, and Ricky Raghunanan was supposed to just build the townhouses. But because of poor supervision by HDC, not to blame my colleague, Trincity/Maloney, they allowed Ricky Raghunanan to do what he wanted to do on that project. And what is the fallback for this country? The same

young men and women that my colleague talked about, who cannot get a home, because of the failure of Ricky Raghunanan and the debacle that he did with that housing project. But I want to tell the country, under this new HDC board and chairman, and the Ministry of Housing, we will fix it. We fix it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: They could not do it. They could not do it. We will fix it. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at the same $100million in the overdraft that they ran up unapproved, who benefited from that $100million? Companies that are all related to a Senator underneath them, Foster Cummings; another financier called Andrew Gabriel; they benefited under that $100 million, Madam Deputy Speaker. That $100 million, they benefited underneath them, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, the small contractor who is now lining up outside HDC begging to be paid, they did not pay them. They did not pay them. They saw it fit to pay the big boys before the small and medium contractors, Madam Deputy Speaker. So where is the equality and fairness that they talk about? They are about protecting their people. We are about quality and fairness for the small and medium contractors.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: That is what our Prime Minister is about. I want to talk about a development called Lake View in my colleague's constituency of Point Fortin, Lake View Housing Development. It is an incomplete infrastructure, abandoned housing units, and denial of homeownership rights. Despite being vested since 2024—my colleague here, the hon. Saddam Hosein knows about that—despite being vested since 2024, this development remains incomplete, with abandoned bungalows, which we found; outstanding works; home ownership—this is a critical

one—unable to obtain legal deeds to their properties. They are not able to obtain legal deeds. These people are paying, Madam Deputy Speaker, but they do not have title. And that is their legacy. They used to just try to build something and hope that these deeds and the title of these ownerships will come out at some point in time.

Mr. Hosein: They are building on lands that are not theirs.

Hon. D. Lee: "Ah?"

Mr. Hosein: They are building on lands that are not theirs.

Hon. D. Lee: Correct, and Caura was like that.

Mr. Hosein: Correct, we had to come to the Parliament—

Hon. D. Lee: We had to come to correct that, to be able to give out keys, Madam Deputy Speaker. When I gave out keys Saturday, I want to assure this country I did not take it back.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: The people were on site. The people were on site, and there are videos. I can give you testimonies of the people taking home their keys. Someone was even putting in their furniture, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is the kind of performance we have done, and that is what we will do, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, we do not take back the keys. We give out the keys, and we say, "welcome," because we understand what a home means to people, Madam Deputy Speaker.

On that Saturday last week, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a list of the people we gave out homes to. I want to say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am putting it here, me, David Lee, Minister of Housing, have no horse in that race for those hundred townhouses, none, none. I have my own home, alright? And these people who got their homes, got it fair and square, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Not like them. They were giving out homes, assigning townhouses to people who had no deed, no mortgages; they were not ready to do it. They did no proper assessment—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Lee: That is true, my colleague. "Maybe yuh didn't use to go to work in de Ministry of Housing, so yuh doh know wah use to go on down in de HDC. Ah know dat. Ah doh blame yuh. Ah doh blame yuh. Ah doh blame yuh".

7.20 p.m.

That is the history of HDC under you all, Madam Deputy Speaker. They were giving out homes, assigning homes to people, taking their finding fee of their—what do you call it, $700 when you do a search that they do not own any other property and so forth. And these people felt that when they did that, they were one step away from acquiring their home and their keys. And these people are now writing me, and some of your colleagues on that side are also writing me, to find out what is going on with these people who were told that they would get a home. Right? Do not let me talk about you, you know.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Lee: "Doh" let me talk about you, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: **"**Doh" let me talk about you. I am waiting for Diego Martin North/East. I will talk about him just now.

Mr. Young SC: He does call too?

Hon. D. Lee: What? What? You will be saying, I do not want, I'm a good person. Right?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is the Lakeview, which my colleague has been begging HDC and me to correct the wrongs for these people of Point Fortin. And I want to assure my colleague from Point Fortin that we will correct it. We will give them their titles and their deeds because that is what the people want.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: And if you go around to all HDC projects, housing developments, it is the same issue. The people are paying their mortgages and not getting their title. They used to put people call rent-to-own, Madam Deputy Speaker. They love rent-to-own. They love rent-to-own. But rent-to-own does not give back the money to allow HDC to continue building new homes. That is why HDC has always been a drain on the Minister of Finance. But that is not what HDC is about. HDC is about building homes at affordable prices, selling it, and then returning it back into the coffers to be able to build new homes. That is the model. But somewhere along you all, it lost its moorings like everything else. Thank God the people woke up on April the 28th and changed that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: But we cannot continue doing HDC like that. It will not achieve what it is supposed to achieve for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, my colleague is correct when she spoke about the young men and women not being able to get homes, Madam Deputy Speaker. She is correct. That is the only thing I would agree with her about. She is correct. And we will do that, because we understand how homes are important to them, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is what we live for: to be able to have a place and to call it home. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague talked about the OPR. My colleague made a mention about

inheritance tax and being charged. HDC is not charging anybody an inheritance tax.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Or if you inherit a property, we are not charging you. Okay?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you have one more minute of your original speaking time.

Hon. D. Lee: Oh my God. I have 10 more? 11 minutes?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, you may request 10 more minutes.

Hon. D. Lee: I will take all. I will take all and more.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Madam Deputy Speaker, over the last 18 months—12 months, under HDC, we have delivered and handed out keys. By the end of the year, we will be up to 900 homes. All right. We corrected what was left to us, and we have given out those homes, and we will be giving out more by December, Madam Deputy Speaker. We will make people happy for Christmas this Christmas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Lee: These are the homes for Christmas, as my colleague said. But I want to share what our project is for the next 12 months, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I want to call out the different sites because, you see, we have a plan under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Over the next 15 months, we will be constructing over 3,300 homes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: And I will read out where we are doing it. Santa Rosa 1, Arima,

179 single-family homes. Take note. Santa Rosa 2, Arima; 332 single-family homes. Santa Rosa was the confusion when the—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I remember.

Hon. D. Lee: You want me to remind you?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No.

Hon. D. Lee: The past, former, former Prime Minister, when he held on as the Minister of Housing, there was some kind of Chinese contractor that somehow, he got this Santa Rosa project, and they had to pull it back. You remember that?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I remember.

Hon. D. Lee: Okay. And then you fired him as the Minister of Housing, and you took over.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Lee: All right. La Culebra in Arima, in my colleague for La Horquetta/Talparo's constituency, 334 single-family homes; Carson Yard in Arima—we do not discriminate—for the Leader of the Opposition, 163 single-family homes. Holly Betaudier Malabar—we will continue. You all did it, 61—that is D'Abadie/O'Meara. Who is that? Former colleague there. Trestrail, Arouca, well, you used to be in Arouca, I do not know if it still falls under you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Trestrail is Member for Lopinot.

Hon. D. Lee: It was yours? Marvin, 118 homes. Trestrail, Phase 3, 4, and 5, Arouca; 155.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: PNM.

Hon. D. Lee: You are saying PNM, but I do not know if PNM will end up there. Mausica Estate, 148. Mausica Estate—because, you see, we do not know who is PNM when we are giving out homes, Ma'am.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: We give out homes for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We give out homes. So, when you are saying PNM, I do not know why you feel PNM will be there. We give out homes. We give out homes—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They are in that area—

Hon. D. Lee: No, we give out homes—I want to say it hard. We give out homes to the people of Trinidad and Tobago who deserve the homes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Thomas Trace, Bon Air South; 20. Pineapple Smith, Mausica; 225. Oasis Green, we continue it in Chaguanas, in my colleague Chaguanas East; 30. Again in Oasis Green, Phase 5; 28. Oasis Green, 5D; 28 again. 16th Street in Edinburgh; 512. Harmony Hall in Marabella; 17. Eden Garden in Freeport; 77. Tarouba North, San Fernando; 5. Couva North Exchange, Section 3; 90. Couva North Exchange, Section 5; 57. Lisas Gardens in Couva South; 133. Savonetta Phase 1 in Claxton Bay; 354. Savonetta Phase 3, Claxton Bay; 288. Rio Claro, my friend, my colleague, my good friend from Rio Claro, Mayaro; 10 and building. Just now, Moruga; 39. These are single-family homes. These are not townhouses, eh. I want to tell you, "We do not build townhouses". We are not building townhouses. The people of Trinidad and Tobago want single-family homes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: My colleague, you know—I wish I had more minutes—my colleague talked about citrus growers. Citrus Growers is not too far from here. They did a development called Citrus Clove. The bill, it was—at the end of the day, even the land structure—I have a lot more to say about that—had a connection

with a former, former Prime Minister. I would not say anything.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Hon. D. Lee: Right? So, while it was called Citrus Growers, the original owner of the land had a connection, right? They got a contract, and that contract is out in the public. The person who got that contract was not the best price, was not the best bidder, but they got this contract to build, I think, four towers in the area of what we know as Citrus Growers. When you all—there was no study done to say why they should build these four towers in that particular area. That particular area is a hotspot.

In my view, it was going to create another planning war because the builder, when I visited, who was doing the work, the contractor, had to hire people in the area because bullets used to fly, and my colleague from Tunapuna is well aware of that. So, there was no feasibility study of why they should do it there. Right? Madam Deputy Speaker? So even that project has been halted, and we are now trying to see if we can change the use of it to put something that is more feasible for that particular area, Madam Deputy Speaker. And we will say more on that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You only have five more minutes [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Lee: I might end up like you.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

7.30 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a lot more I can say, but I want to say before I end—I want to spend two minutes on my constituency–that the HDC is a changed organization under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: We are correcting all the ills of HDC, and there are a lot of ills of HDC, right? We are correcting EPOS, and we are correcting the mall limited, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did not get a chance to talk about smart cities that the Ministry of Housing will be doing. Not only in Arima that they only wanted to concentrate, we are doing it in Chaguanas, the new city of Chaguanas and Siparia will bring in the smart cities, right?

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I end, I want to thank the people of Caroni Central—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee:—for loving me and having the love and support that I get from them, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities for the great work that he has been doing in my constituency of Caroni Central.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: When we came in, Madam Deputy Speaker, under my friend, my colleague from Arouca/Lopinot, the people of Caroni Central were getting water once every three weeks—

Hon. Member: "Woo."

Mr. Alexander: We fixed that.

Hon. D. Lee: Once every three weeks. Under the leadership of the Minister of Public Utilities, it went better than that, and we have plans to achieve better for the people of Caroni as far as water distribution is concerned. I want to thank my colleague from Couva North. She came out with me five o'clock one morning, and we went through Caroni Central—

Mr. Alexander: She was late?

Hon. D. Lee:—I was late, and you are now seeing a change in Caroni Central. Now, Caroni Central is not only the central as you want to think it is, it stretches from Caparo, Palmiste, Longdenville, Montrose, right, down to Preysal Gran Couva. It is a very large landmass. So, I hope when we become a borough, I get some love from my Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: I just want to say thanks to the hon. Prime Minister for having the love for me to put me back as a Member in Caroni Central. I want to thank her for her love and support.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Lee: Yeah, I love my Prime Minister. I do not know about you. You do not love.

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

Hon. D. Lee: Well, based on what I read out here, I do not think you love your former, former Prime Minister, eh, based on what you said here, he led a mutiny. He is temperamental.

Hon. Members: "Ooooh."

Hon. D. Lee: He is arrogant. Something like what I think the late father ofSan Fernando East would have said at some point in time. So, I do not know if you want to borrow it, but Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know how much more time I have.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have one more minute.

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to thank all my colleagues on this side for their love and support that they have shown to me, and I

want to thank again before I end the people of Caroni Central and my Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Diego Martin Central.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Symon de Nobriga (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, thanks for recognizing me to enter this debate on the budget, themed: A People-Centred Approach: Investing in Communities, Transforming the Economy and Securing a Sustainable Future. Madam Deputy Speaker, before I get into my substantive contribution, there are few issues that I need to address. It is unfortunate that too many times, when we come to this House, those on the other side take the opportunity to propagate misinformation, and there are a few things that I think we do need to treat with.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Mayaro, I quite like. That is my partner, Caroni Central, right?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—and he and he stood here, I have to admit, he gave a very spirited contribution. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, spirited does not mean truthful.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—and unfortunately, there are a couple issues. One of which I will deal with, "and one ah going and deal with ah little later". All right. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Mayaro, who is clearly the line Minister for TTT, came here and said that he spoke with the staff at TTT and asked them, something about why they are not showing international events and whatnot, and

they told him that they had gotten a directive to only carry local. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are two issues there. First of all, what is wrong with the state media having a focus on local content?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: "Is so" you hate Trinidad and Tobago? What is wrong with that?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Nothing.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: But, Madam Deputy Speaker, besides the fact that under the former administration, where there was a PNM line Minister, there was a large focus, yes, on local cultural programming. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, he neglected to spend a little bit of time researching the information that he had been given, because if he had gone to TTT's website, he would have seen on April 05, 2024, both a story, a video, and a picture of the then Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the then line Minister for TTT, your humble servant, along with the then CEO and a representative from Sportsmax. Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, TTT had entered into an agreement with Sportsmax to carry the Olympics. As far as I know, the Olympics is not a Trinidad and Tobago event. That is an international sporting event.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have no idea why the Member would come and proffer that untruth, except for the fact that he just liked to do that. Madam Deputy Speaker, no need, you know, he was going good all along. No need, but so need to say something that is not true, he had to throw that in the mix. He laughed while he was doing it, you know, knowing exactly what he was doing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member is also a member of the Roman Catholic faith, and I want to admonish him to go to confession—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—to carry himself before the Lord, and beg forgiveness for his transgressions.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(6).

Hon. Member: What!

Mr. Padarath: I think it is unfair to be reflecting on people's personal faith in a debate like this, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let us move on, Member.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think the Member knows that I was saying it in good favour—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—and but of course, his Leader of Government Business clearly—

Hon. Member: Not in a jovial mood.

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—no, he is not in a jovial mood. Madam Deputy Speaker, I also sat here while the Member for Caroni Central was speaking. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Standing Orders allow us 55 minutes total during this debate. For 55 minutes, the Member spent not focused on what his Ministry was doing, you know. He spent his time almost exclusively talking about what had happened before and the usual wild accusations and whatnot.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I sat as part of a Cabinet, and we were always given instructions when we were coming to a budget debate, in particular, and the instruction from the then Prime Minister, forwarded through the Leader of

Government Business or Leader of the House, was: You are to focus on what you are doing, you are speaking to the nation. Speak about what you are doing in your Ministry that is improving people's lives. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the speaker before me, the Member to my right, made a comment that there were three Ministers in a Ministry and they were doing nothing. The Member for Caroni Central stood up and proved that absolutely correct, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

7.40 p.m.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Nothing to talk about. Not a thing to speak about, except to "call name and try to buss mark" that, unfortunately, for him, because they have ridden that horse into the ground, there is nothing more that they can say. Old news, one-trick pony. Madam Deputy Speaker, while he was doing that, however, the Member made, again, an allegation, but he did not—like the Member for Mayaro, he was not laughing when he said it, so we on this side did not take it as a joke.

The Member for Caroni Central spoke about the Bon Air West Wastewater Treatment Plant. Now, for those who may not remember, that Bon Air West Wastewater Treatment Plant is the plant that the line Minister mixed up between what is a water treatment plant and a wastewater treatment plant, and said that that wastewater treatment plant was going to deliver water to the residents of the East-West Corridor.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central spoke about an increase—sorry, before I say that, he spoke about the initial $3 million on the Bon Air West Wastewater Treatment Plant, and that it was to facilitate minor upgrades. Madam Deputy Speaker, the plant was increased in scope because the project, that

housing, that community was increased significantly in scope, expanded by over 100 units.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Therefore, it would stand to reason that a wastewater treatment plant—and most of us should know, including the line Minister now, what a wastewater treatment plant is there to do. If you increase a project by over 100 units, you cannot expect the existing infrastructure to support that, and as a result, that had to be expanded.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, again, it is unfortunate that the Members take their time to proffer untruths in this House. We know what they are going to do, eh. "All ah dat going to get cut up and sent on social media", because that—not the work that they are doing, eh—is the message that they want to send out; not how they are benefitting. Well, the truth is he is the only line Minister that has spoken. Not a Minister has come here—and my apologies, Mayaro, you are a line Minister of TTT, but you did not tell the truth. They have not come here to speak about what they are doing, how they are spending the money that the Member for Fyzabad is purporting to allocate to them, and what they have done for the last year. None of that is in the conversation. "Just come and make ah set ah bacchanal, tell untruths and point fingers". That is where this House is right now, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is a shame.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: It is a shame.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the line Minister for Housing, the Member for Caroni Central, also told a very unfortunate untruth—maybe not an untruth so

much, but he came here and spoke about, the HDC's model is to build affordable homes and sell them back and bring back the money to continue building, and it is because that was not being done, that the HDC continued to be a drain on the economy. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is a fundamental shift in terms of the purpose of the HDC.

The HDC was designed to create affordable housing that was subsidized by the Government, affordable housing for those in the country who could not afford housing on the open market, and typically, that would be low-income households and low-middle-income households. That is what it was designed to do, to give people a pathway to home ownership through intervention by the Government. That is not what the HDC under this Government and that line Minister seems to be doing. The problem that we have on this side with that is that we already have a historical context for their approach to housing.

It was under them that Victoria Keyes skyrocketed by over $652 million—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—to the point, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we were not even able to subsidize that, to put it on the market for those persons who have applied for housing through the HDC, because even at a significantly subsidized rate, they could not afford it. So, those units had to be put on the open market. But that is a stand-alone, that is not what the HDC was created to do. We are already seeing that the people that the Minister of Housing, the Member for Caroni Central, is talking about are not the people that have always seen HDC as their pathway to home ownership.

Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan has come back into the House, of course, contributing in the way that he does, whether it is in banter or in his contributions, by saying nothing, but saying it loudly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have acknowledged the Member's arrival and his usual behaviour. Can I just ask him to slow down with his typical interruptions?

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me start off where the Member for Caroni Central wanted to end, and I want to thank, first and foremost, the constituents of Diego Martin Central who have put me here—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—and given me the awesome responsibility of representing them and their best interests in this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition for her stellar rebuttal—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—in systematically taking apart this skimpy budget that has come to us, for attributing to it, "mamaguy announced, mamaguy delivered, more to come"—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—and all of my colleagues who have spoken before me.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Fyzabad, as I said, presented a budget under the theme of A People-Centred Approach: Investing in Communities,

Transforming the Economy and Securing a Sustainable Future. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, those are very attractive words, and they were no doubt conceived by—whoever wrote the speech for the Member for Fyzabad, they were conceived with the level of connectedness that clearly the consultant knew would be required, the emotional intelligence that would be required, particularly at a time like we are in now where public trust and public support for this Government is eroding at a most rapid rate.

7.50 p.m.

So, of course, a great title and a great PR campaign leading up to it, where they have made all of these promises, but, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is not how we are going to judge this budget, whether it is in this debate, in the Standing Finance Committee that will follow it, or when the people see its lack of impact, or, worse yet, its negative impact on them. Catchy slogans and great titles will not do them any favours. Madam Deputy Speaker, neither would their typically choreographed response, their call and response, and pounding of the desk. None of those things will assist them. A national budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, has to be judged on what happens to the ordinary people after all of this show by the Government is over, and the thumping is done, and the clapping is done. It has to be judged by that.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I listened to the presentation, let us use that word, I did so not only as a Member of the Opposition, but I did so as the representative for Diego Martin Central, listening to see how this budget, despite the fact that I may be politically opposed to those on the other side, how is this budget going to impact, positively or negatively, my constituents, so that I can speak to them about the opportunities that are available to them through the actions

of the Government that we have right now?

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is nothing here that I can say to my constituents, "Listen, PNM or UNC aside, this is something that should work for you." Nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a simple question that arises from the very opening line of the budget title: "People-Centred". For whom? Madam Deputy Speaker, is it people-centred for the teacher in Diego Martin Central who has lost access to the Employee Assistance Programme support? It is not. Is it people-centred for the former URP and CEPEP workers who have lost that source of income? It is not. Is it people-centred for the vulnerable families in Cocorite, in Petit Valley, in Diamond Vale, in Chuma Monka, in Simeon, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Hosein: Debe.

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—who are finding it increasingly difficult to access assistance. Interestingly, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, from those opposite, they are shouting names at me, alright. But I am here to represent Diego Martin Central.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: I understand clearly, Madam Deputy Speaker, what their assignment is and what they are trying to insinuate, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: I understand that clearly. But I want no part of that. Madam Deputy Speaker, leave that where they are. They could sell it where people want to buy it. But it is not here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Anyway, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is also not people-centred for the residents of Diego Martin Central—but the Union Road, Hillaire, and Simon Street. All in Diego Martin Central who need the assistance to repair their homes through the Self-Help and cannot get the grant.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a budget cannot call itself people-centred if by its very words, reflective of policy, it is pushing people to the margins of society. Madam Deputy Speaker, I know my colleague from St. Ann's East will have a lot to say about the travesty that is now the Ministry of Education. But I spoke to her before and told her that there was one issue that I wanted to raise here. That issue is Diego Martin Central Government Secondary—we have an alumnus here—has not had a Form 5 math teacher for months. You have a Form 5 class that has not had a dedicated substantive teacher for math for months. Madam Deputy Speaker, what is happening there now is that other teachers are trying to shoulder the load for the children. They are all stepping in. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, who is it that is going to be punished by this? Obviously, people are going to say it is the children. They would be correct.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the issue here is that it is not only the children because that situation is not specific to Diego Martin Central. Across this country we are seeing that. We are seeing teachers having to answer to the Ministry, answer to parents, answer to administration, have to deal with curriculum, have to deal with all these things plus be a mentor, advisor, teacher. After they carry the load constantly for the students, who is carrying the teacher?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Who is carrying the teacher? Madam Deputy Speaker, that is why the question about no longer having access to the EAP programme is so

critical. Because if you have a government that says that they care about students—maybe not in their actions. A government that says they care about teachers, then somebody must think about the sacrifice that they are making and making every single day.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while the Minister of Finance presented a budget statement that, having read it here, is 96 pages long and purports to be interested in people and investing in communities, it dedicated less than a page to the Ministry that focuses on people, on families, and serving the most vulnerable in our society. I think that it is despicable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, let me tell you, I have a lot of respect for the Member for Chaguanas East who is the Minister. Whenever I reach out to her on an issue, she does whatever she can as the Minister. Not like the Member for Caroni Central who somehow feels that he needs to report to the Parliament that people are calling him in his substantive role as the Minister of Housing—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga:—somehow. How could that happen?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: But the Member for Chaguanas East never shirks her duties. I have to give her that.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the population also needs to be reminded that the traditional URP, CEPEP and the reforestation programmes, that framework, in Trinidad in particular—it was kept in Tobago—was unilaterally, suddenly and cruelly ended in 2025 by this UNC Government. It is that callous

action from those opposite, Madam Deputy Speaker, that had a real and tangible effect on the vulnerable citizens of Diego Martin Central, in particular, whom I speak for today. So, I know that the usual refrain, whether it is during this or when whoever responds, responds, will come. So, let me be very clear about my position.

If there was criminal activity, investigate it. If anyone is guilty of that, prosecute them. This is not about trying to defend wrongdoing, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, the fact is that we have a Minister, the Member for St. Augustine, who 18 months ago said that audits were being conducted into all of those programmes. Eighteen months later, after saying that she would be coming to the Parliament to "buss mark" and call names, 18 months later, not a peep. Nothing has come from those audits. Madam Deputy Speaker, 18 months later, you either put up, or you shut up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: But what you cannot do is punish poverty for your own political agenda.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

8.00 p.m.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a fact that through their actions, tens of thousands found themselves unemployed. It is a fact that you had mothers who depended on that income. You had fathers who depended on that income. You had households that were living pay cheque to pay cheque depending on that income. Those people who were summarily dismissed through the actions of those opposite now have to turn to a Government that has labelled them thieves and ghosts, lazy and too many derogatory terms to spend time on in this House,

Madam Deputy Speaker. But, "who feels it, knows it." And the mother or the father will do what they must to take care of their family.

So, to the Ministry of Social Development, People and Family Services, I suspect I need to switch, People, Social Development and Family Services, to them they turn. Going there, hands out asking for the Government to step in and do the thing that a government in any caring society would do. Take care of those who are vulnerable, whether it is temporarily, they find themselves in that position, or they have become vulnerable and cannot get a way out of that state where they have found themselves in life.

Madam Speaker, I know that those people, that group of society, would have cheered when they were told that the Government was increasing the Public Assistance Grants by $250, rightly so. Despite the fact that the cost of living has gone up, despite the fact that if they are elderly and requiring medication, CDAP has failed them and therefore they must spend more in the pharmacies. Despite the fact that the cost of food has gone up, every little bit helps. So that $250 would have given tremendous, tremendous good cheer.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what the Minister of Finance neglected to tell the population was that the Ministry itself was getting $740million less than last year, left that part out of it and that might be bad enough, colleagues on this side, but there is more to come. The Minister also did not tell the population that the allocation for Senior Citizens' Pension was reduced by $720 million and that is bad, but there is more to come. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister did not tell the population that the allocation for Public Assistance Grant was reduced by $18 million, and we know that is definitely bad, but there is more to come. Madam Deputy Speaker, the allocation for the Disability Grant was also reduced by $73.3

million. Altogether, Madam Deputy Speaker, over $800 million has been slashed from the budget with regard to these grants that they have increased by $250 each. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the way that the UNC delivers on their promises.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important to remind the population as well who are listening to this debate, that in June 2026, the line Minister, the Member for Chaguanas East, announced to the country that she had revised the means test and that that was supposed to make Government assistance more accessible to more families. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, where are we? We have increased grant values, more persons eligible, but less money available and that would be bad enough, but there is more to come.

Madam Deputy Speaker, who is administering the grant programmes? Who is accessing the internal systems to be able to assess the applications? Who is conducting the site visits and who is processing the approvals? Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry is working with a skeleton staff.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague, the MP for Trincity/Maloney, raised it here, and raised it in connection with the National Family Services Division. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the information that I have is that, at best, departments are operating with 50 per cent staffing across the board and that in most cases it is closer to 30 per cent. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is not necessarily the fault of the line Minister, she is not being given the support by the Member for Fyzabad. But the question has to be, why? Why are you not giving the support? Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, slogans and desk thumping and saying the words mean nothing when they are not backed up by this book and the yellow books that we all have here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, higher benefits, higher eligibility, less money, no staff. They on that side pound the desk and talk about "promises made and promises kept." Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister, I am hoping in her contribution, unlike those who have preceded her, will account to the population. Now that her colleague from Fyzabad, through his actions here, has pushed her under the bus, she must account for the Ministry's failure to renew contracts, to maintain the short-term staff that were chased out of the Ministry, Madam Deputy Speaker, simply because they felt that those staff were PNM. Madam Deputy Speaker, they literally chased out the institutional knowledge out the door, along with the simple bodies to do the work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Who suffers then, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is the very people who are already at the lowest rung of the economic ladder and who are turning to this Government, they are the ones who suffer.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we now have actual instances of persons who would have applied for the Senior Citizens Grant in December 2024, so yes, when PNM was in Government, applied for the grant expecting that the usual six-month turnaround would apply to them. As I said, Madam Deputy Speaker, you have various stages that you would go through before any of those grants are actually allocated and a person has a cheque in their hand or money in their account. So, knowing that there is usual six-month process, I said, okay by June 2025, "we go be good to go," I would get my Disability Assistance Grant or I would get my pension, or I would get my Public Assistance or whichever one it is. Imagine 18 months into the reign of this oppressive Government, we have persons and,

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are real people, I will just not call their names here. October 2026 and they have not even gotten a visit as yet. Madam Speaker, I have a constituent who has been up and down with his family for the last 11 months, a stroke victim.

8.10 p.m.

This gentleman lived a life where he provided for himself, he took care of his family, he worked hard and unfortunately was struck down at a time that was most unfortunate for him and now can no longer provide for himself. And, not through his own desire, but is dependent on others—dependent on his family, his sister, his brother-in-law, to take care of him and to assist him. Eleven months, and he is being told, having gone there every week on a Thursday, that they have no file for him. Eleven months, up and down, sending him all over this country to do God knows what, and coming back.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that the system at Social Development that the Minister met was not perfect, but you cannot create a problem through your own political short-sightedness that suffers the people of this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: But Madam Deputy Speaker, unfortunately does not stop there either, because the Minister also needs to tell us about the outstanding applications at all of the 11 local boards. How many of them have been waiting since late 2024? How many of them have staffing gaps? And how is that impacting the delivery of service to the most vulnerable, by the Ministry that was created long before the Member became a Minister, to serve people and to serve the most vulnerable?

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government reports that food support cost this

country over $102 million in 2026 and reached some 37,066 households. Now, when the Member for Mayaro was speaking, he mentioned food support and announced that he was going to get into it later in his contribution. But of course, Member if you go back, maybe you were just talking on the fly, but if you go back, you will see that he got misdirected by his own misinformation and never came back to actually speak about something that the Government was going to do, but par for the course.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we all know that that figure, both the number of households and the money assigned to it, was directly affected by the mass firings created by those on the other side. We on this side, and I am sure they on that side as well, deal with the casualty of those decisions every week in our MP offices. But interestingly, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the budget statement and in the *Draft Estimates*, there was no specific food support measure for 2027 announced.

And as I said, the Ministry's allocations or the Estimates do not identify an allocation. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am also hoping that the Member for Chaguanas East, when she speaks, will identify for this House how much is going to be provided and under which expenditure line so that we on this side can assure our constituents who are receiving that assistance if they will continue to receive it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is one other issue that I wanted to address, and I believe it was the issue that my colleague was going to speak to before she had to resume her seat. Madam Deputy Speaker, when I was the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, I inherited two legacy projects. One of those legacy projects was the public library in Mayaro. The focus from the Ministry at that point was to complete Mayaro, get that up and running and to move our attention to the Chaguanas Library. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy for the Member

for Mayaro that as far as I know that library is completed. He has not opened it as yet, and I know I will not be invited, but let him know that I am happy for him and for the residents of Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I, in going through the yellow books, was perturbed to see that for a second year running there had been no allocation to the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services' headquarters on Wrightson Road. Now, I use Wrightson Road—I do not think that is the actual address that is listed on the project, but it is on Wrightson Road.

So, I saw no allocation for that, after 2025, $34.7 million, I believe it was, was spent on that Ministry. But then, below it, I saw a new project for the Chaguanas Library that would convert it from its original usage to a new building for the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services. Madam Deputy Speaker, I, of course, got very concerned because you have a building that was being constructed. The Minister and the Government, through their own policy direction, can decide where they want to put the headquarters of the Ministry led by the Member for Chaguanas East. If that happens to be in Chaguanas, then so be it. It could go anywhere.

But you have a building that is going to be refurbished, completed and repurposed, and I distinctly remember all of the issues that they had for that building particularly with parking. Madam Deputy Speaker, firstly, I am giving the Minister, whether she has it or not, some background information and a little friendly advice. If that is where the Ministry is going, if the $30 million that has been assigned to it is the only money that is being spent, or maybe that is a part of the budget that has been assigned—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you have one more minute of original speaking time.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: And then 10?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Thank you very much, I will take it, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Then, Madam Deputy Speaker, then know that you are going to have a problem with parking. But more so, what happens to the contractor who was on the initial building that was being constructed for the Ministry? What happens to that contractor? Madam Deputy Speaker, it is my knowledge that the contractor is no longer assigned to the project. How much money is outstanding for the contractor? Are you now, on top of having to pay the contractor for works finished, now assigning an additional $30 million? And then, Madam Deputy Speaker, you are assigning another $50 million back to that same building because in the books, it says that that is going to be the new office of the Attorney General.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, now we have a project, we have a project or two projects that you have gotten rid of one contractor and you have two brand new contractors, and of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, we know what has been done with procurement legislation in this country. I sound a warning, a warning to this nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, very much like every other citizen in this country, I was astounded by the blatant discrimination that this UNC Government exercised in terms of allocations for local government authorities. Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the benefits of the Member for St. Augustine not being in the House at this moment is that I do not have to hear the usual refrain of, "No, that's not true".

"That is not true." Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a fact.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: A fact.

Mr. Alexander: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: "You could say wuh you want. You know Tunapuna should have been a borough, but you cyah geh dat. So, you cyah geh dat, right."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: But at any rate, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Alexander: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, I only have ten minutes left. Could you please ask the Member for Tunapuna to restrain and maybe he will get a chance to speak, and at that point, he can say what he wants to say.

8.20 p.m.

Anyway, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have already seen the stark disparity between allocations for development programmes: $31 million thereabouts, compared to $187.7 million thereabouts. But unfortunately, Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the real challenges that the nation is going to have in trying to reconcile this astounding discrimination is that they are also being gaslit by those opposite. The line Minister, the Prime Minister, and today, the Member for Mayaro continued inside this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker, allocations are made to local government entities in two ways: Through the Development Programme and through allocations for recurrent costs. The fact is that all of these corporations have had increases in their wages, their salary, their COLA and their contributions to their group health insurance. If you have more workers working in your corporation, then your allocation is going

to be more.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, no resident, burgess or citizen judges the performance of a regional corporation based on the amount of workers that they have. And worse yet, if you restrict allocations, if you cut the money that is being sent to PNM-led corporations for critical votes, like materials, like garbage collection—

Mr. Hosein: That is recurrent.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: I said recurrent. Listen, you buffoon. Madam Deputy Speaker, if you restrict those allocations that are so critical, the collection to of garbage, the patching of roads—

Mr. Hosein: The recurrent is high. The recurrent is high. You not making sense.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, I employ you.

Mr. Manning: It is a constant chirping, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Fair enough, Madam Deputy Speaker. The patching of roads, the buying of cement and steel and sand and blocks and gravel to fix drains and build steps, if you are restricting that, then the corporation cannot deliver to its burgesses, residents and citizens. No matter what those on the side say, it is a fact.

Mr. Hosein: That is rubbish.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: It is a fact that has been done by this UNC Government to PNM-led corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: It is systematic oppression. It is institutional discrimination.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a lot more to say on that, but

I am running out of time and we on this side will have other opportunities in other places as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to turn—how long do I have again, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have five more minutes.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to Diego Martin Central. For another year, I am asking the Member for Couva North, in her position as the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, to address the issue of the Diego Martin Highway. I have raised it here before. The Minister has said that she will deal with it. I can tell you that what typically happens is you will get a team that comes out, they have cut off about 50 feet, and then they do not. And it gives me no pleasure to say this, but when you have a team coming out, cutting less than 2 per cent of the highway, there is a reality to that. The highway has become dangerous, particularly at night. I am asking that the Minister—

Hon. Member: "They doh care" .

Mr. S. de Nobriga: I am not getting into that because I suspect that the Minister does care. I want to believe that she does care.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Why?

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Because I want to believe that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: I am asking that we address the issue of the Diego Martin Highway.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Moruga/Tableland is not here. I am asking her yet again to open the Cocorite Community Centre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Trincity.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, and while she is at it, she could open the community centre in Trincity as well.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: But, Madam Deputy Speaker, in early 2025, we walked through that building. It was 95 per cent complete. We have a snag list. We had already spoken to members of NALIS to put a co-located library there; spoken to employees of the Ministry of Digital Transformation at the time to put an AccessTT site there. All of that 18 months ago. It is still not open.

And, unfortunately, what happens in a case like that is you end up with sick building. What happens is, even if there is a problem, the contractor is no longer held by the snag list. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a real issue there. I am asking that they please open the Cocorite Community Centre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, the usual appeal goes out to the Member for Couva South that he continues in Diego Martin Central the good work was done by his predecessor; that we look at the Cocorite Terrace Booster to get that going. All of the work has already been done. The pump was ordered and then the project was shut down, and that we look at the Simeon Road Booster Station that has now been gutted. That was refurbished under the North West Water Supply Improvement Programme. We ask that that be taken care of. And of course, we ask that the numerous leaks across the constituency are actually addressed, not just in a post, but actually addressed where there are fixed and the road is restored.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is more to say, as I said. I ask that my constituents also receive the services of government that they deserve. That is their right. Madam Deputy Speaker, with those few words.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Claxton Bay.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training (Mr. Hansen Narinesingh): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, both as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and as the Member of Parliament for the proud and resilient people of Claxton Bay.

Let me begin by thanking the hon. Prime Minister for the confidence and trust she placed in me, and also thanking the Minister of Finance for a budget that invests in our people and seeks to rebalance a society that was imbalanced in the first place.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, students of economics and economics theory would undoubtedly be familiar with the principle of Keynesian economics developed by the British economist, John Maynard Keynes, particularly in his 1936 seminal work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the significance of Keynesian economic thought lies in the recognition that government is not merely a passive observer of economic activity, but can be an important instrument in stimulating investment, supporting employment and restoring economic confidence. This principle remains particularly relevant through our national circumstances. The fundamental

lesson is that responsible government must concern itself, not only with managing public finances, but also creating the economic and institutional conditions through which its people can prosper.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: This budget, delivered by this Minister of Finance, delivered by this Government, recognizes the fundamental truth that the strength of an economy cannot be measured solely by the wealth it generates, but by the opportunities it creates, the lives it improves and the future it secures for its people.

8.30 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am reminded of the words of Shakespeare in his famous book "*The Tempest*".

"…what's past is prologue, what to come in yours and my discharge."

In a moment I will read that prologue into the record. The audits are not done, the workers left behind, the workshop left unsafe, but what comes next is in our discharge, and that is the story I intend to tell today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my contribution today has one theme: repair and renewal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: In May 2025, this Government inherited institutions in the tertiary and skill sector that had been allowed to deteriorate. Audits in years in arrears, workers on salaries a decade and a half out of date, workshops without basic safety systems and most importantly, debts unpaid. In 17 months, we have stopped the decline, restored compliance and begun to grow again. I intend to show this House, and place on the record, institution by institution, and then report to the people of Claxton Bay on what we have done together.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I speak of achievements, the House must

understand where we started. Let me read into the record what we found when we took office in May of 2025. I begin with the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts, which we know as COSTAATT. Madam Deputy Speaker, we found 10 years of financial statements unaudited; 10 years of unaudited financial statements, all under the last administration; 101 vacancies, 20 of them critical, including accountants, bursars and auditors left unfulfilled for years. No staff plan, no performance appraisal system for its senior managers, and students were allowed to sit exams and graduate while owing fees to the institution, leaving millions of legacy debt on the books.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the basic machinery of good governance was missing. Historical reports and supporting documents could not be found. There was no clear line of responsibility for procurement and no defined approval thresholds. Acting appointments and promotions were made without objective criteria, and contracts were renewed without any formal performance appraisal. That is the legacy. Programmes were being run with very small numbers of students with no regular review, whether they were viable or not viable, and whether the graduates found work. No one could say for certainty who taught each course, how many hours or what course. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not the fault of college staff or the administration. This is what happens when an institution is left for a decade without proper oversight and left to decay.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: At the MIC Institute of Technology, Madam Deputy Speaker, we found $15 million owed to suppliers. We found between 2023 and 2024 audits outstanding because the institution had been left without a properly constituted board and without signatories needed to appoint an auditor. We found

young people being trained in workshops with no fume extraction, breathing in welding fumes; firehose reels; fire alarms; public address systems absent or broken at multiple centres.

Hon. Members: What? Disgusting.

Mr. H. Narinesingh: No current fire certificate and, of course, multiple citations by OSHA. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not a funding problem, this is a safety problem, and it was left to us.

At the NTA, the National Training Agency, the very body that sets the standard for our national workforce, we found staff paid under collective agreements covering 2010 to 2013. Managers under agreements from 2007 to 2010. Staff who certified the skills of a nation had gone without any negotiated increase for over a decade. Aging servers, obsolete equipment, and a building in need of renovation. In fiscal 2025, the agency was approved $800,000 by city upgrades, and it only received $266,000. And audits, of course, are outstanding. But one of the biggest travesties of justice was at NIHERST, and I have to bring this to the attention of the national community, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We found the institute paying $1.8 million a year in rent for temporary accommodation; temporary accommodation, $1.8 million a year. No, and this is not half of it, you will hear more. Public money was already spent fitting out a rented building and completing it would cost $2 million. This is in electrical, air-conditioning, ICT and partitions. That is $3.8 million in the first year alone. Madam Deputy Speaker, and this is not State property. This is private property. I am informed, Madam Deputy Speaker, that no one works there. The building is empty.

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

Mr. H. Narinesingh: People are working from home. The site is OSHA uncertified. And NIHERST now will have to move now to a facility—well, we will put them up in NESC in Couva, saving the rent and building value for the State.

I want to turn now to the flagship, the On the Job Training Programme. This programme that gives many of young people their first step into the world of work. I am informed that in 2017, Madam Deputy Speaker, the OJT Office was moved to what was meant to be a temporary location in Chaguanas, temporary location. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not here to "buss any mark", I am just here to tell the facts. These are the facts that I was informed; temporary location in Chaguanas. Nine years later, Madam Deputy Speaker, the temporary location is still temporary and the people are still there.

Hon. Members: Nine years.

Mr. H. Narinesingh: Nine years. Madam Deputy Speaker, I visited the location myself. What I found was shameful. No air-conditioning, people cramped in one space. Madam Deputy Speaker, they were using the kitchen as an office space, the kitchen was an office space, and staff are expected to do their jobs there. Field officers who manage trainees across the country without laptops, there are outdated desktops, equipment failing because of voltage problems, and a programme that in 2026, still runs largely on paper. The programme has 121 staff across six locations with 37 positions unfilled. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to give kudos to the staff at OJT—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—for the yeoman service that they have put in, in placing our young people in jobs so that at least they can fulfil a small medium of work and

experience, and they can contribute meaningfully to this country. That is how this last administration treated the very programme meant to prepare our young people for decent work.

8.40 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the pattern is the same across every sector. Audits not done, workers not paid fairly, safety not ensured, bills not paid. That is the PNM's stewardship of the institutions that train our young people. That is what we inherited.

Let me tell you what was done. At the MIC Institute of Technology, we constituted a board, put signing authorities in place and appointed auditors, and completed the outstanding reports for 2023 and 2024. We sought supplementary funding for MIC and received $12.37 million to settle its obligations. We made workshops safe. Close to $10 million was invested in life safety and infrastructure works. Fume extraction systems are now completed at Diego Martin, O'Meara, Pleasantville, Debe/Penal, with Laventille and Macoya under way. Five hose reels are installed at five centres, that is, fire hose reels, public address systems at four centres, roofs repaired, waterproofing replaced and security strengthened with CCTV, lighting and automated gates. Madam Deputy Speaker, no young person should have to risk their lungs to learn a trade.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to also report that MIC is also growing, and kudos again to the board and management of MIC. Enrolment rose from 1,266 to 1,364 trainees, an increase of 7.7 per cent. Female enrolment rose by a third, from 211 to 281 women, lifting the women's trainees from 16.7 per cent to 20.6 per cent. In the Industrial Craft Programme, expanded

from five locations to nine, I added one in Pointe-a-Pierre, Macoya, O'Meara and Laventille.

The HYPE and MUST programmes were redesigned from nine months to six to incorporate two cohorts that can be trained each year. That will create space for more than 245 trainees in the coming year. Our accreditation was renewed by the ACTT for five years to 2030, and NTA centre approval secured to 2029. Three new courses for artificial intelligence were launched in August and September.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one story says it all. Through a partnership with British Petroleum, 12 young nationals, six women and six men, aged 18 to 25, trained across BP's onshore and offshore operations and are now completing their journeyman diplomas. This is what we are doing. This is what this Government is doing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: On the 30th of April this year, 14 trainees completed MIC IT's first two renewable energy apprenticeships at its Centre for Renewable and Associated Technologies. The NSDP Journeyman Diploma is now registered under the National Apprenticeship System, and the workplace safety initiative, which trained more than 200 employees, was named as a finalist in the 2025 IDB President's Award for Innovation and Service Excellence.

At COSTAATT, we confronted the audit backlog head-on with a diagnostic review and audit remediation to rebuild 10 years of records, and the college has started to turn the corner. An operating surplus of $6.15 million as of August 2026, with revenue growing faster than expenditure. Madam Deputy Speaker, $12.5 million in legacy student debt was recovered, $22.94 million covered in VAT refunds. Enrolment up 9 per cent, and for the new academic year,

applications are up 41.7 per cent. This is what we are doing, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: This is performance, Madam Deputy-Speaker.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: And I am here to account for that performance. Continued accreditation for EETC for the maximum period of seven years, and I could go on and on and. But what is most instructive is that 246 new prison officers registered for the Certificate in Criminal Justice, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: And we are very proud of that. General nursing as well, enrolment is up, and the new nursing assistant enrolment is also up. COSTAATT also opened its doors wider. About 200 secondary school girls took part in the Girls' ICT workshop in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and networking.

The National Training Agency. The NTA had one of its most productive years, with 1,079 vocational qualifications awarded, 851 CVQs, and 228 NVQs. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is performance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: Thirteen new quality-assured TVET programmes approved, compared with 11 the year before. Ten new occupational standards, with 1,296 units of competence now in the national database. Madam Deputy Speaker, 240 experienced workers assessed through the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Programme, turning years of skill into recognized qualifications, including 27 graduates in Tobago.

Cabinet approved the National Policy on Apprenticeship, with the NTA now

mandated to approve all state-sponsored apprenticeships. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am proud to announce that for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, there will be the development of legislation to establish the National TVET Authority.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: This, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be landmark legislation that we are bringing forward for the first time. We are also very proud of the recent caravan by the NTA, A Touch of TVET in Rio Claro and in Cedros, and we will be coming to all the different communities where we will be showcasing TVET over the next year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the new occupational standards tell the story of where our economy is going: robotics, data operations, facility maintenance, warehouse operations and steelpan music performance. And through TVET as a Preferred Choice Initiative, the NTA reached 2,600 students in 15 secondary schools.

YTEPP, Madam Deputy Speaker, another skills training agency. A mobile computer training was launched in December 2025, bringing digital skills to underdeveloped communities. It started in my own constituency of Claxton Bay/Pointe-a-Pierre, and I am proud to say that we have trained a number of people. It was launched at the Marabella North Secondary School. In addition to this, a retraining programme for retrenched, unemployed and underemployed citizens began from age 20 to 60, was completed. The 18th cycle of Rehabilitation through Training for Reintegration Programme with Prison Service, giving inmates a second chance. New partnerships with the Manufacturers Association, Caribbean Dockyards and Engineering Services at the North Central Regional Health

Authority.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, out of all of these accomplishments, I am very happy to report one of the most significant accomplishments done at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Our national university is reaching deeper into the industry and community, and I am proud to announce a new undergraduate course in the history and culture of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—has been launched at UTT.

8.50 p.m.

And I would like to thank the Board headed by Prof. Cudjoe, who was one of the initiators of this programme. A programme that was much needed here so that the graduates of our national university will know and tell the story of the nation that they will build.

NIHERST, despite all the inherent challenges, NIHERST took science to more than 7,500 people through its outreach programmes. It partnered with TSTT on the Future Leaders Internship Programme, designed for 1,200 post-secondary students, training them in tech entrepreneurship, 3D printing, robotics, AI and digital content. It launched the First Tech Challenge, robotics pathways for students aged 12 to 18, with nine teams in the first tournament in June. Its national student innovation competition drew 86 groups and produced 20 working prototypes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at the Ministry itself, we opened the doors of GATE, HELP, scholarships and bursaries. The Ministry itself has kept the doors of higher education open to every family in Trinidad and Tobago. Approximately 11,000 students received GATE tuition achievement this year, 60 of them qualified

for full tuition funding, 600 students approved for HELP loan guarantees worth $12.2 million, and for the first time, we had 105 national scholarships awarded on the 2025 CAPE results—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—47 open, 58 additional and 358 scholars being supported at home and abroad. Madam Deputy Speaker, the people's money was well spent on the children of this nation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: Institutions that were in arrears are now in order. Institutions that were shrinking are now growing. That is the difference that this UNC Government makes for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, let me now turn to the people who sent me here. The challenges of the constituency of Claxton Bay, formerly known as Pointe-a-Pierre, are real. Our communities sit between the hills of the Gulf of Paria, crisscrossed by rivers and watercourses that flood. These watercourses have not been maintained for years.

In fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can report a very unfortunate incident that occurred on the 12th of August this year. Heavy rain flooded homes in Southern Main Road, Claxton Bay, Hermitage, Soledad, Sum Sum Hill and the surrounding communities. Madam Deputy Speaker, I had the heartbreaking experience of witnessing constituents, which included children, removing water from their living rooms and bedrooms, while cleaning and washing down their yards and surrounding areas in the aftermath of the flooding. Madam Deputy Speaker, this was the result of the main watercourses and tributaries that remain inadequately

cleaned, not maintained, not desilted and significantly restricting the flow of water and leaving communities vulnerable to recurrent flooding. The situation has gotten so critical, Madam Deputy Speaker, that any time rain falls now, we are prone to flooding.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our hardworking fishermen in Claxton Bay deserve proper facilities and adequate support to sustain their livelihoods. Regrettably, the Claxton Bay fishing depot has not benefited from any meaningful maintenance since 2013, resulting in years of neglect and deteriorating infrastructure. These fishermen make an important contribution to our local economy and national food security. It is imperative that their working conditions reflect the value of that contribution. The rehabilitation and upgrading of this facility must therefore be given priority.

Roads. Madam Deputy Speaker, our roads in Claxton Bay are in urgent need of rehabilitation, and the reason for this is because of the 10 years of neglect—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. John: "Tell dem."

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—by the last Government. Communities like Hermitage Road, Lalloo Trace, Rig Road, St. John's, Spring Vale, Soledad Road West, Diamond, Windsor Park, Bandoo Trace, Chamroo Trace, and I am saying this because these people are listening and I represent their interests. Hermitage Road, Gopaul Lands, Tarouba have endured years of deteriorating road conditions, with many roads not having been properly paved or rehabilitated for the last 10 years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, because several—and I need to say this possibly because these areas fall within traditionally represented areas of the United

National Congress. Residents have expressed long-standing concern that their communities were neglected under the previous PNM administration. But Madam Deputy Speaker, road maintenance must never be determined by political geography. A citizen's right to proper infrastructure must never depend on which political party or which party represents the communities. For years, hardworking families, motorists, elderly residents and small businesses have had to contend with these deteriorating roads through their damaged vehicles, increased transportation costs and daily inconvenience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the people of Claxton Bay were never asking for any special treatment, you know. They were asking for basic infrastructure and public services which every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago is entitled to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: That is what we are asking. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the past year, my office has worked with the Couva/Tabaquite Regional Corporation and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and every agency here to help, and I can report that in terms of drainage and flood prevention we have cleared the Mandillon River, the watercourse at the cement line, the Cedar Hill Road Tributary, the watercourses in Soledad Road, St. Margaret's Road and Tulip and I would like to thank the Member for Couva North—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—the Minister of Works and Infrastructure for her input in clearing these drains.

Road patching as well has also been done in Maingot Ville, Hermitage Road, Cedar Hill, Diamond Road, Belle Vue, and Union Road, Marabella. We have also had some flood relief. In August floods, we delivered cleaning supplies

and hampers to those affected households. Help for families, we have delivered food cards, hampers, Christmas hampers, disaster relief and house repair grants to constituents through the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services.

In terms of the health sector for my constituents. Two constituents received prosthetic legs, five were referred for cataract and glaucoma treatment under the Gift of Sight Programme. We hosted free diabetes and blood pressure screening on World Diabetes Day, two health clinics and one mental health clinic.

In terms of education. We gave SEA support packages for all nine primary schools. Our second annual back-to-school drive was initiated with school bags, stationery and book vouchers. And the School Repair Programme continued with Union Presbyterian School and Mount Pleasant Primary and many others.

9.00 p.m.

In terms of security, I am happy to report, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in September of 2026, the hon. Minister of Homeland Security commissioned the first Tarouba police post for what?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: To keep our residents safer. I want to thank you, hon. Minister. We feel safer. Of course, this is through the vision of our Prime Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—who leads from the front with certainty and without fear.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the constituency of Claxton Bay is a reflection of the rich, religious, cultural and ethnic diversity that defines our beloved nation. We are a constituency of many faiths, but one community, united by mutual

respect, understanding and a shared sense of belonging. As its elected representative, I recognize that my responsibility is to serve every constituent, regardless of ethnicity or background. It is in that spirit of unity and inclusiveness that we have stood alongside our communities in celebrating Divali, Phagwa, Eid, Christmas, Corpus Christi, and all the other important social days in the calendar. I am reminded of the words of former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who said:

"…our diversity is a source of strength, not weakness..."

Madam Deputy Speaker, the measure of a government is not what it inherits, but it is what it does with what it inherits.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh: In this vein, I am reminded of a quotation spoken by Marcus Brutus in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act IV, Scene 3:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of…life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,"

Madam Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago stands at such a moment. We have navigated turbulent waters. We have confronted difficult fiscal realities—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Narinesingh:—and we recognize that the journey towards national recovery and sustainable prosperity is far from complete. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the responsibility of this Government is not merely to keep the ship of Trinidad and Tobago afloat. It is to restore its strength, steady its course, and steer

it towards a future of greater opportunity, economic security and national prosperity. Our responsibility is not simply to survive the storm, but to navigate beyond it; not merely to preserve what we have, but to build what our nation can become.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the tide of opportunity is before us. The responsibility of leadership is to recognize that tide, seize the moment, and ensure that the ship of Trinidad and Tobago moves forward, not adrift in uncertainty, but guided by purpose, strengthened by resolve and united in its pursuit of a better future. It is with this sense of responsibility, that confidence in the potential of our people and that commitment in the future of our beloved Republic, that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I conclude my contribution. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: San Fernando East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Brian Manning (*San Fernando East*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute in this very important debate. Madam Deputy Speaker, listening to the Minister of Finance here on Monday in this Chamber, all I could say is that what the Minister did here may be the most disrespectful thing I have seen to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in this Chamber. The budget contribution is a very important exercise. The Minister came here and spoke for two hours, Madam Deputy Speaker, and most of it was attacking the People's National Movement. He offered no substance. He offered nothing of meaning in his entire presentation, to the point where most people have so many questions. It gave more questions than answers in his budget presentation.

Then, worse yet, because of that, where many people would have questions

about what happened, the Minister decided to duck the public gatherings to discuss this very same budget document afterwards. The TTMA public meeting, he ducked that. He ducked several others and gave no real reason why. The media is reaching out to him, they cannot contact the Minister of Finance. The members of the manufacturing community are reaching out to him to answer questions, they cannot get onto the Minister of Finance. Madam Deputy Speaker, it does not surprise us here at all.

Last year, we said the budget that they presented was fake and fraudulent, Madam Deputy Speaker. We knew that all of the revenue numbers that they presented were absolutely contrived and meaningless. All of their expenses were understated. It did not make any sense. If last year's budget was an attempt to bend light, this year's budget was a fairy tale, Madam Deputy Speaker. It should have been written in crayon, as far as I am concerned.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: In that vein, I saw that the Member for Mayaro decided to continue the fairy tales. Madam Deputy Speaker, if I decide this evening to refute every piece of misinformation uttered by the Member for Mayaro in his contribution, we will be here until next week. I will deal with a few of them actually. I will deal with a few.

The Member for Mayaro, in his very spirited contribution, betrayed, what I believe, is a desperation to distract from the vacuity of this budget document. He is desperate to hide from the public just how empty and vacuous this document really was. So, he just threw out a lot of nonsense. He spoke about the HSF. Well, all I can say to the Member of Mayaro, when it comes to the HSF, please bat in your crease—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—please. The Member came here and tried to take credit for the performance of the HSF in the last few years. Member, let me educate you, as I have educated the Minister of Finance in the past.

Coming out of the COVID crisis, when I was at the Ministry of Finance, I had a discussion with the Chairman, and there was a change to the strategic asset allocation of the HSF, which means the proportion of funding invested in equities, and the other, which is invested in fixed income. Previously, there was an allocation of about 35 per cent in equities, which is not nearly enough. Under the previous chairman of the HSF, after our discussions, he moved it up to about 50 per cent.

I see the current Chairman, the new Chairman, has done the right and smart thing and moved that even higher to 55 per cent. The standard risk-adjusted portfolio to maximize return is generally one of 60 per cent equities, 40 per cent fixed income. I will recommend to the current manager of the HSF that the remaining 5 per cent, that he actually invest in alternative assets, such as private equity and hedge funds. It will improve the risk-adjusted returns of the fund. Member for Mayaro, Minister of Finance, you are welcome.

Moving on—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Moving on: As we saw last time, we knew that those revenue projections made no sense. Looking at the fiscal measures of this budget presentation, only nine have a stated revenue yield. The document was so bereft of any kind of numbers, substance or details. No one can really understand what the document was saying. Also, roughly about half of the listed fiscal measures do not

raise any funding at all, any revenues. So, how are we supposed to justify these revenue numbers?

9.20 p.m.

Let us take a look at that for a second, Madam Deputy Speaker. Let us take a look at the projected revenues. Last year, in the previous budget, there was projected revenue of $55.4 billion. It was later revised to $54.24 billion. This year's budget has a projection of about, just around, $59.7 billion. Madam Deputy Speaker, last budget we said that there is no possible way that they could achieve the revenue numbers that they had. And even with the surprisingly high international energy prices, they still did not achieve the revenue figure that they targeted in the last budget document. As we said, it was simply a means to clear a path to accessing the HSF, Madam Deputy Speaker. But they were foiled by international tensions between the United States and Iran and the unexpectedly high energy prices.

Expenditure: They projected $59.3 billion, then had to revise to $59.2 billion. Then for fiscal year 2026, $61.25 billion. And now in this year's budget, we have an expected expenditure of $63.37 billion. Madam Deputy Speaker, we are certain, almost absolutely certain, that these expenditure numbers are understated. Even they had to hold back on some of their investments. I believe it was. They only spent $3 billion or $5 billion on capital budget expenditure because they knew that they did not have the money to do it, Madam Deputy Speaker. These numbers are not anything that anyone with sense can trust.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Deficit: Fiscal deficit, $8.7 billion in 2025. Then $3.865 billion, projected by this Government in 2026. They had to revise that from $3.865

billion to $7 billion, revised in 2026. Now they are projecting, they want us to believe, that there is going to be a fiscal deficit of $3.6 billion in the next fiscal year. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is complete fantasy. Fantasy. We keep asking over and over. They talk about these programmes. They are going to hire all these people. They are going to build all these houses. Madam Deputy Speaker, where is that funding coming from? And there is absolute abject silence coming from those on the other side. The budget document also did not address several of the major issues in this country right now. And everyone knows what they are. If you live in Trinidad and Tobago, you know unemployment is a major issue. Also, our current economic climate has to be one of the worst in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: It has to be one of the worst. And I am not going to go into all of it, but I am going to pull out the inflation figure. Madam Deputy Speaker, I saw the Minister of Finance boasting that we had an inflation rate of 0.6 per cent. Let me educate the Minister of Finance as usual. That is nothing to boast about.

If you listen to the quarterly reports by the US Fed, they usually have target numbers for both inflation and unemployment. Their target is usually 4 per cent unemployment, 2 per cent inflation. Why is that? Because it is within a band. Too much and too little are both bad. Too much inflation means that the earning power of your money is being eroded. Too little means that your economy has slowed to a halt, and that something is wrong. Minister of Finance, your oppressive taxes and fines have completely crushed this economy. That is what it has done. This economy has slowed to such a pace that people are not buying anymore, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I see constituents now in my office who tell me that they have not eaten meat in months. Because they simply cannot afford it. I want you to understand the stark difference that is from what it used to be. Under the People's National Movement, when I met constituents, they all wanted one thing: A house. Because they were employed. They were working. They were employed. Now, I have people breaking down in tears in my office on a weekly basis because they are at the end of their rope, Madam Deputy Speaker. And it is because of the economy created by this callous Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: And there is no denying it. There is no denying it. Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, it reminds me of an old Paul Newman movie. An old Paul Newman movie, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a line from that movie, and it says:

"What we have here is a failure to communicate"

And I do not think the Minister of Finance is getting it. He came here with this budget and repealed only part of his draconian liquor tax. But I do not think the Member is getting that what he is doing is completely destroying lives. It is destroying dreams. We have record unemployment. We have people who have had businesses for decades, all of a sudden being shut down, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have businesses in this country that have survived multiple administrations and natural disasters. They have survived colonialism. They have done all of that, Madam Deputy Speaker. They have survived the pandemic. But they could not last 18 months under this Government and this Minister of Finance. Terrible.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, much of this budget skews spending or moves spending towards security, utilities, and local government and away from education, agriculture, and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me say that again. It shifts spending towards national security, utilities, and local government. But away from education, agriculture, and Tobago. I just cannot wait, Madam Deputy Speaker, to hear what my good friends from Tobago West and East have to say when they speak in this Chamber on this topic. And let me remind them of what their personal Lord and Saviour, Comrade Chavez, had to say about the allocation.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: The allocation that they received in this year's budget, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I have an article here from the Trinidad and Tobago *Guardian*. It says:

"Farley 'gutted' by Tobago budget allocation."

Gutted, Madam Deputy Speaker. He is not upset. He is not a little irritated. He is gutted by the betrayal of his friends in the UNC in the budget. I want to tell Mr. Farley, why are you surprised?

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

Mr. B. Manning: Mr. Farley has been going around all this time with a scorpion on his back. And now he is surprised when he gets stung.

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

Mr. B. Manning: Just like the members of the trade union movement. I told my good friends from La Brea and Point Fortin, "When you speak in this Chamber, keep your words soft".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: Because very soon your very same membership is going to be

clamouring for you to leave this coalition of chaos and confusion, Madam Deputy Speaker. And that day is coming.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: I already see our good friend in OWTU. Our good, good friend in OWTU seems to be under some pressure because they might want him to leave very soon. Not surprised.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. B. Manning: Even our good friend, Ms. Felicia. Ms. Felicia was outside here during the budget debate, protesting the UNC Government from the PSA.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: The same Ms. Felicia who stood on the UNC platform during the last election and vowed total loyalty to the United National Congress, is now outside this Parliament during a budget delivery, begging for what it is that was promised to her by those in this Government, Madam Deputy Speaker. Because everything in this document is a fraud. They want to say—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. B. Manning: They want to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this budget was about promises made, promises kept. More like promises made, people betrayed, more to come, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: They already betrayed our good friend from Tobago. He is gutted, Madam Deputy Speaker, like his first girlfriend left him. Gutted by the UNC. And now we have our good friend from the PSA, protesting during a budget, asking for what she was promised. And we have various other unions in this country saying the same thing, that they did not get what they asked for. We

have the Member for Couva North promising on an election platform to pave every road in Trinidad and Tobago. And then have our own comrade from Claxton Bay complaining that his road is not paved.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Claxton Bay, do not worry, we are in the same boat. Because she is not paving anything in San Fernando either. Right? All we are getting is patching, not paving. Madam Deputy Speaker, well, let me move on from that. Let me read the words of our gutted friend from Tobago.

> "'I have consistently, over the years…spoken about the fact that I feel Tobago needs to be given more on the capital development side,' Augustine said. 'Certainly, after the hopeful start of last year, it feels gutted to be reduced to what we are accustomed to getting in previous years.'"

What they are accustomed to getting from the People's National Movement. They got that cut by the United National Congress.

> "Addressing the allocation in proportional terms, Augustine pointed out that Tobago received 4.35 per cent of a national budget for 2027, down from 5…per cent allocated in the prior fiscal package."

He got a reduction, Madam Deputy Speaker.

9.20 p.m.

> "He argued that with Tobago accounting for approximately 5.1 per cent of the national population, the island's statutory allocation baseline should never dip below the 5 per cent threshold."

Clearly, his good friends in the UNC did not agree with our Comrade Chavez from Tobago, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I remember we had brought a Bill here to this Parliament, an autonomy Bill rejected by those on the other side that would have guaranteed the people of Tobago at least 6.5 per cent of the national budget—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—but they decided to allow themselves to be led astray by this coalition of confusion and Comrade Chavez and now they are learning their lesson the hard way. The UNC wants to say, promises never materialized. I want to say you never cared. That is what they did.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: They never cared. They never cared about Tobago. They never cared about the working class in this country. They never cared about the business community. They never cared about the trade unions. They never cared about managing or governing this country, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: All they ever cared about was access to the Treasury, and that is why they brought the procurement legislation here and gutted it so that they could back up the truck to the Treasury and fill their pockets.

That is all they are about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Well, let me continue about these allocations, Madam Deputy Speaker, because clearly Barataria is very excited to hear them. We have education and training. So they move money, Madam Deputy Speaker, towards national security, utilities, local government. Now, I keep saying to them on the other side, they are going to have to spend the money one way or another, you know. They are either going to have to spend money on education to train young

people in this country to make sure they can make a viable living, or you are going to have to spend that very same money on national insecurity by imprisoning the people of this country.

We have a government that has foisted on this country one of the highest unemployment rates in recent memory, and then at the same time, they are allocating more and more funding to national security. So, they put you on the breadline, and then the Minister for Social Development will come here boasting about all of the grants that should be given away. Madam Minister, you have been giving away those grants because your friend from Fyzabad has been putting people on the breadline. That is why. That is nothing to boast about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: The Minister is here boasting about high unemployment and handing out people grants. People who had jobs just two years ago, whether it was CEPEP, URP, reforestation, they were employed and working. But today, they have to line up by this Minister's office and beg for a handout instead. That is what this UNC Government has done. Instead of trying tocreate employment, what they are doing is shifting more and more funding to national security, so they can lock up your children instead. Not education—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—not skills, not jobs. National security. That is what they do. Ridiculous, ridiculous. Then the same agriculture overnment, they cut spending to agriculture too. Let us go. Education and Training, last budget, $8.766 billion. This budget, $8.033, a reduction of 8 per cent to Education and Training. So, after all that talk, we got from Claxton Bay, the facts are here. Numbers do not lie. They cut spending to Education and Training, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Next, we have Health. Last budget, $8.214 billion. This one, $8.061 billion. A cut of 2 per cent to the healthcare system of Trinidad and Tobago. You see where their priorities are. Oh, but here, here we go: National Security. So, they could just lock up everybody because that is the easiest thing to do, instead of doing the hard work of building training programmes and skills programmes for young people in this country. Last year, $6.366 billion. This year, $7.321 billion, an increase of 15 per cent to National Security in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think the intentions of those on the other side are clear, abundantly clear to the people of this country.

I move on. Next, the next black hole that they have in the Government: Public Utilities. Madam Deputy Speaker, last year, Public Utilities was issued $3.395 billion. This year, $4.087 billion, an increase of 20 per cent to Public Utilities. Madam Deputy Speaker, Public Utilities is getting a champagne budget while giving us mauby in our taps.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, we have three Ministers in the Ministry of Public Utilities, and that just means three times the incompetence, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is what we are getting. The Member for La Brea stood here in this Chamber and told the country that a pipe replacement programme had started in Pleasantville that would have improved water supply to over 5,000 residents of Pleasantville in San Fernando East. Madam Deputy Speaker, I can stand here today and say that was a bold-faced untruth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: The programme, it never started and it never happened. The people of Pleasantville are still struggling for water. The Minister stood here and

said that it had started. Work never started, never. So, I would like when our friend from La Brea, former Secretary General of the CWU, who wants to disown him now, yeah, who has disowned him from the CWU, would stand here and tell the national community why he stood here and told an untruth to the people of Pleasantville. We do not forget. As the saying goes: The South never forgets.

Next, Infrastructure: $1.943 billion last year to $2.081 billion, 7 per cent. Madam Deputy Speaker, not nearly enough for the decaying infrastructure that we have in Trinidad and Tobago. One way that you can create unemployment for various people along the different skills strata of this country, especially for those who are under skill or unskilled, is through infrastructural work. They added 7 per cent to that. They have not done much to improve the revenue generating capacity of this country, and they are not investing in it. All they are doing is putting money, and more and moremoney, into national security, Madam Deputy Speaker. They are not investing in our people. They are not investing in our country, not at all.

Transport: $1.84 billion last year to $1.712 this year, 7 per cent reduction. Agriculture: We get to the agriculture Government, the same people who were in office from 2010 to 2015 and did not give anybody in Caroni their lands, the same agriculture Government that had the Member for St. Augustine fighting for former Caroni workers in central in a protest, will come here today, and $1.13 billion last year for agriculture, and this year $0.987, a reduction of 13 per cent to agriculture by the so-called agriculture Government. Madam Deputy Speaker, as I said, "promises made, people betrayed, more to come".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: They even betraying their own their own supporters now, right? Their own base of support they are betraying. Less money for agriculture from a

party that comes here and complains about agriculture day and night. Come on, who are they trying to fool?

Housing: Well, we know where the action is going to be taking place in the next government. I think the vote is over here, right?

Mr. Marcelle: Landmark decision.

Mr. B. Manning: Yeah, you can stop the press. We know what is going on. Last year, $0.662 billion to housing. This year, $0.904 billion, or a 37 per cent increase to housing, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure this does not include the $3.4 billion at the HDC, which they try to hand over to friends, family, and financiers that were stopped by the Office of Procurement, Madam Deputy Speaker. They are going to be pushing money into—well, housing and they are going to attempt the mamaguy people by giving out the same houses that the PNM had already built, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is the difficult part. This Minister of Finance is desperate for revenues, and he cannot get it from oil and gas, so he has to get it out of the pockets of the people of this country. So, he would rather make people in this country suffer, so that they can meet some of the ridiculous promises that they made on the election platform. Something like what? Five thousand houses a month, I think, is what they promised?—5,000 houses a month is absolutely impossible, Madam Deputy Speaker. But they want to fool people to think that they could do that. They told trade unions they would give them 10 per cent, poor Ms. Felicia actually believed them. Now they are telling her that: Well, it is not my fault, it is the CPO.

Hon. Member: "Dey buy Felicia".

Mr. B. Manning: Yeah, the CPO say the PNM had offered the same PSA, 4 per cent cash.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Mr. B. Manning: Four per cent cash. That is what the PNM had offered.

9.30 p.m.

Now, those on the other side come to Ms. Felisha and say, "We will give you 4 per cent cash and 6 per cent hopes and dreams", or "6 per cent non-cash", whatever that means, Madam Deputy Speaker. Ms. Felisha—and I give her membership credit—is unwilling to accept that because that is not what was promised to them by those on the other side. I am pretty sure if you were listening, you would have heard 4 per cent Barataria/San Juan, but you have to pay attention. Ms. Felisha is paying attention, because she knows what you promised, which was 10 per cent cash.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: "Cyash." Now, after the deed is done, the scorpion decides, now is the time to sting. "Well, Ms. Felisha, thanks for yuh help, really appreciate it, take ah 4 per cent", and then wants to give hardback, working, qualified public servants—what?—a food card, or whatever else it is they want to give them. That is not what they promised. You promised them cash, pay them cash.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, let us measure the performance of some of the fiscal measures that this Minister of Finance implemented in the last budget. We are looking at the asset levy on banks and insurance, Madam Deputy Speaker. What the Minister of Finance does not understand, and we tried to explain it last time, that there is something called the Laffer curve, Madam Deputy

Speaker. It says that you can increase tax rates, but, at some point, you are going to hit a point of diminishing returns.

Not because you just increase tax rates up, up, up, means that government revenues will continue to increase in a commensurate manner. At some point, you are going to have diminishing returns. People are going to start avoiding taxes. People are going to migrate. People are going to keep their money offshore. They are going to come up with ways to not pay ridiculous taxes, Madam Deputy Speaker. It happens here. It happens all over the world. Even right now in the United States, California is trying to implement an asset tax on billionaires, and they are leaving that state in droves, damaging their economy because it does not make any sense. The Minister of Finance does not seem to realize that.

The asset levy on banks and insurance: Projected revenues, $575 million a year; actual revenues, $397 million. This is from one of the most vibrant sectors in our economy, the banking system, that if they did not destroy with taxes, also trying to destroy with the many changes that they are making to senior management within the banking system of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the last few months, I have seen some of the most qualified, experienced people in the banking system lose their jobs to people who, I am sure, could not even balance a chequebook. I am almost certain.

Republic Bank had at least two directors who were Harvard graduates, Harvard. The UNC decided, "Well, that is not good enough for us, you have to go". "Leh we get small man here who help us in de election."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Just like the committee they formed to come up with the municipal corporations borders or boundaries, the boards of these state banks, all

of a sudden, become UNC party groups, and that is not what taxpayers of this country want. They want qualified, experienced people who can manage their affairs properly. That is what they want.

I remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, under a PNM Government, it would take years to fill out state boards, you know why, because you always try to make state boards look or become representative of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You wanted to have the best qualified people on those boards, regardless of who they were. You wanted somebody from south, somebody from Tobago. You wanted a male representation. You wanted a woman. You wanted an Indo person. You wanted an Afro person. We tried to mix the boards so they were representative of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that they were the best qualified.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: "The UNC eh ha time with dat, Madam Deputy Speaker." "You, you, you, you, you help win election, you are my second cousin, you in my son class, good, lewwe go, put you on a state board." That is what they have been doing, and they have been damaging every major enterprise in this country by putting their lackeys in positions that they are not capable of performing in.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is what they do.

Let me move on to one of my favourites, of course, the landlord surcharge, also known as the "property tax by another name", Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister of Finance could not wait to get rid of the property tax and then decided to bring it back, bring it back as the landlord surcharge. Madam Speaker, he had projected revenues of at least $70 million from registration fees alone. Madam

Deputy Speaker, they received $48.4 million in fees and $85.6 million in surcharge, and that is with 18,678 landlords in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I worked extensively with the Valuation Division on the property taxes that we had implemented before, and I can tell you that we have, at least, somewhere between 135,000 to 145,000 landlords in Trinidad and Tobago. This Minister of Finance is saying that we have registered 18,678, which is nothing. It has failed, as we all knew it would. It is difficult to implement. People are avoiding it. I have met people in my constituency who said that the person who used to rent a room to them has decided not to do it anymore. They have left the market because they do not want to go through the complication of signing up for any landlord tax. That is what happens. People are not going to just sit back and pay taxes. They are going to try to avoid them, and the Minister of Finance is finding that out the hard way, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, moving on. Well, the one area in which they were successful was excise duties on alcohol and tobacco, and that is the one area where they decided to reduce taxes this year, because there were so many cries and complaints coming from several business areas within Trinidad and Tobago. Also, one that never made any sense to me at all, duty on luxury EVs. These are electric vehicles. Madam Deputy Speaker, the previous PNM Government has done everything possible to promote the use of electric vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago. It reduces carbon emissions. It makes for a better environment. It helps us to reduce pollution within our community.

Why would the Minister of Finance think it would be appropriate to add a tax to something that we would want the people of this country to actually do? Sadly, it has failed miserably. He projected $40 million in revenues; actual, $15.5

million. Minister of Finance, I ask wholeheartedly that you please remove this tax on electric vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not necessary, and we need to have a cleaner environment in this country. Please remove and rethink this tax. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, moving on. Yes, another one, electricity, 2026, they added a five cents kilowatt-hour surcharge for businesses. In 2027, it has now been extended to households, using more than 3,000 kilowatt-hours per billing period. Madam Deputy Speaker, this was the same government, the same UNC, when there were different consultations across this country for increasing or reducing the subsidy on electricity in this country, they were there opposing everything at every turn. "No, no, no to increased electricity rates", as soon as they get into office, what do they do, first they raised it on the business community, the commercial rates, now they are raising it on the residential rates, the people of this country. That is what they are doing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they are betraying the people of this country. They are saying one thing in Opposition, one thing on the election platform, and then as soon as they get into office, all talk, done; all consultation, done, and they do the exact opposite to what they said they were going to do. As I said, Madam Deputy Speaker, promises made, people betrayed, more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

9.40 p.m.

Mr. B. Manning: Another measure that they have here in this budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I think is extremely dangerous—and somebody mentioned the accounting firm. I think it was Mayaro. So, clearly, Mayaro missed this part in the E&Y report; the Ernst & Young—not Earnest & Young, by the way, Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: Losses carried forward are capped at 75 per cent of profits or $430 million.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me explain to the national community how this works and how this damages some of the more vulnerable businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. If you are a manager of a business and you make a loss—let us say, I make a loss, one year, of $2 million. I do not have to pay any taxes on losses. Clearly, you only pay taxes on profit. So, I get to take that loss forward to defer taxes in the future. So, let us say the next year, my business recovers and I have a tax bill now of $3 million. Instead of paying taxes of $3 million, I can take the losses from the previous year and subtract it from the taxes that I have to pay this year. So, instead of paying $3 million, I can subtract the previous year's losses and only have to pay $million in taxes. That is done to really help businesses that may have run into trouble, to assist them in moving forward. That is the kind of environment you want to promote. You want to have an environment where there is business activity, where businesses are operating, where SMEs are operating, so that they can employ more people, so that we could have a vibrant economy in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Finance, in his desperation for revenues, has decided to make already vulnerable businesses almost have no hope at all in recovering from any kind of financial downturn. He started his attempt to destroy the business sector last year. This year, he is trying to finish the job. He is trying to finish the job with this tax break here. The people at the accounting firm said as much. They said as much; that this was something that they were very concerned about because they think that many businesses would not be able to recover from it, Madam Deputy

Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the whole tone of this year's budget presentation seemed more like a political stump speech. That is not what a budget is supposed to be. A budget is supposed to give information and data to stakeholders in this economy, so that they can plan their efforts going forward, not just local stakeholders, but internationally, whether it is the World Bank, whether it is foreign direct investors, whether it is a mom and dad trying to make decisions as to how to spend or save their money going forward.

I want to advise the Minister of Finance that there is no business coming to Trinidad and Tobago to be taxed at this rate. There is no business, no foreign direct investor or company that wants to invest in this country that is coming to pay high taxes. Trinidad and Tobago is not the only game in town. We are not the only country with oil and gas. As we have seen in the energy sector, if you do not negotiate and work with these companies, and offer them some concessions, they are simply going to fold up and take their operations elsewhere, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is not hard for many multinationals. We have the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and his friend, the Chairman of the NGC, completely destroying the energy sector in this country because they think they are in a position to play hardball with multinational/international players. All they are going to do is shift their production to a more friendly jurisdiction.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is it. As we have seen, that is not very hard. It was not hard for ArcelorMittal with their steel plant. It was not hard for Proman. It was not hard for—Nutrien, is it? Nutrien. It was not hard for them. They simply would move capacity from Trinidad and Tobago to another jurisdiction, where they would

have some excess slack, so that they could make up for their shortfall. Simple. But in the same vein, we put thousands of people on the breadline in this country, damage our foreign exchange revenues and hurt our overall economy. I am asking for the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Chairman of the NGC to think before they act; think. You are hurting this economy. You are damaging lives.

The problem when you have a 0.6 inflation rate is that when your economy stalls, it is not a simple matter of getting it restarted again. We could get billions of dollars in revenues tomorrow. It is still going to take time to restart our economy. When the economy stalls, businesses close, professionals start migrating, taking their skills elsewhere. So, when you decide to spend money going forward, you have to now find people. It is going to take maybe months or years to get some of these businesses restarted again. All during that time, the people of this country are suffering because they are unemployed; unemployed. That cannot be what this Government and this Minister of Finance want for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I have a difficult time believing that.

Mr. Sturge: With those few words.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: Let me keep moving on.

Mr. Sturge: "Give we ah break nah boy".

Mr. B. Manning: Yes. Let me talk a bit about the allocation to local government, Madam Deputy Speaker. Since I am the only PNM MP from south Trinidad, I think I am in a position to make some comments about how local government is being spent in that part of the country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, Mayaro again came with some "Nancy story" about millions of dollars being spent in local government. That money is being spent on wages and salaries. What money is being spent on development in the various corporations? What money? Let me let the population know exactly what is going on. In the City of San Fernando, in the Budget of 2024 under the PNM, San Fernando City Corporation, $21.2 million; in 2025, under the PNM, $20 million; 2026, under the UNC, $18.5 million; 2027, $3.8 million, Madam Deputy Speaker. To the people of San Fernando, that is a reduction of 82.1 per cent. Madam Deputy Speaker, how do you say you do not care, without saying you do not care? That is what the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: They do not care because they never cared. That is what the UNC is about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: "U Never Care".

Madam Deputy Speaker, at the same time, San Fernando East is bordered by at least two other corporations, the Princes Town Regional Corporation and the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. Let us see what kind of funding they got.

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Mr. B. Manning: Yeah. That would be interesting. Princes Town, 2024, under the PNM, $20.8 million; 2025, $17.35 million; 2026, under the UNC, $37.4 million, Madam Deputy Speaker; 2027, another $37.5 million, an increase of over 80 per cent for her good friends at the Princes Town Regional Corporation, who have a habit of totally and completely avoiding the so-called "PNM areas" in their jurisdiction.

If you go right now to St. John's in San Fernando East, there is a road that separates San Fernando East from Oropouche East. One side is paved, and the other has not been paved in years, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Scotland SC: Wicked. Wicked.

Mr. B. Manning: Easy to see. They are not even trying to hide it. There is a main road, right—I have walked every inch of San Fernando several times, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Alexander: "Waaaaaay".

Mr. B. Manning:—and it is clear.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: Oropouche East, well-paved. San Fernando East, nothing. Nothing. Nothing. The people of Tarodale, which is covered by a Princes Town Regional Corporation, do not even know that they had a UNC councillor because she is never there; never. They did not pave a single road in Tarodale. They have done no work. They did not spray for mosquitoes. Nobody from Tarodale has even gotten a job at the Princes Town Regional Corporation. No work. Total exploitation, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is what we have gotten from the PTRC. Now that they have gotten $37 million from this UNC Government, nothing has changed. Nothing has improved. No one from Tarodale has ever called me to say they have gotten a job at the PTRC. Never. Never. Never.

Let us move on to the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. Madam Deputy Speaker, Penal/Debe in 2024, $21.2 million; in 2025—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. B. Manning:—$17.15 million—Madam Deputy Speaker, I am trying to

use as few syllables as possible for Tunapuna, but he seems to be getting a bit excited. Please assist.

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

Mr. B. Manning: "I trying meh best".

Mr. Marcelle: 53(1)(e).

Ms. Mohit: "Brian, yuh finish?"

Mr. Marcelle: No. He said 53(1)(e). He asked for the Speaker's protection.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Are you finished, Member?

Mr. B. Manning: No, Madam. I am asking for your assistance. I am asking for you to do your job like the PTRC.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I appreciate your assistance.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I did not give a ruling.

Mr. B. Manning: Oh, sorry. My fault—I thought—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

9.50 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let me remind you that when I am presiding, I am unbiased. Although I am the Member of Parliament for Princes Town—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker:—do not bring me into this. Please, continue.

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much, but I must tell you, it is a bit too late for jokes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: I "doh" know. It is a bit too late for jokes. Madam Deputy Speaker, Penal/Debe Corporation, in 2024, $21.2 million; in 2025, $17. 1 million under the UNC 2026, $38.1 million, 38 to the Penal/Debe Corporation. Yet, parts of Union Hall that are part of San Fernando East, they could never collect garbage on time; they could never clear drains; they could never cut grass. Not—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Your original speaking time has ended.

Hon. Members: Yay.

Hon. Member: Ten more minutes.

Mr. B. Manning: I will take the rest, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Much to your excitement, I see. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Speaker, also let us take a look at one more southern corporation; let us look at Siparia, Madam Deputy Speaker. Under the PNM, $22.6 million, then $17.3 million under the UNC, 21, 26 an increase of 15 per cent. Madam Deputy Speaker, of all of the corporations, the four largest increases have come from Chaguanas, have come from Penal/Debe—

Mr. Sturge: 55(1). "We hear dat already for de day." Tedious repetition, tedious repetition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, let me remind the Member—

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am on my legs, Member. I am on my legs. I think you have a problem respecting me and I am kindly asking you to move on.

Hon. Member: "With his sweaty bald head."

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

Mr. B. Manning: I call it the "Zambo head." I call it the "Zambo head." That is what I do. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the last budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, they came and they spoke about the NIF 3, also about the Real Estate Investment Trust which I had initiated while I was at the Ministry of Finance. Madam Deputy Speaker, we knew, we knew that those on the other side had no chance of implementing any of those projects, and now that they are talking about divesting State assets, we know that that is the truth, Madam Deputy Speaker. When the PNM was in office, we had the NIF fund. What the NIF Fund allowed was the State to remain in control and own some of the choice assets from the CL Financial Group, Madam Deputy Speaker, which meant that it stayed in the hands of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: What it also did was deepen the capital markets of investors in Trinidad and Tobago at the same time. Now, this lazy, hopeless, hapless Government, because they cannot implement any of those projects, has decided to divest the State's assets of this country to their friends, family and financiers, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is what they want to do. And let us go over it, you have the Hilton Hotel. The Hilton Hotel would have been ideal for a real estate investment trust. It has been profitable for decades in Trinidad and Tobago, decades. We have had a relationship with the Hilton for decades.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Scotland SC: Madam Deputy Speaker—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, let us let the Member finish quickly with relative silence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much for your assistance, greatly appreciate it. Divestment, Madam Deputy Speaker, they want to divest some of the choice assets of this country. They want to divest the Hilton Hotel, Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort, National Quarries Company Limited and LABIDCO. Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no one on the other side who can say with a straight face that the National Quarries Company Limited is not of national importance to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Why would they want to divest themselves of an asset that is so important, that is the lynchpin of construction in Trinidad and Tobago? Why would they want to do that? Madam Deputy Speaker, they have no good intention, no good intention whatsoever.

Madam Deputy Speaker, LABIDCO, let me remind you of LABIDCO, Madam Deputy Speaker. Under a previous PNM Government, there was something called an aluminium smelter and the aluminium smelter was going to create a manufacturing base in Point Fortin and La Brea, Trinidad, which historically has had some of the highest unemployment rates in Trinidad and Tobago. Because of that, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is why they have invested so much in infrastructure in both Point Fortin and La Brea.

The Point Fortin Highway, we have the Point Fortin Hospital, we have all of that investment in that area so that Point Fortin could have become a hotbed for manufacturing. LABIDCO was supposed to be part of the downstream of the aluminium smelter. The UNC came into office and immediately cancelled all of

the contracts. Madam Deputy Speaker, the matter is still before the court. Trinidad and Tobago may have to pay some of the investors in that project almost $2 billion in penalties because the UNC decided to callously cancel just one of the best projects Trinidad and Tobago has ever had.

Aluminium is one of the highest-demand industrial metals in the world. We could have made billions of dollars from that project and also employed millions of people. Instead, they handed over LABIDCO to their family and friends and financiers and have completely destroyed the organization, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, moving on. Madam Speaker, I think it is clear to see, I think it is clear to see, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this budget has brought absolutely no comfort to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, absolutely none. In fact, it has created more questions than answers. The TTMA would like to speak to the Minister of Finance; they cannot find him. The business community would like to speak to the Minister of Finance; he is not answering his phone. The media is calling the Minister of Finance; they cannot get them because he knows he cannot defend his own budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, he cannot. He is ducking and hiding, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in just the past few months we have seen businesses go out of business across almost every sector in this country. Let me remind the people of this country of some of the businesses that closed. Nutrien, gone. Methanex gone. Proman, two-year suspension, Proman retrenchment. Massy Cat, gone. Media, *Newsday*, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Mr. B. Manning: *Loop News*, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Mr. B. Manning: SportsMax, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Mr. Sturge: Brian Manning.

Hon. Members: Gone.

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

Mr. B. Manning: What else? Retailer services, Standard Distributors, gone.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. B. Manning: "Eh?" Yeah. The Home Store, gone, MovieTowne, Tobago—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 53(1)(e), please.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Come on, Members, let us allow the Member to continue in silence, please. Thank you.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, "ah trying" to keep it as few syllables as possible, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it is causing some commotion. Artists' World, gone; Guerra, gone.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: And Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance seems to have an affinity for the restaurant and bar industry in this country. We have Trotters, San Fernando, gone; the D'Bocas Restaurant and Bar gone; Rib Shack, one of my favourites, gone; Dairy Queen, gone; Papa John's, Debe, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Mr. B. Manning: Scotchie's Sports Bar, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Mr. B. Manning: Livie's Bar, Rio Claro, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Mr. B. Manning: DND Restaurant and Bar, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Hone. Member: De PNM!

Hon. Members: Gone!

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: And, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a laundry list.

Hon. Mohit: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, UNC, gone.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Ms. Ameen: Gone, gone. Brian, gone.

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 53(1)(e), please. The Member has very little time left.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Deputy Speaker, they are not even respecting you. They are not even respecting you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Whilst I acknowledge your Standing Order, Member, your time has come to its completion.

Hon. Members: Gone.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for your time, I greatly appreciate it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

10.00 p.m.

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism (Dr. Colin Gosine): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise in support of the Appropriation (Financial Year 2027) Bill, 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: As the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West and the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Davendranath Tancoo—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine:—and the hon. Prime Minister on a budget which places the welfare of our people alongside the investment required to strengthen our economy. That connection is central to my contribution today. We must help families meet their immediate needs while expanding the productive activity that will sustain those families in years ahead. Madam Deputy Speaker, "All dat glitters isn't gold and the PNM is fool's gold".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: "Fool de people, fool de people, fool de people for 62 years and more to come". The next side is scared because they never see performance like this, with so little that they left in this Treasury. "Dey bankrupt the country and dey can't believe how de Minister of Finance can manage and still do so much with so little for this country".

Hon. Member: On a shoestring budget.

Dr. C. Gosine: On a shoestring budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Promises made, promises kept and more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: As a colleague of mine said, "Former, former Keith Rowley and his PNM Government left the whole university in Debe to rot."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Left the whole hospital in Couva to rot and now they vex that this Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar—

Mr. de Nobriga: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, I think you know that I am going to overrule that Standing Order. Members, Members, I am on my legs. Overruled.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. C. Gosine: And now they vex that this Prime Minister the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar completed this Tobago Airport—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine:—that our taxpayer dollars paid to build, and yet they have the gall to say "Yuck" to the airport. Shame on them, shame on you, shame on you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: A state-of-the-art airport that can bring new markets to Trinidad and Tobago, that can bring more tourism to Trinidad and Tobago, and they are saying such a thing as "Yuck". San Fernando East made his contribution and did not make much sense to me. He said in a quote that, "Farley gutted by the budget".

Hon. Member: Gutted?

Dr. C. Gosine: Gutted, gutted. Yet the Chief Secretary, Farley, thanked this Government for the airport and continue to support this Government .

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: And my two colleagues on this side support this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: San Fernando East kept going on about "gutted", but after hearing him I feel gutted—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. C. Gosine:—from the lack of content in his contribution. He said something about "fraudulent budget" but he himself called for an investigation of criminal activity in his own constituency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: "Corruption and criminal activity", he said. That is gutted.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Apparently San Fernando East has a poor memory. You have a poor memory, Sir. And his own party accusing him of making inaccurate statements. "Not me saying dis innuh his own party saying dat". We had to listen. We had to listen to 55 minutes of a man whose father gave hundreds of millions of dollars to friends, family and financiers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: If you recall Calder Hart and Mr. Manning senior.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Stop this hurling of insults across the aisle. Stop it.

Dr. C. Gosine: For my constituents a budget must answer practical questions, San Fernando East, with an elderly person having more money for essential purchases, with a young person to gain a useful skill and a genuine opportunity to work, with a small business to be better able to produce, sell and grow. Will communities

receive the infrastructure and public services they need under this Government? They will. Those are the questions I bring to this debate. They are also the questions against which I will judge implementation.

The people of Chaguanas West have entrusted me with the responsibility to represent their concerns, pursue solutions and make their voices heard in this House. I intend to honour that responsibility. Mr. Speaker, the budget deserves support. It deserves a lot of support because it combines direct assistance with measures to expand production and investment. It recognizes that social protection and economic development are dependent on each other. A family under financial pressure needs help. A country under financial pressure needs additional sources of income tomorrow and today now. A responsible government must attend to both, and our Government on this side is a responsible Government.

I will therefore speak about the budget through the lives of our citizens; the needs of Chaguanas West and the opportunities in trade, investment and tourism. My support is accompanied by a clear expectation that announcements must become services, projects must advance, and the benefits must reach the people whom they are intended for.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most welcome measures is the proposed increase of the $250 per month in the senior citizen's pension. Effective from the 1st of January 2027, the budget identifies approximately 124,000 senior citizens who stand to benefit. That is $3,000 more over a full year for a person who qualifies. For someone living on a limited income, the additional support can help with food, transport or other necessary expenses. It deserves to be discussed with respect for the people whose daily lives it will improve. The Public Assistance Grant will also increase by $250 while the disability grant for adults and children who qualify will

increase by the same amount.

The budget identifies 13,637 public assistance recipients and 28,000 disability grant recipients. The combined annual course of the pension and grant increases is estimated in the budget at $555 million. This is a major decision about national priorities and that is what our Minister of Finance has done. He has prioritised this at a time when resources must be carefully managed and how they left us with the Treasury. The Government has chosen the direct additional support towards people who often have the least room to adjust in their household budgets.

10.10 p.m.

I also welcome the proposed increase in the personal allowance for the pensioners from $90,000 to $102,000 annually. This is an increase in the amount of income covered by the allowance. It is not a cash payment of $12,000 to every pensioner. Its value will depend on the individual's taxable income and circumstances. Even so, it is meaningful relief for the pensioners who qualify and still have to pay income taxes.

Mr. Speaker, these measures recognize a duty we owe to those who have worked, raised families, and contributed to this country. They also recognize the needs of persons living with disabilities and households that need public assistance. An economic must be assessed partially, by how it treat its citizens and whose circumstances limit their ability to earn. Those increases will work well only if they are managed well, and that is what this Government is doing. Managing well

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: The person who qualifies must be able to understand the requirements, submit the necessary documents, receive a decision, and resolve a

problem without unnecessary delay. As a constituency representative, I know the importance of helping people deal with public agencies. A benefit can be announced nationally, but a resident still needs guidance, and I face that every day within my constituency.

We must make the journey easier, particularly for elderly people, persons with disabilities, and families with limited access to technology. My office must play its part by receiving concerns, recording them properly, referring them to the right authority, and following up, and that is what I intend to do. Constituents deserve clear information about the status of their matters. Good public service is reflected in whether a telephone is answered, whether an appointment is arranged, and whether someone takes the responsibility for the next step.

I welcome the proposed national programme for home care for elderly persons and for persons with disabilities. It is important to extend to the families who provide daily care often while trying to maintain employment. Implementation should establish clear rules on who qualifies for suitable training and supervision, and protection for those receiving care. The contribution of utility assistance also matters, Mr. Speaker.

The budget records support for more than 13,000 persons under the Utilities Assistance Programme between 2025 and June2026. Assistance is provided to approximately 137,000 citizens under the 35 per cent rebate programme. $60 million has been set aside to contribute to that assistance in 2027, and we must give credit to the Minister of Public Utilities for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: These programmes help households manage regular bills. I also welcome the decision to maintain fuel prices. That is a great job, Minister of

Finance. Transport affects the cost of reaching work, attending school, and doing business. Keeping fuel prices steady is therefore relevant and beyond the driver at the pump, and at least we do not snicker at the citizens when we increase prices, and we did not do that with the fuel.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Together, these measures offer practical support while government works towards the investment and production needed to improve national income.

Mr. Speaker, Chaguanas West brings together neighbourhoods, commerce, agriculture, cultural activity and a wide range of small businesses. From Felicity, Endeavour, Charlieville, Caroni, Kelly Village, Bejucal and communities around Warren Road, our people contribute to the economy in many different ways. Soon to be the city of the Chaguanas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Their contribution deserves infrastructure that supports it. A supplier must reach a customer. Workers must reach a workplace. A farmer must produce. A student must attend school. The condition of the roads and drainage influences all of those activities and the household expenses attached to them.

I will continue to advocate for roads and drainage within my constituency. I therefore welcome the $20million investment identified by the Chaguanas Ring Road. This is a Chaguanas-wide project whose benefits and potential extend to constituency commuters and businesses across the central region, not just Chaguanas West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: It should be considered in terms of improved movement, less

traffic, and better access to commercial activity. I will follow this progress closely as I really appreciate that, Minister of Finance. Residents should receive understandable information about the scope of works, the schedule for the work and any short-term disruption. Working together matters because road works, utility work and traffic arrangements affect the same communities.

Careful planning can reduce inconvenience and improve the value of the investment. The Ring Road allocation also points to a wider principle. Central Trinidad must be recognized as an important source of support for natural growth and national growth. Infrastructure decisions should reflect the movement of people, goods and services through the region and the opportunities to support businesses.

I do not present this allocation as a solution to every road problem in Chaguanas West because the roads "rhel bad". It is a welcome investment, although investment within a larger programme of work that remains necessary.

Mr. Sturge: After 10 years of neglect.

Dr. C. Gosine: After 10 years of neglect, right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: My constituents will rightly expect attention to the roads they use every day and the drainage, including those outside the scope of this project. My responsibility is to keep those needs going and pursue them with the relevant authorities.

Mr. Speaker, my effort to speak up for Warren Road, Bejucal Road, Ajodha Road, Akaloo East and other affected roads will continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Ramlal Trace "rhel bad". These are the concerns about access,

safety, damage to vehicles, and the daily difficulties experienced by the residents of Chaguanas West. Repairs should be given priority according to the condition, public use and the harm caused by further damage to their cars, and, of course, that is the grouse of most of my residents and constituents, the roads.

I will continue to work with the Ministries and local authorities responsible for implementation. The Member of Parliament has an important role in speaking up and bringing agencies together, while the agencies with the technical responsibilities and resources must be accessed, plan the works, and carry them out. Residents deserve that distinction to be explained clearly, together with the regular follow-ups.

The budget records approximately 7,800 potholes repaired. That is work being done every day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

10.20 p.m.

One thousand defects linked to WASA works addressed. Thank you, Minister of Public Utilities—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: Yeah, man. Yeah, man. You have to thank Clyde too.

Dr. C. Gosine: Thank Clyde too. And 752 sunken areas of roads repaired in 2026.

Mr. Sturge: Well done, man.

Dr. C. Gosine: Well done. Those figures describe national activity every day. They should encourage further delivery, while we remain clear that they do not mean every road in the constituency has been repaired, but we continue and more to come.

Hon. Members: More to come, more to come. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Drainage requires equally serious attention. I will continue to press the concerns affecting Ibis Garden, Ramlal Trace, Bovell Canal, and other areas where residents face flooding and poor drainage. Effective work must consider the connected watercourses, its outfall, maintenance needs and the suitability of any proposed structure. I welcome the $30 million provision identified for programmes to reduce and control flooding. I welcome that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: I am advocating for the needs of Chaguanas West to receive due consideration within the national programme. I am not claiming that all will be done right away, but I am hoping that we receive allocation. The water programme is also relevant. The budget records 21 kilometres of new mains benefitting approximately 66,842 people—imagine that, 66,842 people, together with 11,835 leaks repaired between January and May 2026. Again, thank you, Minister of Public Utilities—

Hon. Members: Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. C. Gosine: And Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mr. Sturge: And La Brea.

Dr. C. Gosine: And La Brea.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Better water service supports households, schools and businesses. Road repairs following utility works must also be properly planned, and the Minister has done a great job of doing that and I want to thank him.

Mr. Speaker, support for this budget must rest on an honest reading of the economy. The official statement projects revenue of $59.729 billion and spending

of $63.68 billion. The resulting projected deficit is $3.63 billion, compared with an early estimate of $7 billion for the fiscal year of 2026.

Hon. Member: We did well.

Hon. Member: We did great. We did great.

Dr. C. Gosine: In other words, we did well.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: Dave did well. Dave did well.

Dr. C. Gosine: That is a proposed reduction in the deficit, rather than a claim that the budget is balanced. It will depend on revenue, performance, spending, discipline and the delivery of the measures announced.

The oil and gas price assumptions are assumptions, and we continue to use that. Government must monitor those conditions and respond responsibly when circumstances change. The budget reports that the real GDP shrank by 1.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2026, compared to the same period of 2025, which was under your control on the other side. It also records growth of more than 11.6 per cent in non-energy manufacturing, and 20.5 per cent in the food, beverage and tobacco sector for that period.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: We must understand both parts of that picture—

Mr. Sturge: We are working.

Dr. C. Gosine:—which you all do not understand on the side. The wider economy faces challenges, while particular production sectors show encouraging activity. Those areas of growth give us something concrete to build on. They strengthen the importance of supporting production, removing unnecessary obstacles and expanding access to markets. The report's decline in food inflation also deserves

careful explanation.

Mr. Sturge: Definitely.

Dr. C. Gosine: Lower inflation means the prices are increasing more slowly. It does not necessarily mean that the grocery bill has fallen or that families have recovered by buying power lost through previous price increases under the previous regime. Our response must therefore combine relief with work to improve output and supply. This is why I support this approach and I support this budget, which strengthens both the energy and other productive sectors. Energy remains an important national revenue and industrial activity for Trinidad and Tobago. At the same time, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture and services can create opportunities and reduce our dependence on any one source of income. The task is to turn that economic direction into sustained results.

Mr. Speaker, as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, I welcome the focus on production and business. I acknowledge the hon. Minister, Sen. Satyakama Maraj, and the public officers and agencies whose work supports the Ministry's responsibility.

Trade policy becomes meaningful when a local firm can reach the market, meet the standards, deliver an order and receive payment. Investment policy becomes meaningful when money invested leads to production. Tourism policy becomes meaningful when a visitor comes and spends their money here and supports employment, and businesses here in Trinidad and Tobago can grow.

Manufacturing has an important role in Trinidad and Tobago. A manufacturer buys material, employs workers, uses transport and maintenance services and may provide opportunities for smaller suppliers. An expanding factory can therefore generate economic activity beyond its own gates.

For Chaguanas West, the connection is especially relevant. Our constituency includes people that engage in distribution, transportation, food production, retail and other services that can support larger businesses. We must help those businesses understand the requirement for entering supply chains and competing with other opportunities within the region.

The budget reports non-energy exports of TT $7.16 billion between January to June 2026, compared to TT $6.46 billion in the same period of 2025.

Mr. Sturge: That is good.

Dr. C. Gosine: Correct, that is very good.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. C. Gosine: It reports an increase of approximately US $696 million.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: I welcome that reported improvement. Export development should also be examined by production, market and local value created, so the policy supports lasting gains. Our ambition must extend to more firms becoming capable exporters. That requires sound production, reliable quality and the ability to meet delivery commitments—

Mr. Sturge: And less dependence on oil.

Dr. C. Gosine:—and less dependence on oil. Packaging, labels and proof that standards are met can determine whether a promising product succeeds abroad.

Mr. Birchwood: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. C. Gosine: "Laventille East, give meh ah chance".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. C. Gosine: The work of standard bodies and export support agencies therefore forms an essential part of economic development. Mr. Speaker, I want a small

producer in the central of Trinidad and Tobago to see a realistic route from selling within the community to supplying a larger customer, where possible, and exporting. The route should be supported by practical information and skilled help. The budget provides an opportunity to strengthen the conditions under which the progress can occur. The foreign exchange position is an immediate concern for many producers. Businesses may require imported machinery, ingredients, spare parts or packaging in order to manufacture here.

10.30 p.m.

When a key supply cannot be obtained, production and employment can be affected. And, of course, the previous regime is the cause of that. The budget records EximBank payments of US $555.07 million in foreign exchange since May 2025, with 43 per cent going to small to medium-sized businesses. That is a significant contribution to the productive economy, and I welcome—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine:—the attention given to small to medium-sized businesses. This has never been done before. It does not remove every foreign exchange difficulty. It does demonstrate the importance of focusing support for businesses producing and services. Access to inputs should help firms maintain activity, fulfil orders and develop the ability to earn and save foreign exchange over time.

We should also pay attention to the experience of a person applying. A small business needs to know what information is required, whether it qualifies and how its application will be assessed. Straightforward guidance can make a substantial difference to a business owner who cannot employ a separate team to manage the paperwork and other requirements, Mr. Speaker.

As Parliamentary Secretary, I support practical engagement with businesses and

agencies responsible for assistance.

As a Member of Parliament, I also encourage constituents to use the appropriate programmes and prepare their records needed for consideration. Public support must be managed fairly, with clear rules and proper oversight. Some businesses will need assistance with record-keeping, costing or cash flow planning before they use and they expand. Helping a business owner develop their own skills can be valuable, especially in Trinidad and Tobago, and introducing new funding options. An opportunity is useful only when the person it is meant to help is ready to pursue it.

Mr. Speaker, small businesses are a part of the economic strength of Chaguanas West. They deserve policies that recognize their contribution and public services that respect the time that they put into developing their businesses.

Mr. Sturge: They got that in this budget.

Dr. C. Gosine: And they got that in this budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: When they grow in a lasting way, the benefit can reach workers and families within the communities they serve. Mr. Speaker, the list of planned investments described in the budget is very encouraging. The budget identifies 45 potential projects valued at approximately US $2.17 billion, with the potential to generate more than 7,100 jobs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: That shows you, the budget has substance. Those figures represent opportunities at different stages of readiness. They must not be confused with completed investments or jobs already created. They value a list of planned investments, and it shows the achievement and the work required to move

sustainable projects towards financing approvals, construction and operation. That work requires coordination. Investors need clear requirements, consistent communication and decisions on time.

Mr. Sturge: Well that is what we are giving them.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Public authorities must perform the checks for which they are responsible, while avoiding repeating the same work without need or delays that add to cost without improving the decision. And that is what we are giving them.

The proposed revival of the former iron plant is a major example. The budget identifies Pinnacle Steel and Vanadium Corporation as its local company, Ibis Steel, and its initial investment of US $250 million and another further US $750 million were planned. Together, those phases represent a planned investment of over US $1 billion in steel and vanadium at Point Lisas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: That is performance. The budget anticipates approximately 1,000 new permanent skilled jobs, with first production targeted at the end of 2027. Bringing a major industrial plant back into productive use can support skilled employment that has laid without use. The employment of people, skills, contractors and suppliers. Its potential should be assessed through key stages of the work, including repairs and upgrades, infrastructure requirements and the start of production. The target is important, and the work needed to achieve it must remain a focus of this Government.

For the people in Central Trinidad and Tobago, the wider industrial economy can offer opportunities in technical work, maintenance, logistics and business services. We should prepare local workers and firms to compete on skill,

quality and reliability. The benefits of major investments should always come to Trinidad and Tobago and the region, and be connected, where possible, to the development of the domestic skills. This is the approach I support by this Government: welcome investments, help some projects move forward and pursue the productive value they can bring. Our task is to ensure that interest in Trinidad and Tobago becomes sustained economic activity with benefits that extend into our communities.

Mr. Speaker, tourism offers another route to jobs, business opportunities and foreign exchange. The budget sets a target of increasing tourism contribution to GDP from approximately 6 per cent to 12 per cent by 2030. This is a major goal which requires investment, stronger visitor services and joint action. The benefits should reach hotel and guesthouse owners, transport operators, food suppliers and businesses servicing visitors.

I welcome the hotel development identified in the budget. A 100-room Hampton by Hilton at Piarco, targeted for March 2027. A 109-room Hilton Garden Inn in San Fernando, targeted by March 2028.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: And a proposed 150-room Marriott Resort just opened Sutton at Rocky Point in Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Which will help Tobago a lot and increase tourism. These are developments with different locations and markets. Together, they indicate the opportunity to add more rooms for visitors and attract investment in Trinidad and Tobago. Their economic value will depend on completion, operation and the extent to which visitor activity generates spending within Trinidad and Tobago.

Construction can provide work for our contractors, our tradespeople. Operations can create demand for hospitality workers, maintenance services, food suppliers and transport providers. We should encourage local firms to prepare for those opportunities, while recognizing that contracts and employment will depend on the requirements for those projects. I welcome the new terminal at the A. N. R. Robinson International Airport.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: That we had to finish.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: That we had to finish. As part of the facility supporting Tobago tourism and our future.

10.40 p.m.

Airport capacity, reliable air services, accommodation and destination experience must develop in a way that works together. A visitor's journey includes far more than the flight itself. I saw Dr. Rowley's face when that facility was opened. [*Laughter*] And I saw also the pride of our Chief Secretary and my Tobago colleagues on this side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: I want to thank the Prime Minister for her vision and completing that and giving Tobago an input on what went into that airport.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: As Parliamentary Secretary, I support this connection between tourism and investment. We should assess progress through visitor spending, employment, local purchasing, and sustainable business activity alongside arrivals and room capacity, and that is what we are doing. A stronger tourism sector should

offer real opportunities to the people throughout the country, including suppliers and business owners in central Trinidad, and of course, Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, one very practical step is the SailClear. The budget provides for its launch in fiscal year 2027 with the aim of reducing yacht clearance from approximately six hours to 15 minutes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine: That distinction matters.

The reform is planned for implementation, and we should explain its intended benefit accurately and work towards delivering it. A shorter, more coordinated clearance process can make Trinidad and Tobago more attractive to yacht owners and operators deciding where to spend their time and money. And of course—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine:—we are a safe haven for hurricanes during the hurricane season.

Yachting supports a range of businesses, including boatyards, repair services, food and supply services, transport and hospitality. A visiting vessel may generate demand for technical skills and supplies as well as recreation and fuel. Improving the arrival experience can therefore support economic activity and revamp Chaguaramas. That extends beyond the waterfront. SailClear also illustrates the value of improving public procedures where agencies share information properly and bring procedures together. Service can become faster while the required checks remain in place.

Effective digital systems should make it easier to meet the rules and easier for officials to carry out their responsibilities. The same principles apply to the wider visitor experience. Clear information, smooth entry procedures, suitable transport and reliable customer service influence how a destination is remembered. Public

and private organizations each have a part to play, and that is what the SailClear process does.

Mr. Sturge: "Tell dem. It hurting dem".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. C. Gosine: We should prepare those implementations and the new system through training, clear procedures and suitable support. We should then measure whether process times improve in practice, announcing a digital service in the beginning of a reformed, consistent operation which gives lasting value to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, of course, our visitors.

Mr. Speaker, this is an area—

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have like about 45 seconds again.

Dr. C. Gosine: Can I get the extra time?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: "That was a distraction to get extra time, yuh know."

Dr. C. Gosine: [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, this is an area in which relevant focus improvements can strengthen ability to compete. When we reduce needless barriers for visitors and businesses, we improve the conditions for spending and investment. I welcome SailClear as a practical example for work within our Ministry and under our Minister, and I support the partnership within our Ministry and, of course, the authorities.

Economic opportunities must be matched by preparation. The education measures in this budget include $100 million for school laptops and 100 after-school centres—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosine:—and $16 million in technical education workshops in 56 secondary schools. "Ah sure dat hurtin dem."

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. C. Gosine: Young people in Chaguanas West should be informed about these opportunities and encouraged to participate according to their interests and abilities. I will support efforts to connect them with accurate information and the relevant bodies. Preparations should begin early enough for them to compete within investment projects and expanding business requirements.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed 25 per cent reduction in the relevant alcohol exercise rates is also relevant in the local manufacturing. The Government has reviewed the previous increase and is seeking a more appropriate balance between production, consistent tax treatment and revenue. I welcome that willingness, and I respond to it with great thanks to the Minister. The revised excise rates are also to apply to imported alcoholic beverages.

Separately, the proposed customs reform moves relevant imports from duty based on volume to duties based on value subject to preferential treatment under existing trade agreements.

Mr. Sturge: That is for premium drinkers.

Dr. C. Gosine: Yes. Taxes on champagne. These are separate parts of the tax structure, a percentage duty generally places a higher customs charge on higher value products, but the effect on competition depends on the rate and the value properly established for customer purposes. We must therefore examine the final schedule and combine tax treatment carefully. I support engagement with local manufacturers doing this implementation. This is a practical way to support the budget objective while protecting fair competition. Local production contributes to

employment and work for suppliers. Well-designed and properly enforced tax systems, which this Government is responsible for, should recognize that contribution while ensuring imported products meet their legal duties.

Mr. Speaker, the key stage of this budget will be implementation. Every allocation must be turned into the work it is intended to finance. Every proposed reform must be supported by the arrangements needed to make it functional. I will approach that stage through both my responsibility as a Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West and my responsibilities as Parliamentary Secretary in Trade, Investment and Tourism. I will continue to bring forward concerns about the roads, drainage, water, public safety and access to this assistance. I will pursue responses and explain to constituents what progress has been made and what remains outstanding. Again, this is a practical way to support the budget objective while protecting fair competition.

As Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, I will support the work of advancing responsible investment, strengthening business and improving tourism opportunities. That includes listening to those involved and helping practical issues that reach the appropriate decision-makers, with the responsibilities given to me.

10.50 p.m.

We should report progress in terms people can understand: What work has started, what has been completed, what obstacles remain, and what is the next step. Clear answers build confidence and allow problems to be addressed before they become long delays. I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for her leadership and the hon. Minister of Finance for his work of preparing this budget. I also acknowledge the public officers, agencies, and private sector participants whose

efforts will be needed to carry its measures forward. Great work done for everybody on this side.

The people of Chaguanas West, my commitment remains with you, and I continue to advocate on your behalf. Our constituency contributes to the national life through its workers, businesses, families, and communities. It deserves to participate fully in the progress this budget seeks to achieve. I support the pension and grant increases because they provide needed assistance. I support the investment and infrastructure because it can improve daily lives and economic activity. I support the focus on manufacturing, investment, and tourism, because those sectors can help sustain employment—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. C. Gosein:—and expand national income. With a firm commitment to the implementation and continued attention to the people we serve, I commend this budget to the House, and I support this Appropriation (Financial Year 2027) Bill, 2026. I thank you, with those few words, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Kareem Marcelle (*Laventille West*): Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this important debate. I want to first thank the constituents of Laventille West for putting their faith and confidence in me to represent them and their voices in this honourable House. Before I get into my substantive contribution, I just wish to address that—it was not really much to address from Chaguanas West in that prepared ChatGPT speech that they emailed to him before he stood up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: But I will tell you a thing or two about respecting your elders. Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning, you cannot, Chaguanas West, put your toe in the shoes of that distinguished giant in the Caribbean.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: So, you would respect your elders. You would respect not only your elders, but a giant in this country and in the Caribbean.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: More than four decades of unblemished service to this country, and you do not come here to disrespect his legacy. We will stand in defence of that, and we reject that, Chaguanas West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Now, Mr. Speaker, this is the largest Cabinet in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, 25 Ministries, Mr. Speaker. In this House, out of those 25 Ministries, there are 18 Ministers, full Ministers. It is more than 12 hours since this substantive debate has started, and out of the 18 Ministers, outside of the Minister of Finance, you have one Minister, one frontline Minister, the Member for Caroni Central, that is brave enough to step into the gayelle and to defend this nonsense.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: This economic eulogy that they call a budget.

Dr. Gosein: Mr. Speaker, 48(6). Mr. Speaker 48(6). What relevance does that have?

Ms. Ameen: Correct.

Dr. Gosein: What relevance does that have?

Ms. Ameen: Every Member is allowed to speak.

Dr. Gosein: And 48(1).

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Whilst the agenda of the speaking—

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: All right, St. Augustine, can I be allowed to make a point here? I do not think that is the point the Member was making, right? I am going to give him a little bit of latitude on that. I think there are two points to be made. The speaking agenda is that set by the Leader of the House, but I do not think that is the point the Member was making, so I am going to give him a bit of latitude, but, of course, I think he knows within reason to stay within that particular lane.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very well, Mr. Speaker. Chaguanas West has a record in this House, Mr. Speaker. He is the only Member on that side—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Okay, I give you a little bit of leeway, but that is enough now. That is enough. The personal disparagement is enough. Do not go there.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, I thank you very kindly for your guidance. You do not know if I was going to commend the Member for speaking.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: I think, credit me with enough prescience to know where you were going. Credit me with some prescience. Credit me with some prescience, all right?

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: In a week's time I celebrate 37 years at the Bar. So, credit me with

some prescience.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly—

Dr. Gosein: "It does hurt you when ah speak."

Mr. Speaker: Chaguanas West, what is that? Come on, do not get too excited. You know, as Larry David said, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

Hon. Members: "Ohhh gouuud."

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. The point I was making is that you have 18 frontline Ministers who have been appropriated and allocated based on this fiscal budget the respective sums to their Ministries, and not one, not one frontline Minister, outside of Fyzabad and Caroni Central, has come to the Parliament, stood up in the first 12 hours to defend their allocation; it is because they are ashamed of the Member for Fyzabad's budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: They are ashamed to defend it. They know that the "fluff and de huff" could have only stood for two and a half hours, but they know when we get down into the details that this is the worst budget. It was an economic eulogy that was delivered by the Member for Fyzabad on Monday.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: This budget, Mr. Speaker, is a systematic attack on the people of east Port of Spain, on the at-risk youth, and the poor and vulnerable people in Trinidad and Tobago, and I will get into details, Mr. Speaker. The East Port of Spain Development Company—and I was happy that Caroni Central, after being drawn into the debate by the Member for Trincity/Maloney, came to defend the lack of resources and the lack of respect to the people of east Port of Spain, and he came to defend it. He said, "All de East Port of Spain Development Company

does is give hampers". "They doh do nothing." I take offence to that, Mr. Speaker, as the Member of Parliament for Laventille West, and I will go through why.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: In 2005, Mr. Speaker, Laventille and its environs, the area referred to as east Port of Spain, was declared a special development zone. Special attention was to be paid to the economic and social challenges faced by the residents of east Port of Spain. The ultimate goal, Mr. Speaker, was for the reduction of regional disparities and the creation of sustainable communities within the east Port of Spain region. By Cabinet Minute No. 2384 of September 15, 2025, the Cabinet agreed to incorporate the East Port of Spain Development Company as a limited liability company, wholly owned by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Since May 2025, Mr. Speaker, there has been a continuous attack on the East Port of Spain Development Company. The Member for Trincity/Maloney spoke about the issue of no board. That is one aspect of it.

I want to look at the specific allocation to East Port of Spain over the years, because whilst the hon. Member for Caroni Central believes that East Port of Spain does nothing, nothing for the people of east Port of Spain, I want to just go through some very few projects.

11.00 p.m.

I could go on and on, enlisting projects that East Port of Spain Development Company has delivered to the people of east Port of Spain, not only under the PNM, but even under the UNC, 2010/2015, under a chairman called Annabelle Davis; consistent work in east Port of Spain. I am talking about the Beetham Gardens Recreation Ground, that is East Port of Spain Development Company; the

Point Pleasant Park recreational ground, East Port of Spain Development Company; the Coconut Drive Recreation Ground and upgrades to the football field, that is East Port of Spain; the Morvant Recreational Ground. There are over 100 projects in terms of retaining works throughout the length and breadth of Laventille. East Port of Spain comprises both Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Port of Spain South, Laventille West and Laventille East/Morvant. And any one of the four representatives on this side, Mr. Speaker, can tell you about the important work that East Port of Spain Development has done and delivered to the people of east Port of Spain.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: So, it is a complete disrespect, and I reject the Member's remarks concerning the East Port of Spain Development Company. And apart from the infrastructural development, Mr. Speaker, the East Port of Spain Development has developed so many socio-economic initiatives that have uplifted the people of east Port of Spain. And to come and say here that they do nothing but give hampers is a disrespect, Mr. Speaker; a disrespect and disregard to the East Port of Spain Development and my constituents.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: So, Mr. Speaker, in the *Recurrent Expenditure*, you will consistently see that there is an average or range of $14.4 million that is allocated to the East Port of Spain Development for its recurrent expenditure: Pay staff, rent building, pay for vehicles, materials, goods, services, et cetera. Now, in a very dishonest way, we are seeing that the Revised Estimate for this fiscal is $14.4 million in 2026, and it comes again in 2024. But I challenge the Government to indicate which portion of that $14.4 million was released to the East Port of Spain

Development Company since they came into office, Mr. Speaker. Because that will tell a story by itself.

Because what has been happening in the East Port of Spain Development Company is that persons who have worked there since the inception, since 2005, persons who were hired between 2010 and 2015, and persons who were hired between even 2015 and 2025, are all being sent home monthly. It is a gutting that is going on in the East Port of Spain Development Company. So, it cannot be that the full $14.4 million in the first place was actually released.

Then we go to, Mr. Speaker, the issue of development programmes for 2027. And I want to take you back, Mr. Speaker, to what was done and what was actually spent in 2024, the last full year of the PNM in office, and I will take you through to show the utter disregard and disrespect that has been meted out to the people of east Port of Spain, and specifically my constituents in Laventille West, when it comes to the East Port of Spain Development Company.

Mr. Speaker, under Head 61, line Item 14/A./002 and 004, you would have the Social and Economic Programme for East Port of Spain, as well as 004: Regeneration of Communities – East P.O.S. Region. In 2024, $10 million was spent on the Social and Economic Programme for East Port of Spain Development Company. That was under the PNM. In 2025, although allocated around the same—a measly $1.8 million alone was released by the UNC administration when they came into office. But then they came in 2026 last year and they cut that from the $10 million allocation, and they reduced it to $2 million to be spent in 2025/2026 fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, out of that $2 million allocated in the *Development Programme* for East Port of Spain, not one red cent was released to the people of east Port of Spain, although $2 million was allocated.

You are talking about no maintenance work on the facilities. You are talking about no new projects. You are talking about—Mr. Speaker, when there are different sporting initiatives, different cultural initiatives within east Port of Spain, every single community group in east Port of Spain knows that no matter what you are keeping, whether you are keeping something for Emancipation Day, whether you are keeping it for Christmas, whether you are keeping it for Indian Arrival Day, whether you are keeping it for Divali, whether you are keeping it for Eid, that you could have knocked on the door of East Port of Spain Development Company and you would have received funding in order to encourage that community bonding and spirit and peace and love in the community, Mr. Speaker. Not one red cent in the last fiscal.

And you would think that they had 18 months, with three Ministers in the Ministry of Housing, that they could have arranged to have a board in place so that at least in this fiscal year, they would be able to spend some moneys. There is one, who sold his political soul, called Fuad Abu-Bakr. Every Monday morning, he turns around and tells people that he is going to be the incoming chairman of East Port of Spain Development Company "since dey win".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Marcelle:—"since dey win". I do not know why Caroni Central—why is it that you are getting in the way of Fuad.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: But they come this year, in 2027—and the Member for Fyzabad, "he stop play like he doh even like east Port of Spain, he showing yuh". Not one red cent was allocated in 2027 for the East Port of Spain Development Company under the Social and Economic Programme for East Port of Spain, under

this line Item, Mr. Speaker. That is the disrespect that my constituents have to face. That is the geographic discrimination that my constituents have to face.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Then, Mr. Speaker, 004: Regeneration of Communities – East P.O.S. Region. In 2024, the last full year of the PNM, $5 million was actually spent by East Port of Spain. In 2025, $2.2 million was spent up until April; $2.2 million spent up until April and then the UNC came in power. The remainder—they bothered to spend no moneys. In the last budget, Mr. Speaker, 2026/2027, the Minister of Finance allocated not one red cent again under this line Item to the people of east Port of Spain when it comes to regeneration of communities. And the Member for Caroni Central spoke about it. He spoke about the Latrine Eradication Programme, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this was done under the then Minister of Local Government, the hon. Hazel Manning, this was her pilot—that was her pilot project. I am talking about going to different communities, knocking on the doors of the different community groups, the different village councils, different community councils, coming together to find out what some of the major issues are within our communities and how we can treat with it and how we can better the east Port of Spain region.

One of the things, based on the statistics, Mr. Speaker, was that there were a high number of latrines within certain parts of east Port of Spain. The PNM implemented the Latrine Eradication Programme, specifically for the east Port of Spain region. There were over 500 beneficiaries of having removed from latrines and go to flush toilets free of charge to them—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle:—but at a cost of $50,000 to $55,000 per household. That was an investment that the PNM made. And a lot of them like to come and say that the PNM does nothing. The PNM does do nothing. The East Port of Spain Development Company is an attempt, Mr. Speaker, at understanding the unique circumstances of the east Port of Spain region, and therefore, putting the resources in place in order to achieve that. But the Member for Caroni Central believes that that is nothing, that that is hampers and the people of east Port of Spain do not deserve that. But we, Mr. Speaker, reject that and we condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: And then they had the 18 months, with the three Ministers, to come up with a board. And they came in this fiscal budget, and the Member for Fyzabad, under 004: Regeneration of Communities – East P.O.S. Region—they might as well just scratch it off as a line Item, you know. Because all it has is dash, dash, dash, dash. Zero, zero, zero. Zero for 2025, zero for 2026 and zero for 2027. That is the disrespect that we have been met with.

Ms. Ameen: 2025, that is you. That was your year.

11.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the East Port of Spain Development Company, you have the local government attack on our corporations. Now, Port of Sain South, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Laventille West, Laventille East/Morvant—as I told you, makes up the east Port of Spain region, and those four cluster constituencies, Mr. Speaker, are in terms of the local municipal corporations, fall within the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation as well as the Port of Spain City Corporation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have seen the Minister of Finance make a coordinated, geographical, discriminated attack against PNM corporations, and Laventille West, because of those petty agendas, is going to continue to fall victim, to the neglect in relation to the local government funding when it comes to this administration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, under San Juan/Laventille, the 2025 Estimate under the Member for Diego Martin North/East when he was Minister of Finance, San Juan/Laventille West allocated $17,150,000 under its Development Programme. It was actually, the UNC came in April, they only released $7.7 million, an immediate cut of $10 million as they came in.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Say, alright—2026, they say here is what we are taking it back—mamaguy—to $19 million allocated. The Member for Fyzabad allocated $19 million. By mid-year, they cut it to $14 million, and then—so, from receiving consistently an average about $17 to $20 million in San Juan/Laventille, for Development Programmes, you have in this fiscal, a reduction to $9.5 million, Mr. Speaker. You are telling me, for such a large geographic area, with all its different local government electoral districts that need assistance with box drains, with paving, with assistance to maintain their recreational grounds, to put in play park equipment, all these things for disaster preparedness—every single line Item under Head 42 and line Item 9, 169 to 390 under the San Juan/Laventille Regional Cooperation, was gutted.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, in a very deceitful way, there is an inference being made that there is an increase in the Recurrent Expenditure for the PNM

corporations. Mr. Speaker, the Recurrent Expenditure increase, and if you go through the line Items, you will see it next to Wages. You would see it next to Salaries. It is to account for back pay. But when you look at the line Items concerning garbage disposal, Other Contracted Services in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, it was cut by a further $3 million in this fiscal. In Port of Spain City Corporation also cut by a further $2-point-something million.

These communities, for example, in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, usually under the PNM, you would have waste disposal collection on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, three days per week. Because of the systematic attack by this UNC administration, cutting the funding in relation to waste disposal, it was reduced to two days per week, and what you have happening, Mr. Speaker, because of the bulk of garbage that they have, that the trucks have to pick up when they try to squeeze in from three to two days, what you have happening is some areas are not able to be serviced based on the day, and you have sometimes, Mr. Speaker, a lot of different parts in my constituency that are having garbage collected once per week. It is a health hazard.

In addition to the overgrown grass left, right, and centre. It is a health hazard. I had to write—persons complaining in my constituency in terms of the overgrown bush, the health hazard about the different—in terms of mosquitoes and so on. I had to write to the Minister, the Member for Oropouche West, I see now that they go into St. Augustine, all hope looks gone. But I had to write to Oropouche West, and I must commend the Member, the Minister of Health, and the Member for Oropouche West, who I begged to send the insect vector in order to spray the constituency because of the health hazard. I want to commend him and thank him for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: So, Mr. Speaker, it is clear on this point concerning Laventille West and the East Port of Spain that this budget attacks us geographically and it discriminates against us.

Mr. Speaker, I go on now to the at-risk youth in Trinidad and Tobago. This administration came in, and they sought to get every young person who was willing to sell their soul for $10,000 and $5,000, to go on social media, to spread their propaganda and lies and call themselves influencers, to hoodwink the young people of this country to vote for them. They promised—Mr. Speaker, I want to go to their manifesto because it is laughable at this point.

Hon. Member: "Doh do dat, doh do dat".

Mr. K. Marcelle: It is laughable at this time. I now understand why Sen. David Nakhid—anybody, Mr. Speaker, who he could find to talk to in private, is ponging right down the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo as the most incompetent Minister "he ever see".

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

Mr. K. Marcelle: "Every time, and yuh cud take my word for it". "You cud take meh word for it".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Sen. Nakhid say, that he fight for the UNC so long, worked so hard that he would be the best Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, and they come and bring a rejected PNM in order to be his line Minister, who is the most incompetent Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. They so have no respect for the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. Every single year, from last year to this year, from mid-year in between, they just continue to gut his Ministry and reduce his

funding and not giving him any releases. If Fyzabad and they have an issue concerning his membership, and on which side he stands, then treat with that internally. But do not put that on the backs of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Settle your internal differences. Fire La Horquetta/Talparo if you find he is incompetent, or if you still believe he is "ah back door PNM", fire him. But do not threaten the young people and the future of this country when it comes to the funding and the programmes, Mr. Speaker.

Do not talk for the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. Because the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande has two important youth initiatives under him—the CCC and MiLAT, and I want to get to that, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: Forget it.

Mr. K. Marcelle: I have to get to the systematic attack on our at-risk youth in Trinidad and Tobago, and when we get to that, Mr. Speaker, we would see—

Hon. Member: All they want to do is lock them up.

Mr. K. Marcelle:—before I go to the numbers, Mr. Speaker, I want to stress on the importance of MiLAT and CCC. Now, the MiLAT is a social intervention programme that was specifically designed for young men aged 16 to 20 who are academically inclined, but they lack discipline and a structured environment required to excel.

11.20 p.m.

So the programme immerses young men into a quasi-military residential environment for two years. During that time, the young men are provided with hands-on instruction in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate course.

During the programme, the cadets are also exposed to academic volunteerism through community service, vocational skills, life skills, military training, physical fitness and social skills, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this programme has saved the lives of so many of our at-risk youth in Trinidad and Tobago. We could have been 20 times worse, Mr. Speaker, if we did not have programmes such as MiLAT and CCC. Because, you see, Mr. Speaker, in 2013, the hon. Prime Minister would have laid, in this honourable House, the Professor Selwyn Ryan report, and in that report some very surprising data came out.

The committee examined young people, the at-risk youth in different communities, to come up and look at what is the actual status of it, and to see how they can improve same. One of the things, Mr. Speaker, that this committee found is that every year you have an average of 17,000 young students sitting the SEA exam; 17,000. But by the time you get to Form 5, you only have an average of 12,000 per year graduating. Which meant that an approximate 5,000 at-risk youth every year were slipping through the regular schoolsystem and academic journey.

Therefore, it was important to come up with the different technical and vocational courses in order to save these young people. Because not everyone would want to go and do CXC and go and do a degree to go into the more academic and professional world. But there may be young persons, who they are no less than, because they want to be a plumber or an electrician, or an AC technician, anything, Mr. Speaker. So when you see, Mr. Speaker, these young persons looking for an opportunity, the MiLAT programme, specifically, and the CCC programme were also designed to help and save these young persons.

So let us look at CCC. Now, CCC was implemented across eight regions throughout, seven in Trinidad and one in Tobago, Mr. Speaker. Right? The

trainees were exposed to life skills training, physical training, sports, agriculture, conservation, job training, and they were given opportunities to pursue a skill in their desired path. They listened to the influencers who sell their souls for $5,000 and $10,000; young people that jump up, "dey gone down de road", and fall for the lies, the deceptive lies of the UNC. They, Mr. Speaker, cannot get into two of the most oversubscribed programmes in this country, which were MiLAT and CCC.

I want to go through what were the public statements of the line Minister in relation to CCC and MiLAT. So, on the 29th of July, 2025—"dey ent too long coming in"—the headline, "Sturge: CCC is not being shut down". That is nice. I quote from a *Guardian* story by Carisa Lee:

> "Minister of Defence Wayne Sturge says the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) programme has not been shut down.
>
> He yesterday assured young people that the Government recognises the value of the initiative and that they have 'nothing to worry about.'
>
> His clarification came after reports circulated that 72 of the programme's 114 employees will have their contracts ended on July 31.
>
> Sturge revealed that the CCC has not had an intake of students since January, while the Government…"—was—"…spending approximately $2.5 million monthly to keep the programme…"—alive.

Now, they also interviewed some students. What are their takes on that, the students who applied? In fact, there were over 1,000 applicants waiting to be enrolled in the CCC programme. This is from the same *Guardian* media story:

> "Students feel abandoned
>
> Guardian Media spoke to one of the students who had been selected for the January 2025 intake. He said receiving that call felt like his future was

finally coming together."

He said, and I quote:

"'I was eager to start in January, meet new people, learn new skills, and help support my family,'…

With the programme now on hold, he said he feels lost and anxious every day.

'it's heartbreaking because some of us were really counting on this chance…'"

Real lives, Mr. Speaker. Real young people, Mr. Speaker.

"He added that it's hard not to feel abandoned by the Government, especially after working so hard to get into the programme.

'Is this a replay under this Government, to close these programmes which were put in place for us young people who lack opportunities, especially coming from my community of Laventille?' he asked, saying he still hopes to make a difference.

Another trainee from Chaguanas, who also requested anonymity, said she wakes up every day hoping for good news about the programme."

This young trainee, she said, and I quote:

"'We prepared ourselves mentally and emotionally for this opportunity. It's not just a programme—it's a lifeline that has been suddenly taken away from us,'...

A past trainee, who graduated…"—from the programme in 2024 and is now—"…a qualified auto mechanic, said he has yet to find a job and hopes the new administration will support unemployed graduates of the youth programme in securing employment."

That was in July 2025. July passed, August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March now, the media approached the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, "Minister, what going on with CCC? Young people asking, vulnerable youths out there clamouring. This is a Trinidad *Express* story by Melissa Maynard, March 2nd, 2026, "Sturge: CCC to restart soon once approved":

> "Minister of Defence Wayne Sturge says the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) youth programme will restart soon after a pending proposal is approved by Cabinet in March."—2026.

It goes further to say:

> "The debate comes as former Defence Force retirees, speaking anonymously to TV6 last week, urged the Government to restart the programme amid growing anxiety over the future of roughly 1,000 participating youths. When contacted for comment, line minister for the programme and Minister of Defence Wayne Sturge said the Ministry of Defence and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force are currently finalising a proposal for the restart."

He goes further to say:

> "'The staff of the Ministry of Defence and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force are currently finalising the proposal for the restart of the CCC, incorporating some of the recommendations of the Committee to allow for better efficiency and value for money.'
>
> Sturge said once the revised proposal for the CCC is completed, 'It will be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.' It is anticipated, he said, 'That approvals will be obtained in March 2026 and the CCC will recommence shortly thereafter.'"

You know Kartel has a song saying, "January, February, March, April, May, June".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Month upon months passing, Mr. Speaker, and not one word from the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. I do not know what happened with the proposal, if it lost its way to Cabinet, or when it reached Cabinet, Fyzabad say he is not funding it, but this is the reality.

11.30 p.m.

Then we looked, Mr. Speaker, at what was allocated to CCC in this fiscal. I will get to MiLAT right after, Mr. Speaker, because it is important. Mr. Speaker, when you look at it in terms of the Recurrent Expenditure, and you look under Head 84, line Item 04/007—and I want to quote directly from it please, Mr. Speaker. In 2024, Mr. Speaker, $40,225,881 was actually spent by the PNM administration for the CCC programme. In 2025, the Member for Diego Martin North/East allocated $39,200,000; $27 million of that $39 million was actually spent in the 2025 fiscal, Mr. Speaker.

Then came the Estimate, Mr. Speaker, by the Member for Fyzabad last year. The Minister of Finance allocated the very same $39 million to CCC again. We said, Well, all right. They will work out the differences. See about the issues internally. Whatever administrative issue you want to do. Whoever you want to bring, bring. But ensure that the young people have the opportunity when they come to CCC. Who you bring, you bring. Who you fire, you fire, Toco/Sangre Grande. But allow the programme to start for when the young people could be able to access it.

You know, how much was actually spent in 2026? Well, they revised it. I

do not know if it was actually spent. The Revised Estimate was cut to $17,000,251. Going down. But they still did not do any intake. I do not know if from this line Item, they were paying persons for the proposal or what. I do not know. But you would think that after 18 months in office, that the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande would get his Ministry in line and put things in place to give this programme and provide these services to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Fyzabad in this fiscal, allocated a mere $5 million for CCC. This is just—you know, it is almost certain, Mr. Speaker, that although he allocated $5 million, not one red cent would actually be released to CCC to restart this project, Mr. Speaker. We call on the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, the Member for Fyzabad, and the hon. Member Prime Minister to understand the value of the CCC to our at-risk and vulnerable youths. This is not a PNM and UNC issue. This is a youth issue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: There must be times, Mr. Speaker, where we put our differences aside and do what is in the best interest of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: The young people and the at-risk community deserve a bi-partisan approach to saving our young people and saving the next generation, Mr. Speaker. So, I call on the hon. Prime Minister, if the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande cannot seem to do the job, "she have ah few super Ministers". "Barataria/San Juan, if yuh up to it", you take CCC under your wings, let it be funded and bring it back. But this cannot continue as normal, Mr. Speaker. It cannot continue as normal.

Now we go, Mr. Speaker, to the MiLAT Programme and the allocation there. Mr. Speaker, in 2024, the MiLAT Programme actually spent $17,121,032. In 2025, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, as Minister of Finance, allocated the sum of $16,900,000 to the MiLAT. Around the same thing, Mr. Speaker. "The young people listened to de 5,000 and 10,000 rent-ah-influencer. Dey went and dey vote for de UNC. Plenty in dem parents who probably already in the MiLAT Programme may have also take ah gamble with de UNC. Mr. Speaker, de youth, de parent, de whole family", everybody lost when the UNC won. Every single one when it comes to the MiLAT, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, in 2026, the Minister of Finance came. He said that he is allocating the same $16,900,000. We said, "All right, MiLAT continuing". "No fuss. We supporting dat. Dat is putting de young people first." Both sides could support that. We made no objections to it. We did not condemn it. We supported it. Only, by mid-year, to send home the young cadets, the young men that a year and two years before, Mr. Speaker, were taken from the blocks, were taken from suspension, were taken from homes where they were expelled from school, put in a safe space, clothed, fed, taught, educated, disciplined in a safe environment, Mr. Speaker. Training them. Preparing their minds mentally. Physically getting them in gear, in terms of whether they want to go into the military or not. Mr. Speaker, without even a week's notice, this UNC administration sent home the young cadets in the MiLAT Programme, and they only spent $5 million out of that $16.9 million allocated in fiscal 2026.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is almost up. Just putting you on notice.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, thank you very kindly. I would like to avail

myself of the extra ten minutes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, then comes this year. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has allocated $5million to the MiLAT Programme. A cut of over $11 million, Mr. Speaker. How is this a government that promised the young people that they would win? How is this a government that tried to tell this country in 2025 that they cared about everybody and the young people, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I want to just look briefly at some of their manifesto youth promises because it is important. Now, I do not know if the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo was still reading the PNM manifesto, right, if he did not get the chance to keep up with the UNC manifesto. But, Mr. Speaker, it is a reality that nothing in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs' budget aligns with what was promised to the young people by the United National Congress in their 2025 general election campaign. Nothing. Let us go through.

The UNC has announced that they will have an:

"…Up to $50,000…"—start-up grants—"…for youth-led businesses."

"Yuh hear anything about that, Mr. Speaker? Ah flip de book upside down. From page to page, ah looking for it." No mention of it. Second budget. They said that they will establish a national youth cabinet. They will have young people working in all the Ministries advising in every single Ministry, advising the Cabinet about what the young people want in the different Ministries. "Yuh hear anything about dat, Mr. Speaker? Yuh hear lie, Mr. Speaker? Dat is lie." They said:

"Youth Guarantee: Every person under 25…"—would be—"…offered a job, training or internship within 6 months of leaving school."

"Yuh hear anything about dat, Mr. Speaker? Dat is lie, Mr. Speaker." Mr.

Speaker, and then they said, "Here is what". "What we are promising you, we would also tell you what we would do immediately in the first 120 days." We are 18 months past, right. They will have a:

> "• Career Acceleration Program with private sector absorption quota."

Mr. Sturge: We did that.

Mr. K. Marcelle: "Yuh hear lie?"

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

Mr. K. Marcelle: "Dey ain't even lying in dey manifesto alone. Dey lying on de Floor." They will:

> "• Revamped OJT placement linked to industries with mentorship…"

—and increase the amount of OJTs. Mr. Speaker, "yuh want to hear lie? Dat is lie". Mr. Speaker, they said that in 120 days, they would:

> "• Launch…the GEN-FORWARD Secretariat to oversee policy implementation."

—for young people. In the first 120 days. "Mr. Speaker, yuh hear anything about dat?"

Mr. Sturge: Mr. Speaker, "lie" is unparliamentary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

11.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: It is non-parliamentary if it is directed at a particular person. But in the general political rhetoric, I suppose you can respond in a proportionate manner. I just remind my friend:

> "Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war;"

You remember that speech by Marc Antony in *Julius Caesar*? Just remember that

line.

"Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war;"

Bear that in mind. It is a proportionality issue.

Mr. K. Marcelle: You want to hear lie? "Dat is lie".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say when it comes to politics, "I never fidget in a war, not once". I do not care what the other Members come to say. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to their five-year roadmap, they said, year one to two, they said, they will have youth housing. They will desire—acquire and subsidize housing for young people under 25. They said that they will have a mental health infrastructure, they will launch centres and hire counsellors between year one to year two. The Member is checking to see if I am reading from the same Manifesto [*Laughter*]. It is page 3 under:

> The Youth Development: Empowering a Future-Lifting Generation with Skills and Purpose.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move on. Mr. Speaker, they said—

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: St. Augustine—I will stay on track, Mr. Speaker. Youth governance: They said that by year one to two, they will establish the advisory bodies. They said, Mr. Speaker—lastly, when it comes to police youth club expansion, Mr. Speaker, they said that they would increase the allocation and support and staffing to the police youth clubs. Mr. Speaker, that is an important point, you know. Because I looked carefully at what was allocated, since this administration came into power, to our police youth clubs, and in a backward move, when it comes to the police youth club, there was actually a cut. Minister of

Homeland Security is acting surprised. Go through your line Items. Go through your line Items.

In 2024, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: In 2024, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, point of order, 53(1)(e). I would like to hear the contribution from my colleague from Laventille West.

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]—say, we stand on ceremony with the rule on silence and then we proceed to break it. So, all the Members have to be just and fair and proportionate in the observance of the rule. I am not discouraging the friendly banter that happens, you know. But we have to be sensitive and proportionate towards each other.

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry, Diego Martin Central?

Mr. de Nobriga: I was just saying—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Okay. So, whilst I understand your insistence to the adherence of the rule, as I have said repeatedly, it is a rule that is observed more in the breach. So, whilst I will ask Members to be sensitive to each other and tone down the banter a little bit—nothing is wrong with it, it is all part of the colour of the debate. But do not insist on—standing on a pulpit and insisting on the adherence to that rule when all of you are accustomed to breaking it. All right? So, in those circumstances, let us be a little fair to the Member, please.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. Might I enquire in terms of how much more time, please, Mr Speaker?

Mr. Sturge: Seconds, seconds.

Mr. Speaker: Three minutes.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Three minutes.

Hon. Member: Less than three.

Mr. Sturge: Less than three.

Mr. Speaker: So, I was about to stick a nickname for you and call you, Tony Cozier, running commentary. All right? Let us stop that.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will use my last two minutes very wisely. Mr. Speaker, in 2024, under the PNM, $980,237 was actually spent in the police youth clubs. In 2025, Mr, Speaker, you had $972,301 actually spent in 2025 under the PNM. In 2026, the Member for Fyzabad allocated $1.3 million; an increase. We say, "Good," in keeping in line with their Manifesto, when, actually, by the end of September 2026, Mr. Speaker, they actually only released $500,000 to the police youth club, cutting their budget by almost 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

And then you would think that they will try to make up for it this year. They have allocated only $800,000 to the police youth clubs, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, these numbers tell a troubling story when it comes to the people of east Port of Spain and our at-risk youths.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: And therefore, on behalf of the constituents of Laventille West, the people of east Port of Spain and the at-risk youths, I say that we reject this economic eulogy distributed by the Member for Fyzabad. We reject this budget. And, Mr Speaker, with those few words, I thank you very kindly for the opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Ernesto Kesar): Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin.

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr Speaker, I rise at 11.46 p.m., on Friday the 16th of October still, to join this debate and to say, unequivocally, that Point Fortin supports this budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: I wish to continue to thank the people of the constituency of Point Fortin. And I know that some of the persons who are not in support, I know right now they are on Facebook, they are on "dey TV and dey glueing, and right now dey hands tired because dey vex right now".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Right? But, Mr. Speaker, before I get into my contribution, I think it is only wise and prudent that I respond to some of the things that I heard from the other side during the course of some 13 hours of debate.

Firstly, Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Arima, Mrs. Pennelope Beckles-Robinson, referred to this budget as deceitful and deceptive. But she went on, Mr. Speaker, to quote one of the Mighty Sparrow's songs, "Good Citizen". But Mr Speaker, may I remind this august House that Good Citizen's original release was in 1972—

Mr. Alexander: Who was in charge?

Hon. E. Kesar:—at the height of the Black Power Revolution—just before. And who was in charge? The PNM was in charge.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: So that, Mighty Sparrow, at the material time when that song was made, was referring to the People's National Movement—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar:—led by their historical leader at the time, Dr. Eric Williams. And it highlighted a whole lot of issues that were going on at the time, especially when the PNM, who, in my humble opinion, is the proxy for colonialism at that time, Mr. Speaker, it is the PNM that upheld all those colonial facets. Black people could not work in banks.

Hon. Member: The values.

Hon. E. Kesar: Yes, all the values. And that in 1972, not just Sparrow, you had other great calypsonians who would have made songs of the era. You know, calypso is for everyone. It is not only when the PNM says that calypso is for them, but calypso refers to everybody.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: It is for a material time, so that nobody—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: [*Laughter*] But let me continue, Mr Speaker. I expected you to say that. That is why I will say:

"That's all, that is all, that is all."

Yes?

"That's is all, that is all, that is"—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: And in a little while, I may very well have to refer to the PNM's response as:

"Maggie darling, sugar dumpling..."

Because all they are doing is "lying excuses", Mr. Speaker; "lying excuses", right through. Lying excuses for all the years "allyuh" governed this country, and up to now, "even if allyuh were to come back in 15 years, you still cyah get it right".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

11.50 p.m.

Hon. E. Kesar: Because of your philosophy, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, indeed, if we are talking calypso, we refer to Nelson, and this is instructive for some of the speakers that have gone before. They say Nelson, in his song, Lion the Liar, and there is someone who is fitting, but I will come to him just now. He said, "Doh show me de man, my tailor is class. Just show me de corner where the man just pass and he go make ah suit." That is some of the contributions here for the entire day. "Ah set ah creation, ah set ah manufacture, ah set ah imagination." When really and truly, Mr. Speaker, this is the second budget, there was no lines in the gas station, Mr. Speaker. There was no panic buying in the gas station.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: This is the second time, Mr. Speaker. There was no panic buying in the grocery, Mr. Speaker. This is the second time, right? But let me continue, Mr. Speaker.

Political dictatorship was also referred to by the hon. Member for Arima, but, Mr. Speaker, again, let me refer, there is no other government that has run this country, fits the description of political dictatorship, like the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: If dictatorship was—rather than referring to a specific person, if it was a dictatorship, as a human being, the head would have been P, the torso would

have been N, and the feet would have been M, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, let me refer to the ISA, March 20th, 1965. One of the most repressive set of rules on working people, Mr. Speaker, PNM. Let me refer to the COVID-19 Regulations. "As of midnight tonight—as of midnight tonight, curfew. As of midnight tonight, furlong for not taking the vaccine." You see, Mr. Speaker, they want us to forget all these things that they did just recently and just move on. "Oh, allyuh in power now, allyuh in power now, wuh allyuh go do?" But no, you all spent nine-and-a-half years in this Parliament, blaming the Opposition at the time, for 2010 to 2015, every minute, every minute, every day. "So come on, man, yuh cyah play mas and 'fraid powder".

The shutdown of businesses during COVID, the locking out of our own citizens, Mr. Speaker, the arrest and tear gas, the arrest and tear gas.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: "Ah coming tuh you just now, San Fernando East, doh worry. Talk, man, talk, you talk. You talk, man, talk, talk. Ah coming just now, doh worry. Doh worry. And most importantly, ah calling Maka fuh yuh first. Love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love. Doh worry nah man, Maka coming fuh yuh."

And, Mr. Speaker, let us not forget the most destructive economic decision ever, and I will always remind them of it, Mr. Speaker, because let me remind—I heard someone in a press conference not too long ago, mocking the Petrotrin workers. This is my opinion. Mocking, "Oh, the refinery will never start back." And "comrade", Mr. Speaker, can you imagine that? You shut down the second largest foreign exchange earner in the country. You shut it down because, because

there is no Cabinet Minute that I have—well, I have been researching. Where is the Cabinet Minute that would have instructed the shutdown of the refinery and the sending home of all the Petrotrin workers? I am asking someone to—I have asked for it already. "I ain't get it yet. I eh geh it yet." But, Mr. Speaker, they shut it down. But let me remind Trinidad and Tobago of the events.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would have loved to have a friend who will shut down a whole company, send home all the workers, get rid of all the witnesses, get rid of the evidence.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: "Yes, geh rid of all the documents. Send home everybody, just tuh save meh friend. And meh friend—AV to save meh friend". And that you win—"yuh gone to court, no witnesses, no witnesses, no nothing. Yuh loss de case, even though it might have been a good case. I is not a lawyer, but there was no appeal. You eh even appeal de case".

But let me move on. Let me respond, Mr. Speaker. We talk about the issue of Petrotrin lands, Trincity/Maloney, she is not here. She mentioned about the distribution of Petrotrin lands and asking in a very disingenuous way, what about the Petrotrin lands? Mr. Speaker, 238 persons were given land in some lottery, but let me remind the country, that was an agreement between the OWTU and Wilford Espinet, that Wilford Espinet, as representative of the Government, agreed, but that the PNM, led by the then leader, the former, former, refused to implement it as part of the overall package for the workers. And after the workers left, went home, they created a lottery.

Mr. Speaker, they could say what they want you know, I have the Minutes of that meeting, Mr. Speaker. I was there. Yes? They were not there, I was there.

None of them on that side were there. I was there, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, they do not care anything about workers, because I hear every day, and my heart goes out, for any worker who lost their job. But we talk about CEPEP and URP workers, and yes, I am not denying there is no—any time you lose jobs, there will be hardship—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar:—of course. But while you are clapping, which one of you lawyers there would have taken up a trade dispute for any of these workers? Who did it? When?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: "No, yuh doing it. Mr. Speaker, yuh hear"? Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, I am saying again, I am saying again, I am saying again, these workers were not unionised. None of them came to any unions, as they did in the last time, because BIGWU picked up a matter and won. And all of the *harbar*, I have heard none of them ever refer to any case that is currently in train in the Industrial Court or any court on behalf of the CEPEP workers and URP workers. So, I hope you proved me wrong. Right? Let us continue.

But they talk about they care about workers. Mr. Speaker, let me read something for you that came through while we were talking.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Facebook? No, Sir. No, Sir. This is today, Mr. Speaker, this is today. I am not going to call the former worker's name:

> Good Minister, Sir,
>
> I don't mean to bother you. I was looking forward to going back to work heritage, as it is so painful, my life is a mess. I worked my life 20 years,

temporary, did not get a cent for my temporary years. Five years permanent, I barely went home with nothing. If you only knew what I going through. I am so tired of fighting for work, I feel like giving up. I am 58. When will I get work? My family and I are in poverty, in a poverty situation, no fault of mine.

Good night. God bless you and your family.

This is a former colleague of mine that worked Petrotrin. You see, a worker is a worker is a worker, is a worker, Mr. Speaker, and while we are talking about one group of workers, much significant losses were made, not just for the workers, but for the country, with the decision that these people made to shut down Petrotrin and send home everybody.

12.00 a.m.

But let me continue. Minister of Housing, hon. David Lee referred to something that hit home when he said that the employee's pension plan was in deficit of $450 million. And I hope someone could get up on that side and refute what the hon. Minister said. I have not heard anyone say it, right? But again, Mr. Speaker, this is how they operate. Benefits for workers concerns any time workers achieve things significantly. It is the PNM that works hard to take it away.

Let me continue. Brian "Lionel" Manning, sorry—

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, contradictions. I remember the Member for Diego Martin Central. He said that this Government takes extremely long to fill certain state boards and, you know, we are taking long.

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: But that indeed, Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East

said that the PNM always takes their time to fill state boards. So, what it is, when we are taking "we" time to fill state boards, it is a travesty. But when they are taking their time, it is greatness? Come on, come on, come on. And when you had Newman George on our four different boards, Michael Kwamena.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Anyway, Senior Counsel, sorry.

Mr. Manning: Yes.

Hon. E. Kesar: Yeah, I have respect. I have respect. Something that you all do not have. I have respect, a lot, a lot of respect.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about people betrayed; more to come. But, Mr. Speaker, let us remember, the Government is not closing down Petrotrin. And in case you were opening your fridge, the Government is not closing down Petrotrin. If that was not betrayal, Mr. Speaker, then I do not know what it was, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Let us continue again. We are talking about people betrayed, more to come. The Members on that side should be ashamed to talk about ArcelorMittal. Ashamed. These comrades went home with nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing. They lost the severance, everything. And you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because ArcelorMittal was able to manipulate a flaw in the Retrenchment and Severance Benefit Act. The hon. Leroy Baptiste has moved now to correct that, Mr. Speaker. This Government is quickly and hastily advancing the workers' agenda.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: In less than 18 months we brought the vesting Act to ensure that the successor union would be able for Heritage, Paria, and Petrotrin Legacy to

ensure that the OWTU was the successor union for the same. Thereby, Mr. Speaker, bringing baseline judgment for other situations like that because the vesting Act is not something in isolation. It happened again in 1993 with Petrotrin and so on and so on. We also have laid and improved workmen compensation and also a Retrenchment and Severance Benefit Act. Three pieces of legislation in under 18 months to defend workers of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. Promises made, promises kept, more to come.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, let me see. I want to make sure that before I get into my whole thing—Ah, ah ha, Brian "Lionel Manning, sorry.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, could the Member refer to me by my proper title, please?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Refer to the Member by their constituency name, please.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, my apologies.

Mr. Speaker: Referring to a Member, refer to the constituency which they represent.

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, I am guided. My humble apologies to the Member of San Fernando West.

Hon. Member: East.

Hon. E. Kesar: East, my humble apologies.

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. E. Kesar: My humble apologies to you, San Fernando East. I do not think his name is Lionel. I do not think so, but okay, my humble apologies to you, San Fernando East.

Let me continue, Mr. Speaker. It is again disingenuous that you are referring to Comrade Felicia Thomas as being outside begging. No, Sir. No, Sir. The PSA, the OWTU, the Postal Workers Union, and some of the other unions, transport and so on, are very clear and resolute. I have been informed as to what they are dealing with. Trade unions have taken enough "licks" from the People's National Movement. They have taken enough "licks", and they have decided now this is the way they are going to go.

So, to say to this august House and for the public to say that Comrade Thomas is outside begging. Listen, Sir, just as your colleague would have mentioned that a legend that my colleague, MP Gosine, cannot walk in the shoes of Mr. Manning, I am saying to you, Sir, you are disrespectful to even think that you could walk in the shoes.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I never said "begging" Thank you.

Hon. E. Kesar: You said begging based on my—

Mr. Manning: No, I did not. I did not.

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. E. Kesar: What is your the Standing Order? What is the Standing Order? No, you said "begging". I am simply saying, Mr. Speaker, none of my colleagues on that side could stand in the shoes of Felicia Thomas or Ancil Roget or any of the trade union leaders who have given their life's work defending workers in this country, and they can get up and say whatever they want, Mr. Speaker. Disingenuous.

One last thing for the Member of San Fernando East. He speaks about the UNC never cared. So, by saying the UNC never cared, Mr. Speaker, what are you implying, that the PNM cares? Mr. Speaker, if the Member for San Fernando East

believes that, then when he utters that with his mouth, possibly "he mouth should fall out," Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. E. Kesar: You cannot be for real, man. The PNM care? No, come on, come on, come on. But let me move on, Mr. Speaker. Let me move on. Let me move on. Let me move on. Let me move on. Let me move on. Laventille West. Now, I find that I am spending a lot of time on responses. I just thought that we have to respond, right?

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, you complain, and look what you are doing. No, stop that. You complain all the time about—

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Hush, hush, hush, and let me speak.

Mr. Manning: "Doh tell me to hush."

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Let me speak.

Hon. Member: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Let me speak. Sit down. Sit down. Let me speak. You complain incessantly.

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: You complain incessantly about being allowed to speak in silence. And yet, you are running a running commentary. You complain about Toco/Sangre Grande.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*] contribution. You said nothing.

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I did not preside over your contribution. I did not preside over your

contribution. Even your colleague invoked the Standing Order to allow you to speak in silence. So come on, have some respect for the Member. He is speaking too. So, give him the opportunity that you sought for yourself. That is all I am saying.

Hon. E. Kesar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said before, look at the behaviour, Mr. Speaker. That is what I am saying. If you want to go home, no problem. You can just get up and leave, no problem. You can go home, no problem.

Mr. Speaker, let me get to the budget. First of all, Mr. Speaker, one of the Members on that side would have said that most of the money allocated was for national security. Mr. Speaker, that is not true. That is not true. Mr. Speaker, the largest allocation in this budget is in education, with $8.003 billion.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, once again, 44(8). I did not say that. I did not say that. 44(8).

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

12.10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: The Member did not identify you as having said so. He said a Member.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, no Member on this side said that.

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, stop wasting my time and the Member's time.

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, "if it fall in your garden pull de string, Mr. Speaker, pull de string". Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Toco, I am hearing you. Stop that.

Hon. Member: Toco stop it, Toco.

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, being a Minister in the Ministry of Energy and

Energy Industries, I want to focus because, again, I want to respond to someone on that side saying that "no line Minister did not respond, eh". So, I want to focus a little bit on energy because I know my substantive line will go.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: So, Mr. Speaker, I would not attempt to go into all the details. Indeed, "the lion" will take care of that tomorrow, please God. Yes? But indeed, I must highlight some of the successes in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, I must do that. Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight strides at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries would have made in the last 18 months. First of all, the LPG regulations that have been sitting in the Ministry for approximately eight years.

Hon. Member: "Ooo."

Hon. E. Kesar: It started under the former, former now deceased Dr. Khan and it continued under the former, former, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and it has stayed there, Mr. Speaker, and it has never come to a Cabinet. I am informing this House that the LPG regulations have been reviewed. It is in its final stages and after that, Mr. Speaker, it will be given to the line Minister for his review and then taken to Cabinet. Yes?

Mr. Speaker: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Eight years, work that was done in less than 18 months. Mr. Speaker, the local content board, which is resident in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, again, we have not had a chairperson for the local content board in well over four years, give or take. Mr. Speaker, again, because of the situation in the energy and the pending upsurge, the issue of all these multinationals coming and doing business with Trinidad and Tobago, the local content board, again, it has

been dusted off and reviewed, and it would be given to the line Minister for his review and taken to Cabinet before the year goes.

Mr. Speaker: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, the schedule of jobs for daily-rated workers in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries under—with the recognized majority union, NUGFW. Again, this has been outstanding in the Ministry for over five years. Recently, last week, the Permanent Secretary and her team and the HR person, together with the union, they signed off the schedule of jobs for the daily-rated workers, yes, for the daily-rated workers in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

Mr. Speaker: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Right. And they talk about how they like workers. And something a bit more topical. Recently, with the support of the hon. Leroy Baptiste, Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, there was a seminar on offshore rig safety. Recently, again, as in two days ago, we had an issue with a crane. But, Mr. Speaker, it is so interesting, eh, that the *Guardian* newspaper on the morning of the—just after the incident happened about, maybe, two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning, the *Guardian* newspaper prints an article saying, a worker died from the incident. Only to realize that the worker survived, quite well, and was resting comfortably in Southern Medical Clinic. The *Guardian* now had to change their news report. But I am happy to report, again, the Bankers and General Workers Union would have issued a press release calling for investigation and for the rigs operation to cease. I am happy to report that the OSH agency would have issued a media statement on the 16th of October, Friday, indicating that Perenco has suspended all crane operations in all fields, Teak, Poui,

and Samaan, until pending the investigation of this incident, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and their labour inspectorate and the OSH inspectors and so on, for continuing to do a marvellous work in regulating our industry.

Mr. Speaker, let me continue. I would like to turn to Heritage Petroleum because there are some interesting developments. First of all, Heritage Petroleum, within the fiscal '25 to '26, they would have increased production, yes? Offshore existing production at September 2006 was 17,200. They conducted a forward drilling programme, and they were able to drill six development wells in the east field Soldado, and they were able now to realize a further increase of production—they were able to save money, Mr. Speaker, on power generation. This is an interesting tail here. The company over the years was renting generators from a particular company and they were spending over $5.2 million a year in renting 500-kilowatt generators for the marine base.

With the intervention of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, we were able now to put a stop to that and to save money for the company. And, Mr. Speaker, this is interesting, you know. The company had a light bill of $500,000, but was spending $5.2 million a year from as far back as 2016, you know, Mr. Speaker. Do the maths—on generators, when all they had to do was pay their light bill. " ah-yah-yie." But let us continue.

Mr. Speaker, now, this is not my document, eh. Because I know those on that side would want to refute what I am saying, but this is not my document. This is a document that was developed by the company itself. All right. Mr. Speaker, the company was able to employ 152 people between October 2025 and September

2026; 53 fixed-term, including 48 graduate trainees, 34 permanent and 65 short-term, including 29 vacation interns. Advanced graduate and vacation internship programmes signed, a research workforce development MOU with UTT and refreshed a strategic plan for 2035. Interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues on the other side spoke about procurement.

Procurement reform and contractor optimization. Mr. Speaker, during the period 2019 to 2025, there were over 600 contractors that were single-source for service. Let me read it again, Mr. Speaker, just in case you were opening your fridge. Between the period 2019 to 2025, there were over 600 contractors that were single-source for services and materials. But these are the major contributors. IAL Engineering Services, $105 million; Tucker, $65 million; Alfonzo McDougal General Contractor, $35 million; Sotech General Contracting Limited, $20 million; and Acropolis Medical Centre, $8 million.

Mr. Speaker, Heritage has reviewed their inherited reliance on single-source arrangements and recurring contract extensions, restructured contracts, consolidated requirements and improved procurement strategies and commercial oversight. These interventions delivered reported savings of some $59.5 million, strengthening the value of money and stewardship of a state resource, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: Well, done.

Hon. E. Kesar: "Yeah, man."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

12.20 a.m.

Hon. E. Kesar: But, Mr. Speaker, it gets a little more interesting. Mr. Speaker, I mentioned about the forward drilling programme, and I want to read some highlights, Mr. Speaker. Offshore: More than 30 projects, including Cluster 37

well reactivation optimization, delivered over 1,000 barrels extra, 1,000 barrels more per day, and it is projected, approximately 4,000 barrels of base production going forward. There were asset upgrades, four compressors, three platform structure upgrades, four safety systems, boat landing systems, piping and alongside remote monitoring improvements.

Offshore September 2026: Exit production rate, approximately 17,200, as I reported. And, Mr. Speaker, we had here now, on land, 26,000 feet of flow bulk pipelines replaced, 41 tanks cleaned and inspected, 30 tanks repaired and upgraded, electrical distribution improvements, approximately 100 base management, despite reported. Crude exports: 25 cargos in fiscal 2026, including four in September 2026.

Mr. Speaker, procurement, financial and national contribution: Company revenue for fiscal 2025 was $7.2 billion, and fiscal 2026, $7.7 billion; reported figures. The national contribution estimated 4.1 per cent of GDP and 4 per cent of government revenue, equivalent to TT $2.3 billion, as reported, as audited.

But let me continue again, Mr. Speaker. You see, Mr. Speaker, I am reporting all of this, Mr. Speaker, because, again, some—what was happening with Heritage at the time, Mr. Speaker, the other side was reporting profits. I am not disputing. But at while they were reporting profits, the infrastructure, particularly offshore and on land, were deplorable, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let us remember, between the period when we took office to now, there were a series of oil spills. We have been able to minimize—through the intervention, we have been able to minimize oil spills in the offshore to almost zero at this time, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar:—because of fixing infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, let me get to a very, very interesting, interesting point here now, and this is my final thing on Heritage. I am going to historical contractor expenditure. Significant vendor expenditure: Payment summary supplied for Heritage Petroleum Company indicates TT $1.084 billion in payments to a particular contractor. I will call that name just now.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. E. Kesar: One contractor. Yes? And this is between the period 2019 to 2026. The scale of expenditure warrants review for—sorry, of the underlying contractual arrangement, procurement methods, extensions, service delivered and value-for-money assets. The payment totals alone do not establish impropriety or excessive pricing. It is very, very careful to note. So that, in 2019, $78,508,525.90, all in TT, Mr. Speaker; 2020, $111,297,625.25; 2021, $135,894,377.84; in 2022, $181,917,973.20; 2023, $147,305,937.49; in 2024, $166,373,230.11; in 2025, $176,599,402.31; and in 2026, thus far, $85,645,572.75. A total of $1,083,543,631.84. Contract governance, financial oversight and expenditure reinforces the importance of competitive procurement, documented contract reviews, disciplined contract extension, ongoing commercial assistance. Heritage separately reported $58 million in procurement savings and should not be attributed to this vendor without supporting evidence. Mr. Speaker, who is this vendor? This vendor is from south Trinidad. And this is Kenson Production Services Limited, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Right? And I rest that there, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Hon. E. Kesar: I rest that there, Mr. Speaker.

All right, Mr. Speaker, let me move now, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. E. Kesar: "Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm". Right. Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to the hon. Minister of Housing, the hon. David Lee, in his contribution just a while ago, and he would have mentioned some housing areas in my constituency, the constituency of Point Fortin. Mr. Speaker, I have here in my hand some good news for the residents of Lake View.

Mr. Speaker, I want to report without fear and without hesitation that the issue of the vesting of land for the residents of the Lake View Housing Development, that vesting certificate was dated—that vesting process, sorry, would have been in abeyance since the 18th of June, 2024. I want to report to this House, Mr. Speaker, as reported by the HDC and hinted by the hon. Member, the Minister of Housing, the hon. Dr. David Lee, that I can report to this House that the vesting of the land into HDC and Petrotrin lands in Lake View has been completed, and the residents will be receiving their lease, deed of title. Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, what that will do—422 units are in Lake View: 25 bungalows; 18 family-sized, single; 95 single-family, three-bedroom duplexes; and duplex units, 52; and townhouses, 232. Mr. Speaker, strange enough, yes, this was built by the PNM. Yes, no denial. But, Mr. Speaker, the 25 bungalows have been incomplete, Mr. Speaker, since 2022; not completed. All of the areas—this development, Mr. Speaker, goes way back. This development is 20 years old at least; 2006, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, daily I am bombarded by residents' complaints. And these

complaints range from the state of the roads, the incomplete drainage, the sewer plant. And again, I want to thank hon. Minister Dr. David Lee and his team for fixing the sewer plant in Lake View, so that the residents do not have to be dealing with raw sewage coming through the manholes, and so on, when there is flooding. But, Mr. Speaker, there is so much of work to be done there. And you know what HDC used to be telling these residents? "Allyuh, we not doing nothing for allyuh there because allyuh have no deed, allyuh have to wait."

In other words, there is a period—a guarantee period, my words, that when you sign, you sign on for a mortgage. You have a guarantee period where HDC will assume the responsibility. But, Mr. Speaker, these residents would have had permission to occupy. No mortgage, because they could not get a mortgage, Mr. Speaker, because the HDC had no title to the land. And, Mr. Speaker, indeed, 20 years this development is running. And in 20 years, Mr. Speaker, the PNM saw it—did not see it as a priority to ensure that these residents got the deed and title to the land.

12.30 p.m.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there are PNM councillors living in Lake View. There are aldermen living in Lake View. "Government officials living in Lake View, both past and present, and Mr. Speaker, I am saying, when yuh talk bout, all yuh care, that is how all yuh care about people, boy?"

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have just a minute again, but you have the option—

Hon. E. Kesar: Yes, Mr. Speaker, may I have my time, please?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. Kesar: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: So, Mr. Speaker, indeed, the residents of Lake View will be hearing from the officials of HDC very soon, as they do the needful to ensure that all the residents of Lake View are given their deed and title.

Mr. Speaker, I am not stopping there, you know. Techier, Techier Development—Techier is an old development since way back in 1950. The lands for Techier were vested since 8th of June 2017, Mr. Speaker, and more than half of the residents of Techier have no deed and titled. But Mr. Speaker, again, in my campaign, when on the hustings, we spoke about land tenure and land title for certain areas. So, I could say with confidence, promises made, promises kept, more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: One more, Mr. Speaker, Hubertstown Housing Development, again, in Gonzales Village, Guapo. Again, Mr. Speaker, this development is a newer development and the same issue. The lands were not vested. Again, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to report here again to this House the excellent work by the hon. Minister of Housing and his two other Ministers and his entire team, the Board and everyone. They are doing their work for the constituency of Point Fortin. I can say it with a bold assurance and that the residents of Hubertstown, those without deed and title, again, the land has been vested and in a very short notice, the HDC will be coming to them to ensure that they get their deed and title, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: "Well, let meh continue, Mr. Speaker, quickly in meh ten minutes. Let meh spend meh time talking about meh constituency while I am on dat." Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

"Apart from she being good-looking", Mr. Speaker. Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. E. Kesar: I want to thank her for I want to thank her, Mr. Speaker, for doing something. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank her for breathing life into a project that the PNM, just before elections, would have—it is several projects they went on just before elections. One of the projects is the Coronation Park project. A project that was launched somewhere in October of 2023, but it did not start until 2024, and elections were called. That project, Mr. Speaker, has been under investigation, and the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs would have had to put a halt on that project.

Mr. Speaker, that project is so important to the athletes of Point Fortin. Point Fortin has produced several elite athletes, including the great Jereem Richards himself, and there is a small but very effective athletic club called Point Fortin New Jets. And they have a very limited place to train. So when I came, and I told the hon. Minister, "Minister, I need to get Coronation Park playfield rehabilitated. I need us to clean up the place, power wash the courts, get the place looking decent, and to move it so that the next phase will be to look at pavilions and so on. Take it in steps, because I understand." I want to thank you. The project has been scoped, and that work will begin in this fiscal to rehabilitate that field in Coronation Park so that the athletes can have access to a grass track to train properly, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Kesar: Thank you, hon. Member Jearlean John.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight, in agriculture, the Minister of Agriculture, hon. Ravi Ratiram, in a visit to the Cedros and the Icacos Peninsula.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. E. Kesar: "Mr. Speaker, why dey laughing, Mr. Speaker?"

Hon Member: Ask your colleague.

Hon. E. Kesar: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report the upgrade during this fiscal year of the Bamboo Fishing Depot, the Bonasse Fishing Depot in Cedros, the Fullerton Fishing Depot in terms of the toilet facilities, Sunset Beach facilities, and the scoping and possible start of the rebuilding of the Icacos fishing facilities, all of which were agreed for this fiscal.

Mr. Speaker, I go to Sport and Youth Affairs. Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding all that was said and hopefully I will have some time to respond to MiLAT and CCC, knowing fully well that in April 2025, Mr. Speaker, "the PNM demselves is the one dat sent home dem youths and dem in MiLAT. Dais according to the report. But let meh continue." Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for in—we have works, football field rehabilitation in Gonzal Recreation Ground and in the Techier Recreation Ground, all scheduled for this fiscal.

I also want to thank the Minister of Community Development, as I read from the *Public Sector Investment Programme*, Mr. Speaker. We have the restoration of the Point Fortin Civic Centre. That project is a very controversial project, but that indeed that project was shelved by the PNM. A whole lot of nonsense inside of it, Mr. Speaker. "Ah doh have the time to go into it", but that the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Development would have placed that project back square because there is still a civic centre as a board and has been enacted by an Act of Parliament, Mr. Speaker. So that you have a board, the Board is not functioning and you have no centre. I thank Minister Benjamin for putting this back on the

Public Sector Investment Programme. Yes, look at right there, page 213:

"Community Development".

—you have one:

"• San Souci…

• Clarke Rochard…

• La Savanne…

• La Romain …

• Valleyline…

• Chaguanas…

• Brickfield…"

—and the

"• Point Fortin Civic Centre."

In addition to that, the upgrade of four community centers and the scoping of the Warden Road Community Centre to be rebuilt. That is a new one, and the Granville Community Centre. Thank you, hon. Michelle Benjamin, Minister of Culture and Community Development.

Mr. Speaker, in my closing, as I have a little bit of time. How much time do I have again, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You have three minutes.

Hon. E. Kesar: Three minutes, good. Mr. Speaker, I must touch on education. I started with education, and I will end with education. Mr. Speaker, again, I want to thank both the Ministry of Tertiary Education and now the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for returning technical and vocational education focus to the constituency of Point Fortin. Mr. Speaker, Cedros Composite saw Cedros Secondary for the very first time in a long time. YTEPP will return in November,

doing courses for the people, for the young people in Cedros, and that in the *Public Sector Investment Program*, Mr. Speaker, they have allocated money for the upgraded facilities of the Government vocational facility and MIC located in Point Fortin.

We have also allocated funding for the opening of the Point Fortin Youth Centre. Again, Mr. Speaker, again, that was built by the last group. But there was this harbar that they say that we wicked and we wicked.

Mr. Hosein: "Harbar."

Hon. E. Kesar: "Harbar", yes, that we wicked. Mr. Speaker, when we campaigned, we said things that making sense for the young people, once it makes sense, we will continue. The Point Fortin Youth Centre is a brand new facility that, hopefully, NESC or MIC or one of those will run it, but I have been informed by the line Minister that that centre has been cleared and will be ready for intake in January of 2027.

12.40 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of this country, for her support, for her dedication, and for her leadership, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the various line Ministers who continue to support Point Fortin. Mr. Speaker, there is much more. I have kept my contribution on the Municipal Corporations Act for the Standing Finance Committee, because there is much to be said about that. So, Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the House would have granted me their silence and their attention. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and with those few words, I am happy to have contributed to this debate. Pleasant morning.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Christian Birchwood (*Laventille East/Morvant*)**:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start by congratulating the Leader of the Opposition for her rebuttal to the national budget, and I would like to say to the people of Laventille/East Morvant, once again, thank you for allowing me to represent you in these prestigious halls. Mr. Speaker, you know, this morning, 12.41a.m., I rise today with a responsibility that extends way beyond the boundaries of my constituency. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is divine intervention that I am the one who was selected to respond to the hon. Member from Point Fortin. I took some notes here, Mr. Speaker, and one thing stood out to me, was his comments on Kenson Production. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if anyone in here knows, but I worked at Kenson Production, and I am very proud of that. Mr. Speaker, just to give you a little history. I am a young African male from Laventille East/Morvant, who went to school, earned his engineering degree, and immediately began sending out résumés, not knowing where one might stick. Mr. Speaker, I knew absolutely nobody in the energy sector, no one. I got a phone call, Mr. Speaker, for the position of an assistant at Kenson Production Limited. Mr. Speaker, I worked extremely hard and, in very short order, I was promoted, and it kept on happening. Why?

Mr. Sturge: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: Because, Mr. Speaker—oh, no, I had no affiliation to any party as well, and the record would show. Mr. Speaker, it showed me that Kenson Production, they did not see—as many of them on the other side may and will notice while they are in Government now—Kenson Production did not see my address and choose to victimize me for that. Mr. Speaker, I was hired and given an

opportunity.

I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker: Kenson Production, before they were awarded whatever contract—by the way they tendered each and every time, and I was a part of that process, and it was the most intense period of my life, Mr. Speaker, because the bidding was very competitive. But, Mr. Speaker, Kenson Production has several international clients, Mr. Speaker, and there is a reason for that, that is because they are the leading service providers in the energy industry with respect to what they do, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, I do not know if it was divine intervention that the Member rose to bring that point, but, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Des Vignes: The best is best, come on.

Mr. C. Birchwood: The best is the best. I like how you say that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: The best is the best, Mr. Speaker. They will continue to have clients, Mr. Speaker, because the best is the best, and I will say no more with respect to that. I will get back to why we are here today, Mr. Speaker. You see, while I represent the people of Laventille East/Morvant, what we discuss here, at these atrocious hours, I would say, are issues that affect all of us in this prestigious hall. It affects all of our constituents. It affects the roads that they utilize. It affects the food that they eat; the quality of water that they consume. It affects employment opportunities for everyone in the country, Mr. Speaker, which is why I started off by saying I go beyond the boundaries of Laventille East/Morvant here this morning.

I would like to approach this debate from a particular perspective—and just to cast your mind back to where I am going, Mr. Speaker, I would like to cast your mind back to my maiden contribution where I said, I do not come in here to argue

whatsoever. When we come in here, it is my responsibility to elucidate what we do in these halls, and to bring light to what we do so that the people understand what we do, because it affects their lives every day.

Mr. Speaker, in assessing this budget, the simple question to me—it should not be how much money is actually allocated—the question is whether the expenditure is guided by a coherent CEO economic strategy, whether it addresses the structural weaknesses of our economy, and whether the people of Trinidad and Tobago will experience measurable, and I think that word is one that we need to stick a pin in, Mr. Speaker, "measurable" and lasting improvements, as a result of the decisions that were made.

Mr. Speaker, the budget is presented under the theme: A People-Centred Approach: Investing in Communities, Transforming the Economy and Securing a Sustainable Future. This, Mr. Speaker, I believe, is a very admirable aspiration. Mr. Speaker, we have to remember that a theme, that is not a strategy. It is a nice theme, but it does not appeal to a strategy. An allocation, as well, does not, particularly, equate to an outcome. And a project announcement, Mr. Speaker, does not mean a project is completed. In addition to that, jobs created on paper, Mr. Speaker, do not actually mean that a job was actually created. You see, the test of this budget, it should be whether it moves Trinidad and Tobago from managing its immediate pressures, to utilize Trinidadian lingo, "outing fires", in this case, economic fires, moving us away from that, and towards planning long-term prosperity. That, to me, is the objective and the goal here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

12.50 a.m.

Mr. C. Birchwood: Because, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this Government has

been suffering from a severe policy and strategy deficit. And I say this because the connections between these measures and the economic outcomes that they intend to achieve, and the national development framework that should be guiding them, Mr. Speaker, remain insufficiently clear. It is very cloudy. And it is only within the absence of this clarity, Mr. Speaker, of this framework, is where I wish to examine the Finance Minister's budget. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the Government must be able to explain not only what it intends to spend but why that expenditure matters to the country in a long-term perspective. And we must also explain to the people if we actually have the capacity to facilitate all of this.

We need to consider the relationship between energy, transport, agriculture, infrastructure and so on, Mr. Speaker, because if we really look at it, the energy industry, we generate a lot of our revenue from that. So, all of these things that I just mentioned rely heavily upon the energy industry. Mr. Speaker, a farmer, they need reliable roads so that they can produce their market. An investor needs confidence that infrastructure will be delivered on time, and they need to have the confidence that it could be maintained after it is constructed. Mr. Speaker, I do not see these as separate economic ideals or ideologies. I do not see it as that. They are part of the same developmental equations, and for too long the public in general has been presented with individual announcements without being shown an entirely completed picture.

So, Mr. Speaker, the national development framework is what is missing in my interpretation. Remember, I put a pin in a word, "measure", earlier? We need to know, Mr. Speaker, where the milestones are against which the population can assess the progress of what was presented to them. How are we going to measure it? How? You see, because the Government should not expect the public to accept

the phrases "economic transformation" and "more to come" without being able to explain to the population what that transformation would look like and how it will be measured and when the results will become visible, tangible, physical, how?

Mr. Speaker, that conversation of national development is imperative, and I believe it is one that should go beyond one administration because it is one country. Trinidad and Tobago requires a developmental plan spanning 10/20 years, Mr. Speaker, and that to me is the only way we move from outing fires to economic stability. That is how we get there. Just to zero in on one aspect, Mr. Speaker, this budget refers to the Revitalization Blueprint, and that was launched in November 2025 as a major infrastructure undertaking, right? And just a quote from the documents presented. The budget projects on average employment of—

> "…close to 51,000 jobs annually…"—that is—"…rising to…approximately 72,000…in 2028."

Mr. Speaker, those are substantial projections and with projections that substantial, the scrutiny, in my opinion, should also be substantial. And I am not saying this because I do not think infrastructure or investment in infrastructure is not wanted. I think that would be a silly thing. I am saying this because the scale, Mr. Speaker, of the claim, the scale of that claim it requires a particular level of transparency. I think transparency is even more important at this point in time. And that is because, just through conversation, I believe the general public has trust issues with the Government. They do. They need to understand, Mr. Speaker, clearly the assumptions behind all of these numbers.

And when I say that, I mean, how many of these jobs are directly related to construction? How many of these jobs would be indirectly related to construction? Maybe suppliers, a supply chain of some sort, contractors. How many of these

jobs are temporary? How many of these jobs will go through the construction phase and end up in maintenance? How many of these jobs, Mr. Speaker, are for our locals, Trini-born? How many of these jobs, Mr. Speaker, are or will or may require some form of international skill set? How many of these jobs—or not how many of these jobs, I should say, what mechanism, I should say, is there that ensures that small contractors, mid-sized contractors and even large contractors get an equal share of the pie, Mr. Speaker? How?

Mr. Speaker, I also want to ask a more fundamental question. And I think it is the most important question here. What feasibility work supports this blueprint? We would like to know. I am certain the public would like to know. Have any feasibility studies been completed? Have these studies been completed for individual projects based on the blueprint? Have they been completed for the entire project? Have we assessed any economic costs or benefits associated with this blueprint? Have we assessed any HSE concerns with this blueprint? Mr. Speaker, has the Government even published any projection pipelines, estimated capital costs, timelines, or implementation plans? We are all left in the dark.

Mr. Speaker, more crucially, what model will be used to finance, build and operate these projects? Will they be financed by the State? Will there be public partnership? What will investors be expected to do after construction? Will they still be requested or required to maintain the facilities or whatever plan they have? Mr. Speaker, what risk will be borne by the Government through this project? And if any risk is borne by the Government, it is paid in full by the people. This is why we need to know. These questions are important. And, Mr. Speaker, I say that because in project management, there is a triangle that exists. And when one corner of that triangle is altered it offsets the other two. And that is scope, your

time and your cost.

So, when you come to the public, and you present a plan, Mr. Speaker, if you do not have these as a technical professional, how are we to really believe or see or share in your vision? It is impossible to do so. So, I therefore call on the Government to publish all of their feasibility findings. Because it is apparent that the Government believes that confidence is borne by the size of the announcement. But that is not it, Mr. Speaker. That is built by the evidence that supports it. That is where it is built. And as I said before, there is a serious confidence issue and matter that exists with the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government. It is real.

1.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to assess the performance of the respective Ministry thus far, over the past 18 months, we have seen a lot of routine functional—functions, I should say, done by the Ministry that will continue, probably on autopilot, with or without a Minister, and that has been meted as if it has been earth-shattering, ground-shaking. But, Mr. Speaker, I refuse to give routine functions within the Ministry that level of gratitude, all while we have a dusted-off Patrick Manning *Vision 2020* plan sitting there, waiting to be executed. Mr. Speaker, I refuse. We are sleeping on that, Mr. Speaker

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

Mr. C. Birchwood: So, Mr. Speaker, we could continue to go. Mr. Speaker, the 2027 PSIP, it raises basic questions about government's infrastructure and their priorities. The road and bridge allocations, they fall from $261.6 million to $216.8 million in 2027; a reduction of $44.8 million, or approximately 17 per cent. All of this is happening, while road rehabilitation is still wanted.

Mr. Speaker, and I am making reference to this because these things, they do not stop—the demand for them does not stop, so a fall in allocation is baffling to me. I ask that, Mr. Speaker—I say that, sorry, I should say because, I myself, if I bring it home—I have requested, for a while ago, an upgrade of the Lady Young Road from the vicinity of the walkover, heading into Pitch Road. To give you a landmark—I do not know how many of you commute over there. Just to give you a landmark, it is from the walkover to maybe around the WASA pump station there.

Mr. Speaker, I requested that upgrade primarily because that is where I grew up. I walked there my entire life. Mr. Speaker, when I see young kids walking there—walking in the road, avoiding water because you have a ruptured line, when I see young children and their parents walking there, because there is nowhere to pass because the bush has grown into the road, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: "Mm-hmm".

Mr. C. Birchwood:—when I see that, Mr. Speaker, obviously, as the MP, you have to make the request, and to the Ministry's credit, they came. They did a site visit. I myself, as an engineer, we had a nice conversation. I had some input. Really, really good staff. Mr. Speaker, that was the end of it, and I think I was quite disappointed to not see a single line Item dedicated to the upgrade. Because, Mr. Speaker, when you witness three-car smash-ups there—because the bush and the landslides, it creates—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: Yes, it is. The bush is actually causing an accident.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: When it grows into the road, Mr. Speaker, causing cars to drive into the oncoming lane, which creates accidents, how many of those are you going to sit and watch? So, I am asking kindly—even though I have not seen any allocation here, Mr. Speaker, I am asking the goodly Minister to assist us in Laventille East/Morvant, we are people too. We are people too.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: So, Mr. Speaker, moving along, the PSIP tells us that the Solomon Hochoy Highway, that extension, it required $95.5 million in 2026, with three major packages reported close to completion and now in 2027, they require another $60 million. The thing is—now, fairness, I am not suggesting that a high completion percentage means that further expenditure or cost is not required. I am not saying that. I am just asking the Government, once again, for clarity, because we need to know precisely what else has to be done. Like I said, cost, scope, time.

Mr. Speaker, the other big question is, why was it not finished in the last fiscal year? How does that change the overall cost, Mr. Speaker? We must ask because if this gets priority over Laventille East/Morvant, we need to know why. Mr. Speaker, I could even use another example here. We have the Chaguanas Ring Road, for which $20 million is allocated for surveys, investigations and design reviews. These activities, Mr. Speaker, they may be necessary, but they do not put a single lane, a new lane, on the ground or remove any vehicles from the traffic, Mr. Speaker.

When will the construction of that begin, Mr. Speaker? If we are asking for funding, when will that begin? What is the full project cost? You see, Mr. Speaker, it is my opinion that the Government must publish clear project timelines,

and they must explain why allocations are falling, all while all the significant infrastructure issues, they continue to climb.

Mr. Speaker, you see, I would now like to turn my attention briefly to our employment figures as presented by the Government. Mr. Speaker, employment is an important measure, I must say, of economic performance; it is. And no responsible Minister in this House, I would say, will dismiss the significance of people being employed and keeping that employment. But, Mr. Speaker, you see, employment statistics, they must be presented with enough information so that the public could understand what they actually mean.

For example, Mr. Speaker, there is a clear difference between jobs projected, jobs announced by investors, vacancies advertised, people hired, and people who remain employed over a period of time. There is a difference between that, Mr. Speaker. And when the Government announces thousands of jobs, it should disclose the methodology behind the calculation itself. You cannot just come and give us an arbitrary number because it sounds good. It is our job to scrutinize, and we will do so. Where did you get this number? Payroll records? Was it done from a labour force survey? What was it some projected employment multiplier? What was it, Mr. Speaker? Nobody knows—it is just a number; 51,000, 72,000.

You see, the thing is, Mr. Speaker, you see statistics, they are very powerful. It is a very powerful thing, and they can inform good policy, Mr. Speaker, but they can also be selectively presented to support a preferred narrative. If there is one thing we have to give to the PNM, Mr. Speaker, is that, be it good news, be it bad news, the data was presented, and the administration either they took the praises with humility or they took the punches directly on the chin. It had no fudged numbers—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood:—and the population misses this, Mr. Speaker. I know they miss thathonesty.

1.10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I will move on. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, they also have a responsibility that extends well beyond moving people from one place to another. Mr. Speaker, an effective transportation system, it gets people to work safely, gets our children to school safely, and gets you to your place of worship safely. Mr. Speaker, it is essential. Mr. Speaker, it also determines how efficiently visitors, cargo, all of this moves through our country. All of this adds to our economic development, our economic position, and, generally, our standard of life and living. These are important areas, Mr. Speaker, of public policy.

But the question remains, how will the Government measure—how do they measure whether these initiatives are improving our daily experiences on the roads? For our citizens, our businesspeople, our children, how do they measure that, Mr. Speaker? You see, last year, we saw an allocation of $5.5 million, Mr. Speaker, for projects aimed at providing traffic management and road safety measures in the form of data collection. And by data collection, doing a little investigation here, referring to view detection devices, probably used to monitor pedestrians and vehicles, and so on, road marking equipment, provisions to upgrade traffic signals, road safety audits, all of these things, Mr. Speaker. Where is the report? I could tell you that I have not seen any upgraded traffic lights outside of Mount Lambert. We have not seen any video detection devices either. Mr. Speaker, that was $5.5 million. Alright?

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, our roads, we must examine not only the number of enforcement devices installed, but we must also examine and retain the number of deaths, serious injuries, causes of collisions, effectiveness and interventions over time. That appeals to data collection, but, yet again, Mr. Speaker, it is tough to do so because it is statistics. It is a funny thing with this Government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the 2027 PSIP, that report, with respect to Sea Transportation, it had a revised allocation, yet again, of $42.9 million in 2026, but expenditure itself was $25.8 million, another difference of $17.1 million. Mr. Speaker, that appeals to either delayed or incomplete work. Why was it delayed? What caused the incompletion, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, and while we are on transportation—I do not see Tobago West, East in here—we have two of our three vessels working, and that is approaching a Tobago Carnival. Mr. Speaker, they do not raise their voice for their people; they sit. They do not raise their voice for their people, Mr. Speaker, and that is a problem, because right now, if it were me, I would be asking the goodly Ministers to assist.

Mr. Lee: We are coming after—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: Well, you are in Tobago. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the latest PSIP report as well, it reports a consultancy contract and down payment with an assessment set to commence in the dry season, yet, the 2027 programme, it allocated $8.8 million. Mr. Speaker, when will all of these things be completed? It was in the past year. It was allotted in the past fiscal year. When will it be completed? It keeps rolling over. Mr. Speaker, I would like to move forward a little again, Mr. Speaker. I will turn this House's attention to a fundamental contradiction in the Government's 2027 *Public Sector Investment*

Programme. Food Security, Mr. Speaker, it speaks about reducing our food import bill, increasing domestic agriculture production, creating employment; good things, Mr. Speaker, but objectives, they must be supported by implementation. This is another thing that the entire budget showed us, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when we examine the Government's own programme alongside the figures reported for 2026—asking the difficult questions, Mr. Speaker, it is imperative. The question is, Mr. Speaker, how can this Government promise food security when it has failed to demonstrate that it cannot fully execute agricultural projects that were already before the country and have not been completed? Mr. Speaker, we are looking at the *Public Sector Investment Programme*. They were allotted $124.8 million for agriculture, Mr. Speaker, and expenditure was $49 million. That by itself represents a 39.3 per cent allocation, Mr. Speaker; 60.7 per cent not utilized. I would like the House to, really and truly, appreciate those numbers; 60.7 per cent not utilized.

Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about a government that did not have the allocation, you know. We are talking about a government that had the allocation and just did not use the money, Mr. Speaker. How can you want to attain food security and not utilize the funds allotted to you to achieve that? That is nonsensical. It probably appeals to a level of—I do not know if it is dysfunction within the Ministry, I do not know if it is a level of incompetence; we do not know, Mr. Speaker, but we need results. We do not need catchphrases.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: I could even give you some examples of this, Mr. Speaker. If we look at Marper Farm, the Government itself, they acknowledge Marper Farm

and their supplies as the top-grade planting materials intended to increase plant production.

Mr. Speaker, for fiscal 2026, they were allotted $1.5 million, and could we augur a guess at how much was actually utilized, because the objective, as outlined by the Government, is food security. If you would guess how much they utilized, you would be baffled. Mr. Speaker, they utilized $50,000; 3.3, a whopping 3.3 per cent. That, to me, is laziness. The Prime Minister has been calling people lazy, Mr. Speaker, that, to me, is laziness.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: And now they return asking for $900,000 to facilitate that, Mr. Speaker.

1.20 a.m.

So, we are asking, Mr. Speaker, what can the Government do to demonstrate to this House here what they have learned from not utilizing that fund, Mr. Speaker? What came out of that? What was the objective of not utilizing that fund? You see, Mr. Speaker, we have to address this because outside of that we run the risk of coming back yet another fiscal year asking for another allocation with a continuation of unfinished projects. Incomplete projects, Mr. Speaker. That by itself is harmful. That is also harmful to economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, even something as important as pest and disease control in food security, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, $700,000 allotted; $100,000 utilized. Mr. Speaker, that is pitiful. It is woefully unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. Woefully unacceptable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: Mr. Speaker, there are a host of other examples that we can

draw to that thoroughly describe how incompetent at project closure the Government has been. That, Mr. Speaker, is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, we are here at a point in time, Mr. Speaker, where the people of this country, they—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: Mr. Speaker, if you would.

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*] move on.

Mr. C. Birchwood: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are currently in a period where the youth of our nation, they do not know what to particularly do with themselves, given that shock that they have experienced since last year, April28th. Mr. Speaker, I even heard my good friend from Point Fortin, in his contribution, he made mention of not having any long lines in a gas station, Mr. Speaker. But what he does not know is that the line moved. Because, Mr. Speaker, upon going through social media, just today there was an extremely long line in front of Persad's D' Food King, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: Mr. Speaker, in all my life, all 37 years of my life, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that I have ever seen a line that long for employment in a grocery, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment stands at 5.4 per cent, Mr. Speaker. That is a very high number. Mr. Speaker, as I said before, statistics with this Government are a funny thing, Mr. Speaker. It is a funny thing. That unemployment, Mr. Speaker, is casually—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Yes. The Member was right to take his seat. Come on. Let the Member continue above that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: You know, Mr. Speaker, "dey really say empty barrels does make the most noise inno".

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

Mr. C. Birchwood: "It ha' some big barrel over dey boy. I ain't lying boy. Dey noisy". But yes, the unemployment rate, as I said, with the statistics, Mr. Speaker, it is alarmingly high in Trinidad and Tobago today. Instead of accepting the fact that the country, more so our younger people, Mr. Speaker, are experiencing extreme difficulty, this Government callously ignores that. What they do, Mr. Speaker, is dismiss it as a lie. Yet we see these people in front of our offices weekly, daily.

Mr. Speaker, I woke up out of my bed last week, and two gentlemen were outside of my house. I live in the middle of my constituency. No ivory tower. Mr. Speaker, food resource, as per usual. That is because they are not employed, Mr. Speaker. But, then again, when you dismantle youth programmes, like MiLAT, and so on, Mr. Speaker, that is the outcome. The reasoning behind dismissing MiLAT or eradicating MiLAT or whatever word he used to describe getting rid of MiLAT, that does not make it seem like he got rid of it, Mr. Speaker, which we know he did, Mr. Speaker; it does not change the fact that these things played a pivotal role in our society. Mr. Speaker, when you offer his reasoning of it not being economically feasible, and you compare that to $800 million in overtime, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that is a fair—that is chalk and cheese to me, Mr. Speaker. It is not fair.

Mr. Speaker: You have 30 seconds again and your optional 10 minutes.

Mr. C. Birchwood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have it.

Mr. Hosein: The 10 minutes, that is optional.

Mr. C. Birchwood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Marcelle: Take it. Take it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: You see, Mr. Speaker, the Government created these issues that we are currently living in today. The thing is, Mr. Speaker, unemployment, it is a social problem. It is linked to crime and criminality, Mr. Speaker. To understand that crime and criminality cause the majority of our issues in the country, Mr. Speaker, I do not think over policing or authoritarianism is the way to go, Mr. Speaker. Almost as if every issue that the country faces, they throw a police officer at it. That, to me, Mr. Speaker, that is not it. A police officer is not the answer to every situation or issue that you face in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Moonilal: "Bandit de jar".

Mr. C. Birchwood: Oh. Bandits. Okay. All right. So, Mr. Speaker, since we are speaking about bandits, if we get to the root of where our crime and criminality issues really and truly began, that contributed to our crime and banditry as the Member for Oropouche East just mentioned, we need to cast our minds back to that period in 2010 to 2015, Mr. Speaker. When this Government came in, disbanded SAUTT, got rid of our three coastal vessels— By the way, those vessels taken, purchased by Brazil, which now play a vital role in their coastal security, Mr. Speaker—and got rid of the blimp. That programme, Mr. Speaker, that could have evolved into drones today, Mr. Speaker, they got rid of that because there was a lack of vision at the point in time. When you spoke, and you asked—

Hon. Member: "Is probably crime dey want".

Mr. C. Birchwood: Exactly. They probably wanted the crime problem. When

you do your review, you understand that, at that point in time, the then Prime Minister said this about our crime situation. She said, "Our issues are on the land, not on the sea." That was her words. Now, Mr. Speaker, your concern is narcoterrorism and trafficking and our borders are porous. "Mr. Speaker, too late in de cry".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: You have caused our issues, and we are now reaping your sour fruit. Mr. Speaker, I will conclude here. But, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: Ah. I like that. I like that. But I cannot. I cannot conclude, Mr. Speaker, without bringing the discussion home to my people of Laventille East/Morvant.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: You see, Mr. Speaker, in Laventille East/Morvant, as in many communities across Trinidad and Tobago, national development, Mr. Speaker, it is experienced through our very practical realities. Road repairs, drainage, retaining walls, improvement to transportation. All these allocations here, Mr. Speaker, they sound good. Mr. Speaker, these are reasonable. They are not partisan demands. They are Items that reflect the use of our public money, Mr. Speaker. We need transparency with it.

1.30 a.m.

Mr. C. Birchwood: You see, Mr. Speaker, the people of Laventille East/Morvant, they should not have to settle for announcements through Tweets, slogans, and, strange enough, insults.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Birchwood: That is weird, Mr. Speaker. Who does that? That is weird. Why would you steadily and consistently insult the population? Mr. Speaker, "yuh lazy, is ah dump". The worst of the worst is said over and over about the population of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

And, you know, I had a conversation with a young professional sometime, Mr. Speaker, and I found what he said to be so profound, you know, I could not help but chuckle and walk away, and I had to do that, trust me, I had to do that.

Mr. Maharaj: Walk away?

Mr. C. Birchwood: Because, Mr. Speaker—yes, I had to laugh and walk away. Because, you see, the UNC's campaign over the years, Mr. Speaker, I found it very ironic, but the campaign over the years, Mr. Speaker, it was so successful at painting the then Prime Minister, the hon. Prime Minister at that point in time, Dr. Keith Rowley, as such an evil, a vile, wicked individual.

Mr. Hosein: Correct.

Mr. C. Birchwood: Yes, "ah hearing" wicked. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yes. Nice. And, Mr. Speaker, that young person, at one point in time, he believed it. Well, obviously, after experiencing this, he reconciled with himself, he understood differently. And, Mr. Speaker, you know, he went on to say that, you know, despite his firm and stern demeanour, you used to hear him, you used to see him and he spoke directly to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, repeatedly. If it is one thing you know after that post-Cabinet meeting, Rowley in "yuh" face, "yuh" know that. Almost like clockwork, Mr. Speaker, and that is the conversation we had.

And he went on to say that this current Prime Minister came across as a bit heartless, and I listened to him, because he is venting at that point in time. He said,

a bit heartless, cold, absent, and as I just said, insults us all the time as citizens. And I believe this is the part that really made me laugh and chuckle and walk away. Because I did not want to say too much to discourage him from politicians, because, Mr. Speaker, because of the direction that the country took, it is very rare you hear a young person say they want to be a Prime Minister anymore and I did not want to discourage the young man. But this is what took me out clean, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Maharaj: The same fella?

Mr. C. Birchwood: Yes, he said that, it seems as if we have traded the proverbial raging bull for the ageing bull. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I will have my seat.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

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 today, Saturday, 17th October, at 10.30 a.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Saturday, 17th October, at 10.00 a.m.?

Clerk: 10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: 10.30 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.33 a.m.